



Pedagogická
fakulta
Faculty
of Education

Jihočeská univerzita
v Českých Budějovicích
University of South Bohemia
in České Budějovice

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Katedra anglistiky

Diplomová práce

The Role of Crime and Moral Questions in Ian McEwan's Novels (Ian McEwan, Solar)

Téma zločinu a morálky v románech Iana McEwana

Vypracovala: Bc. Andrea Soudková
Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Alice Sukdolová, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the topics of crime, violence and brutality in four novels written by a contemporary British novelist Ian McEwan. The aim of the thesis is also to define the motivational development of these topics and moral questions of guilt and punishment based on the analysis of Ian McEwan's novel *Solar*. The goal is to reflect problems of the society of the 21st century including the basic moral questions connected with the professional life and career of McEwan's characters.

ANOTACE

Cílem diplomové práce je analýza tématu zločinu, násilí a brutality ve vybraných románech současného britského prozaika Iana McEwana. Práce si klade za cíl vymežit motivický vývoj těchto základních témat a nastítnit morální otázky viny a trestu na základě analýzy McEwanova románu *Solar*. Úkolem práce je reflexe společenské problematiky 21. století včetně základních morálních otázek doby v souvislosti s profesním a kariétním růstem v podání McEwanových hrdinů.

CONTENT

PROCLAMATION	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
ABSTRACT	4
ANOTACE.....	4
CONTENT	5
INTRODUCTION	8
The Cement Garden (1978).....	10
The Comfort of Strangers (1981).....	12
Amsterdam (1998)	14
Saturday (2005).....	15
Solar (2010).....	16
Sweet Tooth (2012).....	17
The Children Act (2014).....	18
THE COMFORT OF STRANGERS – IAN McEWAN	19
Inappropriate Behaviour of Strangers	19
Sexual Relationships and Taboos.....	23
Obsession and Voyeurism.....	26
Crime.....	28
Conclusion	30
AMSTERDAM – IAN McEWAN.....	33
Illness and Death	34
Molly’s Affairs.....	35
Working Environment.....	38
Euthanasia and the Strange Deal.....	39
Moral Decision.....	41

Betrayal	43
Murder.....	45
Conclusion	46
SATURDAY – IAN McEWAN.....	48
McEwan’s Strategy	49
Family Affairs	51
Terrorism.....	53
Violence For No Reason	55
Illness and Death.....	59
Criticism of Nowadays’ Humankind	61
Crime.....	62
Moral Questions.....	67
Final Thoughts	70
Conclusion	71
SOLAR – IAN McEWAN	72
Adultery	72
Violence	76
Beard’s Professional Life.....	77
Death.....	80
Moral Decision.....	81
Beard’s Love Life	83
The Power of the Media.....	84
Betrayal	85
Fraud	88
Beard’s Childhood and its Influence.....	89
Illness	91
The Fall of Michael Beard	92

Conclusion	93
FEATURES COMMON FOR ALL ANALYSED NOVELS	95
CONCLUSION	96
RESUMÉ	99
REFERENCES.....	102

INTRODUCTION

Ian McEwan started his career in 1970 and along with another British writer Martin Amis he was considered as one of the *enfants terribles*. They earned this title due to kind of a rebellion that their novels presented. Amis is the author of *Dead Babies* (1975) - a book that contains sex, drugs and violence.¹ McEwan's first fiction *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) was published in the same year as *Dead Babies* and the reaction to the novels were similar - the readers were exasperated.² Not only the readers, but also the critics were shocked. *First Love, Last Rites* is a collection of stories in which McEwan occupies himself with sexuality, abusing and violence. These topics occur in his later novels, too. The first novel he wrote was *The Cement Garden* (1978).³ This novel along with another novel called *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) and two collections of stories *First Love, Last Rites* (1975) and *In Between the Sheets* (1978) earned him a special nickname in the British press – Ian McAbre.⁴ It is a play upon words connected with his name: macabre → McAbre. The term *macabre* is an adjective originating in late 19th century in France and it relates to *Danse Macabre*, which means "dance of death".⁵ The word *macabre* means "disturbing because concerned with or causing a fear of death".⁶ This word would describe the stories because of some unpleasant feelings of fear that pervade the stories.

McEwan's family was not literary at all. His father was sergeant major in the British Army; therefore the family spent several years on British military bases in

¹ CHILDS, P. *The Fiction of Ian McEwan. A reader's guide to essential criticism*. New York:

² cf CHILDS, P. p. 1.

³ cf CHILDS, P. p. 2.

⁴ BEGLEY, A.: *Ian McEwan, The Art of Fiction No. 173*. (accessed May 24, 2013). In: The Paris Review [online]. Retrieved from: <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/393/the-art-of-fiction-no-173-ian-mcewan>.

⁵ macabre (accessed May 24, 2013). In: Oxford Dictionaries [online]. Retrieved from: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/macabre?q=macabre>.

⁶ macabre (accessed May 24, 2013). In: Oxford Dictionaries [online]. Retrieved from: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/macabre?q=macabre>.

England, Singapore and Libya. According to an interview published in 1978, he considers his father " 'handsome' and 'domineering' "⁷, while his mother as "a very gentle woman, very easily tyrannized"⁸. This might be the source for his interest in sadomasochistic relationships.

He started his career in the seventies and his first works denote his obsession with the perverse and the macabre, which earned him his nickname mentioned above. His favourite themes were sexual abuse, sadistic behaviour, childhood and death.⁹ There was a change in his writing after the mid-1990s. Critics noticed that something had changed in his novels *Enduring Love* and *Amsterdam*; however, he remained one of the most important and respected British novelists of the 20th century.¹⁰

McEwan "is very concerned with the role of the irrational in his characters' lives"¹¹. Jack in *The Cement Garden* is sexually fascinated with his sister.¹² Garmony in *Amsterdam* has transvestite desires, which illustrates that McEwan is attracted to taboo subjects.¹³

Ian McEwan might be a descendant of the *Angry Young Men* of the 1950s. Angry Young Men were "various British novelists and playwrights who emerged in the 1950s and expressed scorn and disaffection with the established sociopolitical order of their country"¹⁴. McEwan is similar to other contemporary writers such as Martin Amis, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie (all UK), Barry Hannah, or Cormac

⁷ MALCOLM, D. *Understanding Ian McEwan*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press. 2002. ISBN 1-57003-436-2. p. 1.

⁸ MALCOLM, D. p. 1.

⁹ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 4.

¹⁰ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 5-6.

¹¹ MALCOLM, D. p. 14.

¹² cf MALCOLM, D. p. 14.

¹³ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 15.

¹⁴ Angry Young Men (accessed November 25, 2014). In: Encyclopaedia Britannica [online]. Retrieved from:<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/25251/Angry-Young-Men>.

McCarthy (both USA). These authors deal with the anger towards the weaknesses and injustices of society.¹⁵

Martin Amis is one of McEwan's friends; their writing is also similar - both intend to shock and disgust the readers, their characters are violent; however, Amis is even sharper than McEwan.¹⁶ As McEwan himself told, there are two areas that attract him the most - relationships between men and women, and relationships between people and children.¹⁷

The Cement Garden (1978)

The Cement Garden was Ian McEwan's first novel. The mood of this novel is as macabre as the one in his previous works – the two collections of stories. The novel was shocking for the readers because of the topic of incest, transvestism and the way of dealing with the death of the mother.

The Cement Garden is a psychological novel about adolescence; McEwan observes the relationships between Jack and his father, among the four siblings and also the relationship between the mother and her children¹⁸

It is focused on childhood and it reminds of other books that deal with the topic of children who are isolated from adults such as William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954). There is a difference between these two novels - the children in Golding's novel become wild, whereas the children in *The Cement Garden* become closer. McEwan is concerned with their natural sexuality.¹⁹ Also the setting is different: the group of children in *The Lord of the Flies* is on an abandoned exotic island, whereas *The Cement Garden* has a domestic setting, which might be more disturbing because the traditional rules of the society

¹⁵ cf SLAY, Jr., J. *Ian McEwan*. New York: Twayne Publishers. 1996. ISBN 0-8057-4578-5. p. 3.

¹⁶ cf SLAY, Jr., J. p. 5.

¹⁷ cf SLAY, Jr., J. p. 6.

¹⁸ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 51.

¹⁹ cf CHILDS, P. p. 34.

completely collapsed.²⁰ McEwan does not need an exotic place to show children acting as savages; he sees the darkness in contemporary Britain.²¹ However, the description of the area where the house is, reminds of 1960s.²² Journalists asked McEwan where these landscapes came from, which he explained:

"It was the late 70s," he says. "Everyone seemed focused on a sense that we were always at the end of things, that it was all collapsing. London was filthy, semi-functional. The phones didn't work properly, the tube was a nightmare, but no one complained. It fed into a rather apocalyptic sense of things."²³

After the death of their parents, Julie, Jack, Sue and Tom take care of themselves alone during one summer. They bury their deceased mother under concrete, which means that she is still there and cannot be mourned.²⁴ This kind of burial does not seem that strange to the children taking into account the life of the family before the parents died - the mother and little Tom were tormented by the father, they lived without any friends - there was not love in the family.²⁵ One of the children, Jack, looks for a replacement for his mother, which he finds in his sister Julie. He finds also a lover in her when sleeping with her.²⁶

The children buried their mother on their own because they were afraid of being parted by the authorities. They have sort of a freedom now; Jack sleeps and masturbates all the time, the two sisters dress Tom (the youngest child) as a girl and he is willing to wear such clothes. The house is full of smell of the rotting corpse of their mother. Finally, Julie's boyfriend Derek sees Julie and her brother Jack having sexual intercourse.²⁷

²⁰ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 52.

²¹ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 53.

²² cf MALCOLM, D. p. 55.

²³ DICKSON, A.: *Ian McEwan on The Cement Garden, sexual gothic and being in the 'toddlerhood of old age'* (accessed December 9, 2014). In: The Guardian [online]. Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/26/ian-mcewan-cement-garden-sexual-gothic-old-age>.

²⁴ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. *Ian McEwan: Sex, Death and History*. The United States of America: Cambria Press. 2014. ISBN 978-1-60497-870-4. p. 20-21.

²⁵ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 22.

²⁶ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 35.

²⁷ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 45-46.

There are gothic elements in the novel: a dark basement with a horrible secret (reminding of Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) or Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960); Jack's nightmare of him tormenting Julie; the burial of the mother under concrete and the smell of her corpse later coming from the cellar.²⁸

***The Comfort of Strangers* (1981)**

His second novel, *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), also belongs to the category 'literature of shock'. It is not written directly, but according to some hints the story is set in Venice, which McEwan affirmed.²⁹ According to an interview with Ian McEwan, it was rather difficult to write this novel. After finishing the first chapter he did not know what to write next. He knew what he wanted to write about in the first half of the novel, but had no idea for the rest. Once when he was in Venice in 1978 he took some notes about it and then he lost them. After more than a year he found it again. He started to write the novel due to the notes he had. He himself considers the book difficult to understand.³⁰

According to critics, McEwan's Venice in *The Comfort of Strangers* is a combination of *The Aspern Papers* (1888, Henry James), *Don't Look Now* (1971, Daphne du Maurier) und *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912, Thomas Mann). The most allusions in *The Comfort of Strangers* are to Thomas Mann's novella *Der Tod in Venedig* - death, homosexual elements, beautiful men (Colin; Tadzio), main characters following the self-destructive path (Colin and Mary; von Aschenbach) and sexual fantasies. McEwan is interested in Thomas Mann's works which apparently inspired him.³¹

The reason why the novel was so shocking for the public is the topics. He deals with sadism and masochism, murder, voyeurism and sex. People were not used to

²⁸ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 52.

²⁹ cf CHILDS, P. p. 3.

³⁰ cf CHILDS, P. p. 48.

³¹ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 77-79.

read about this. McEwan attended a conference where he had a speech about many women having masochistic sexual fantasies and men having the sadistic ones. According to him it happens in private and people never talk about it. He also expressed that it would be better not to deny it, but accept it because the recognition of being masochistic and its connection to sexual pleasure would mean freedom for these women. The participants at this conference were outraged when hearing this.³² According to an interview with John Haffenden, McEwan claims that Colin's behaviour suggests that he is a victim because of being manipulated.³³ Robert does not regard Colin as a 'real man', which may be the reason why he becomes a victim.³⁴ Robert treats him like Caroline - in a sadistic way.

There were several authors who analyzed McEwan's works. The latest work dealing with his works is called *Ian McEwan: Sex, Death and History* (2014) written by Eluned Summers-Bremner. In his description of the novel *The Comfort of Strangers* he claims that Robert has been following Colin to make him and his girlfriend take part in sadomasochistic sex with him and his disabled wife Caroline which ends up with Colin's death.³⁵ As written before, the reason why he has chosen Colin might have been that Colin was not a man enough, seen through Robert's eyes. According to Robert and Caroline, he was very beautiful and looking like an angel. As for the forcing to take part in their sadomasochistic sex, people who have these sexual desires cannot be forced to do it, they simply have these desires, they want to have this kind of sex. Such as Caroline, who wanted to be submissive and it was arousing for her being beaten up. In one part of the novel, she explains Mary the whole situation with her back injury which was caused during sadomasochistic intercourse.

³² cf CHILDS, P. p. 49.

³³ cf CHILDS, P. p. 51.

³⁴ cf CHILDS, P. p. 57.

³⁵ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 29.

One of the central themes of *The Comfort of Strangers* is childhood. Colin and Mary are adults who behave like children. The roots of Robert's sadism lie in his childhood because his father wanted him to be dominant over his older sisters for which they avenged, which meant humiliation for Robert. He avenges to his sisters and all the women who are not submissive through abusing his wife. He and Caroline met in childhood and the first time they met his sisters humiliated him again in front of her.³⁶ There are several allusion linked to childhood such as Colin's childlike appearance, Colin and Mary being "on holiday" denoting that they do not have any adult occupation; though it is not written what they do for living, it is written in which job they did not succeed - as a singer and an actress. The first time in Robert's house they are also treated like children.³⁷

Amsterdam (1998)

The novel *Amsterdam* is the winner of Booker Prize 1998. According to the reviewers it is 'an exquisite social satire or moral fable'³⁸. In this novel, McEwan deals with the mid-life crisis of people who realized that the best times have already passed and there is not much left in their lives. The novel begins with a funeral of Molly who linked together three men. Her death denotes the vulnerability and mortality of the human, which is what the main characters realize.³⁹ A significant part of the novel deals with politics. McEwan enjoyed writing this novel, and he would not care, if no one liked it. After writing his previous novel *Enduring Love (1997)* he wanted to write a short novel that he was writing earlier.⁴⁰

³⁶ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 32.

³⁷ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 40-41.

³⁸ CHILDS, P. p. 118.

³⁹ cf CHILDS, P. p. 121.

⁴⁰ cf CHILDS, P. p. 120.

Amsterdam is both psychological novel and social satire and moral fable. Clive and Vernon are each in a moral dilemma; however, they do not deal with them correctly.⁴¹

Saturday (2005)

Saturday is a novel about an accident transforming a day of a neurosurgeon into a nightmare. Henry Perowne, the neurosurgeon, has to deal with a moral dilemma that he is confronted with.

In *Saturday*, poetry plays an important role because it is a poem recited by Daisy Perowne that enables the family to escape alive.⁴² According to Summers-Bremner it is impossible not to notice the topic of the conflict between the art and the science.⁴³ Perowne is not a big fan of arts, but in the end it is a poem that saves his family's lives.

Saturday reminds of Virginia Woolf's writing, especially *Mrs Dalloway (1925)*. The day of Clarissa Dalloway is similar to Henry Perowne's day - the viewing of something happening on the sky; the evening party; the city blockades; memories from the past.⁴⁴

McEwan explores the experience of the modern city; London plays an important role in his exploration. Also his early stories were connected to London, especially so called "Darkest London" where young innocent people are corrupted and take part in slave labour and prostitution: paedophiles abusing children in *Disguises (1975)*, a boy raping his sister to get rid of his virginity in *Homemade (1975)* - all these are set in London.⁴⁵ "Darkest London" means also pornography,

⁴¹ cf MALCOLM, D. p. 194.

⁴² cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 145.

⁴³ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 163.

⁴⁴ cf GROES, S. *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. 2009. ISBN 978-0-8264-9722-2. p. 95.

⁴⁵ cf GROES, S. p. 99.

prostitution, or adult entertainment connected with Soho: a porn peddler cheating on two women gets castrated in *Pornography* (1978); a pornographic musical in Soho in *Cocker at the Theatre* (1975).⁴⁶

The beginning of *Saturday* also reminds of another work - Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1912) - in both works the authors describe waking up. Perowne does the same as Samsa when he moves to the window. There is a difference in the feelings of both characters; Gregor Samsa feels depressed, his legs and arms have metamorphed into insect's legs and arms, Henry Perowne feels euphoria.⁴⁷ *The Metamorphosis* is mentioned in the novel as one of the crucial novels that helped Daisy become a literate.

***Solar* (2010)**

Solar belongs to the latest works of Ian McEwan. *Solar* depicts the inability of Western people to change their unhealthy lifestyles.⁴⁸

As written before, Ian McEwan's early works were focused on strange sexual and psychological behaviour, since 1980s he has been interested in both historical and contemporary events.⁴⁹ In *Solar* he is engaged with a contemporary event, in this case about climate change. McEwan thinks that the best way to inform people about climate change is using non-fiction. He believes that new technology could save the humankind.⁵⁰

In this novel the main character uses a technology called artificial photosynthesis, which is not reality yet. The main character Michael Beard is an anti-hero. Among

⁴⁶ cf GROES, S. p. 100.

⁴⁷ cf GROES, S. p. 103.

⁴⁸ cf SUMMERS-BREMNER, E. p. 188.

⁴⁹ cf WROE, N.: *'It's good to get your hands dirty a bit'*. (accessed November 26, 2014). In: The Guardian [online]. Retrieved from: www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/06/ian-mcewan-solar.

⁵⁰ cf WROE, N.: *'It's good to get your hands dirty a bit'*. (accessed November 26, 2014). In: The Guardian [online]. Retrieved from: www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/06/ian-mcewan-solar.

reviewers and scientists *Solar* was warmly received. However, American literary establishment with their critic Michiko Kakutani described it as McEwan's "lesser efforts", which made McEwan angry because in his eyes they did not understand it all. He is convinced that the Americans do not like anti-heroes, or the reason might also be the British sense of humour because several writers such as Michael Frayn, Malcolm Bradbury or Evelyn Waugh were never received in the USA.⁵¹

Sweet Tooth (2012)

Sweet Tooth is set in 1972 when Britain faced economic disaster. It was the period of Cold War; there were riots and a threat of terrorism. McEwan tells the story of an agent of intelligence service Serena Frome who is on a mission called Sweet Tooth involving a young writer Tom Haley. To find answers to her questions, Serena has to break one of the most important rules of espionage - trust no one. She also falls in love with this writer.⁵²

According to McEwan, it is more than just a spy thriller; he describes it as his first romantic novel. It is not only story of espionage and betrayal but also a love story asking questions such as lying and sacrificing relationships in the name of the country. It also contains sex. There is an unexpected ending. When researching for *Sweet Tooth*, McEwan even applied to be a secret agent and was rejected by a computer because the applications have to be made online. He said in an interview for Daily Mail that only a computer can reject one so brutally.⁵³ This is the proof again that McEwan prepares himself thoroughly for each novel.

⁵¹ cf Ways With Words 2010. *Ian McEwan Interview*. (accessed November 26, 2014). In: The Telegraph [online]. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/ways-with-words/7744712/Ways-With-Words-2010-Ian-McEwan-interview>.

⁵² cf McEWAN, I.: *Sweet Tooth* (accessed on December 9, 2014). In: Ian McEwan [online]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ianmcewan.com/bib/books/sweettooth>.

⁵³ cf GREIG, G.: *Sex, spies, the Seventies and me: Writer Ian McEwan in his most revealing interview yet* (accessed on December 9, 2014). In: Daily Mail [online]. Retrieved from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2190237/Sweet-Tooth-Author-Ian-McEwan-talks-sex-spies-1970s-new-book>.

The Children Act (2014)

The Children Act is Ian McEwan's latest novel with a strong protagonist. Fiona Maye is a High Court judge who is professionally successful, but her personal life suffers. Her childless marriage is in crisis. She has a new case, a young boy rejecting to be cured because of religious reasons. Meeting this boy changes her life and has consequences not only for her, but also for him.⁵⁴ The topics of successful women with no children and religion preventing the doctors from treating a patient are current issues in modern society.

This thesis deals with analysis of four novels written by Ian McEwan: *The Comfort of Strangers*; *Amsterdam*; *Saturday* and *Solar*. Three of these novels contain moral questions that the main characters have to deal with. *The Comfort of Strangers* represents McEwan's early work connected with strange sexual behaviour, violence and murder. It differs a lot from the other three novels. The other three novels contain contemporary topics that the society faces every day. There is a reflection regarding political situation, the fight against terrorism, or global warming.

⁵⁴ cf McEWAN, I.: *The Children Act* (accessed on December 9, 2014). In: Ian McEwan [online]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ianmcewan.com/bib/books/childrenact>.

THE COMFORT OF STRANGERS – IAN McEWAN

The Comfort of Strangers (1981) is a novel where almost nothing is happening, except for the ending. This work is not about people who have many experiences during their vacation. In fact, they are somehow bored. The book seems to be very dull for the reader as the vacation is somewhat boring for the main characters, but in the end everything is ruined.

This chapter is divided into several topics that the readers are familiar with also from McEwan's other novels. They are crime, sexual relationships, taboos, inappropriate behaviour, obsession and voyeurism.

As for the plot the main characters Colin and Mary are on vacation in an unknown town somewhere at the sea. There are many streets and alleys and without a map people can get lost easily. One day when Colin and Mary were out looking for a hot-dog stand they forgot to bring their maps and ended up lost in the alleys. Colin's following statement shows that they travelled to some country where eating might have been a ceremony (according some hints it is Venice): " 'One of the eating capitals of the world,' Colin said, 'and we're walking two miles for hot dogs.' "⁵⁵ They are lost, exhausted, hungry and thirsty and exactly in this uncomfortable situation a new character appears: "In the far distance, picked out momentarily by a streetlight, a figure was walking towards them."⁵⁶ His name is Robert and he lives in the town with his wife Caroline.

Inappropriate Behaviour of Strangers

Since the very beginning Robert seems weird. And the reader feels it.

The man laughed too and extended his hand. 'Are you tourists?' he asked in self-consciously precise English and, beaming, answered himself. 'Yes, of course you

⁵⁵ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. Great Britain: Vintage, 2006. ISBN 9780099754916. p. 13.

⁵⁶ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 13.

are.' Mary stopped directly in front of him and said, 'We're looking for a place where we can get something to eat.' Colin meanwhile was sidling past the man. 'We don't have to explain ourselves, you know,' he said to Mary quickly. Even as he was speaking the man caught him cordially by the wrist and stretched out his other hand to take Mary's. She folded her arms and smiled. (McEwan 2006: 14)

In this sequence Robert seems to be kind and friendly, but the reader and Mary already realize that it is too much. It is obvious from folding her arms. His behaviour is uncomfortable also for Colin: " 'Look,' Colin said, trying to detach his wrist without appearing violent, 'we know there is a place down here.' The grip was loose but unremitting, a mere finger and thumb looped round Colin's wrist."⁵⁷ Robert might have been one of the people who touch other without knowing them properly. However, there was something strange in this case. McEwan might have wanted to give a hint that touching would be involved in the story later. 'Loose but unremitting' might denote that power was important for Robert, which the reader will find out later. Violent people obviously cannot hide their 'needs', even not in public.

Robert starts to be pushy. He wants them to go with him to his club to get something to eat there: "Mary shook his hand and Robert began to pull them back down the street. 'Please,' he insisted. 'I know just the place.'"⁵⁸ Both Mary and Colin seem to dislike the stranger, but in spite of this they follow him. The author uses the word "insisted", which may denote that Robert was really obtrusive.

The reader feels now that there is something strange about him and that something is going to happen. But it is not like this. Ian McEwan plays with his readers and lets them wait in this state of mind almost until the end of the story. Meeting Robert is the turning point of the story. The reader anticipates that after several pages (where nothing was going on) THE THING is finally coming. But after the introduction of Robert, McEwan goes back to the situation around Colin and Mary. Robert invites them to his club to have something to eat and drink and he tells them his story. This story of his childhood seems to be unimportant for the

⁵⁷ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 15.

⁵⁸ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 15.

readers, but in reality it is. It is important for McEwan to reveal the psychological motivation of his characters, especially the supporting ones who are dark and mysterious. He demonstrates their motivation through their past. It is necessary to explain why, for instance, Robert acted in a strange way. There could be the roots of his behaviour and the whole personality in his past. The same method is used in *Saturday* and *Amsterdam* where the past of supporting characters is being described for better understanding of what is happening in the present.

If the readers feel something odd, after meeting Robert on the street, they must have been shocked when Colin and Mary woke up naked at Robert's house two days later: "Like her he was naked and lay above the sheets, prone below the waist, above it twisted a little awkwardly towards her."⁵⁹ It is typical for McEwan that he uses suspense to make his stories more attractive for the reader cannot just put the book away until finding out what will happen next. His other aim is to use taboo and perverse topics since it is something that is shocking for the readers. Taboo and perversion are favourite themes among artists because people talk about them and that is what makes the novels popular.

After a night at Robert's club, Colin and Mary did not return to their hotel, instead they spent the rest of the night on the street. The following day Colin and Mary met Robert again. They were tired and lost, still without the maps. Robert invited them to his place. He promised that he would take care of them because he was convinced it was his fault that they went through such a terrible night:

'Yes, it is my responsibility. I shall make up for everything. You will accept my hospitality.' 'Oh, we couldn't,' Colin said vaguely. 'We're staying at a hotel.' 'When you are so tired, a hotel is not such a good place. I will make you so comfortable you'll forget your terrible night.' Robert pushed his chair in to allow Mary to pass. (McEwan 2006: 38)

It seemed that they did not want to go, but they did go again. There might have been something about Robert that forced them to do what he wanted. Or it could

⁵⁹ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 39.

just have been the fact that they were really exhausted after that night, and they might have had no more energy to protest. In the extract mentioned above Robert tried again to push Colin and Mary to do what he wanted. He even tried to explain them what was the best for them. He just needed them to go with him.

The awakening without their clothes would not have been surprising if Colin and Mary had taken off their clothes on their own: "Colin stood up again, this time carefully, and looked around. He folded his arms. 'What's happened to our clothes?' Mary said, 'I don't know,' and raised her legs above her head into a shoulder stand."⁶⁰ The central couple was confused when finding out that they were naked. And that someone had undressed them. The readers might be confused as well. What was happening that the author did not mention? Who undressed them? And the most important question might be the reason why somebody would do it.

It is not written who exactly undressed them, but it looks like it was Robert's wife Caroline. She had to lock their clothes in a cupboard and she was allowed to give them back to Mary and Colin after promising that they will visit them again. Until Caroline tells Mary that she was looking at them while sleeping naked she looks like a woman who is there just for her husband and has no goals in her life. She is doing what Robert says. She has also problems with her back, she cannot walk without pain.

On their way to Robert's bar his twisted character came to light again:

'Did you understand what I was telling people as we walked here?' Colin shook his head. 'Not one single word?' 'No.' Robert smiled again in simple delight. 'Everyone we met, I told them that you are my lover, that Caroline is very jealous, and that we are coming here to drink and forget about her.' (McEwan 2006: 81)

⁶⁰ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 41.

Colin apparently did not share the same kind of humour because he wondered why Robert would do something like this. His behaviour was weird also previously when they were at their apartment for the first time:

Colin had turned back momentarily to set down his empty glass on the arm of the chair, and as he straightened Robert struck him in the stomach with his fist, a relaxed, easy blow which, had it not instantly expelled all the air from Colin's lungs, might have seemed playful. Colin jack-knifed to the floor at Robert's feet where he writhed, and made laughing noises in his throat as he fought for air. Robert took the empty glasses to the table. When he returned he helped Colin to his feet, and made him bend at the waist and straighten several times. (McEwan 2006: 55)

Robert was obviously the kind of a person who is convinced that he could do whatever he wants, such as punching people for fun. It might have been funny, but Colin did not laugh at all. More likely Robert wanted to demonstrate how strong he was and that nobody could limit him. It also seemed like Robert was used to invading people's personal space because he almost did not know Colin and Mary, but he was touching them several times when speaking: "Robert sat on the arm of the chair and rested his hand on Colin's shoulder."⁶¹ Considering that the setting is in Venice, it might not have been so strange that the locals are friendlier. Nonetheless, Robert's behaviour was beyond friendly, constantly crossing the line. He was being too intimate, which is totally inappropriate as for strangers.

Sexual Relationships and Taboos

When Colin and Mary leave their house Caroline says something that Robert cannot hear, because he is still upstairs.

Caroline lowered her voice. 'I can't walk down stairs.' Mary stood before them, but hearing Caroline whisper, she moved on towards the bookcase and picked up a magazine. 'Perhaps we should leave,' she called. Colin nodded gratefully and was about to stand when Caroline took his arm and said quietly, 'I can't get out.' (McEwan 2006: 58)

⁶¹ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 54.

This was probably the utterance that launched the future evil. When people whisper that they cannot get out of a house in a situation similar to the situation showed in the quotation it might sound creepy. Hearing this Colin and Mary started to think there was something wrong in their relationship. They had the feeling Caroline could be one of the oppressed and mistreated women: "After a prolonged silence Colin said, 'Perhaps he beats her up.' "⁶² And this is exactly what it looks like - a poor woman who is probably being hit by her husband:

'We went on like this for some time. My body was covered in bruises, cuts, weals. Three of my ribs were cracked. Robert knocked out one of my teeth. I had a broken finger. I didn't dare visit my parents and as soon as Robert's grandfather died we moved here. To Robert's friends I was just another beaten wife, which was exactly what I was. Nobody noticed. It gave Robert some status round the places where he drank. [...]' (McEwan 2006: 87)

Therefore it would not be odd, when she tried to signal her problem to someone who she has just met and who did not know anything about them. Who could have guessed what is about to happen a few days later? After realizing Caroline's presumable situation Mary committed herself to Colin who told her that he had the same opinion. They felt that she might be conciliated or even satisfied with this fact: " '... and yet she seemed to be quite ...' He trailed away vaguely. 'Quite content?' Mary said sourly. 'Everyone knows how much women enjoy being beaten up.' "⁶³ The short conversation when leaving caused that they did not want to go to Robert's house anymore. However, they did eventually. The latter quotation denotes that Caroline might have liked the way she was being treated. The topic of sadism and masochism, especially when having a sexual intercourse, is an issue that also attracts McEwan. It is again one of the taboo topics that he occupies himself with. To be more precise, it definitely used to be taboo in 1981 when the novel was published for the first time. In modern society the situation has changed – it is not a taboo anymore; nevertheless, people do not talk about it in public.

⁶² McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 71.

⁶³ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 71.

The narrative strategy when describing the story of Caroline and Robert is interesting. McEwan could have told their story so that the reader knows, but he "let" Caroline say it on her own – in ich-form. This move makes the story more authentic, and there is also the possibility that the readers would sympathize with her, at least for a moment. This might remind the readers of *The Collector (1963)* by John Fowles where one part of the novel is narrated by the kidnapper Frederick Clegg.

Once their "games" went wrong and Robert broke Caroline's back: " [...] I blacked out with the pain, but even before I went I remember thinking: it's going to happen. I can't go back on it now. Of course, I wanted to be destroyed. 'My back was broken and I was in hospital for months. [...].'⁶⁴ Since this accident, her injured back has been causing her troubles while walking. Robert treated her weirdly also in other aspects of their life, such as when she was back home again and once she left the house but was not able to get back because of the pain that afflicted her when trying to go up the stairs. Robert found her sitting on the stairs but instead of helping her to get home he let her sit outside the whole night, saying that she should not have left the house without his permission. Since then she has become a prisoner in her own house: 'I became a virtual prisoner. I could leave the apartment any time, but I could never be sure of getting back, and in the end I gave up. Robert has been paying a neighbour to do all our shopping, and I've hardly been outside in four years. [...].'⁶⁵ Caroline really was a prisoner, she did not have to do anything except for being there for her husband. She might have been kind of a sexual slave.

'[...] We had arrived at the point we had been heading towards all the time. Robert confessed one night that there was only one thing he really wanted. He wanted to kill me, as we made love. He was absolutely serious. I remember the next day we went to a restaurant and tried to laugh it off. But the idea kept coming back. Because of that possibility hanging over us, we made love like never before. [...]' (McEwan 2006: 87)

⁶⁴ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 87.

⁶⁵ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 88.

It was his dream to kill Caroline and according to her twisted meaning, it was her obligation to fulfil his wishes. The desire to kill someone while making love might not really be a part of sadomasochistic relationship. Robert's conviction may have been the proof that this man was a psychopath. So was Caroline. It is absolutely odd to be in a relationship with someone whose only desire is to murder their partner.

As written before, Colin and Mary had quite a boring vacation; they stayed several days in their hotel room, they ate there, smoked weed, and the only occasion to leave the hotel was to visit a café in front of their hotel. Speaking of smoking weed, it would not probably surprise anyone today, but back in 1980s it must have been shocking to read about people who smoke marijuana. In their case it might have been caused by boredom.

Obsession and Voyeurism

Robert and Caroline admired Colin. They said several times that he was really handsome and he looked like an angel. Caroline also mentioned that to Mary when they were alone for a while: " 'Colin is very beautiful. Robert said he was. You are too, of course.' "⁶⁶ It is interesting that Caroline said Mary was beautiful too. It was said only once. She might have said it just in order not to offend Mary by admiring her boyfriend. She also mentioned that Robert had said it. It sounds like she did not have her own opinion and needed to take somebody's side or more precisely Robert's side. Robert and Caroline were interested whether Colin and Mary were married or not. They were not, Mary had children with her ex-husband and she was never going to get married again. But they were satisfied with their lives.

The admiration of Colin's handsomeness was exaggerated. They had taken a lot of pictures of Colin:

⁶⁶ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 46.

The room was flooded with late afternoon light, and Mary was suddenly aware that the wall adjacent to the window, the wall behind her which ran the length of the bed, supported a wide baize-covered board covered with numerous photographs, overlapping like a collage, mostly black and white, a few Polaroids in colour, all of them of Colin. Mary moved along the bed to see more clearly, and Caroline came and sat close beside her. 'He's very beautiful,' she said softly. (McEwan 2006: 90)

They seemed to be completely obsessed with him. Taking hundreds of photos of someone and making a collage of them is really weird, especially if the photographer almost does not know the object of his photos. This kind of behaviour could be considered as stalking or voyeurism, which is another taboo. Of course, this kind of taboo has the same status as earlier in the past. Pointing that out can help to do something with it. It is one of the topics that are not being discussed a lot as well as sadism and masochism.

On some of those pictures Mary's hand or only a part of her face was visible because she was cut apparently in order not to bother Colin's beauty. Caroline told Mary (who was already sick from being drugged because of the tea) that their perverted plan could have failed when Mary and Colin had not come back. And there they were. They were facing the worst people they could ever meet on their vacation. And they came on their own as if some kind of an invisible power would have dragged them to Robert's house.

Mary might have anticipated that Robert was taking photos of them because he let her see a slurred picture with a man in the distance. While having a nightmare she realized that the man was Colin: " 'That photograph at Robert's is of you.' 'What photograph?' 'I saw a photograph at Robert's flat, and it was of you.' 'Me?' 'It must have been taken from a boat, a little way beyond the café.' "⁶⁷ Even creepier is the fact that Robert started to follow them since they arrived:

⁶⁷ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 67.

'Robert saw you both, quite by chance, the day you first arrived.' She pointed at a picture of Colin standing by a suitcase, a street map in his hand. He was talking over his shoulder to someone, perhaps Mary, just out of frame. 'We both think he's very beautiful.' (McEwan 2006: 90)

The realization that they have been followed by a twisted person since the beginning of their vacation must have been very frightening for Mary. It is definitely not normal to follow a stranger basically everywhere. Is this what Robert usually does? The question might be how many couples he has already played with like this.

Crime

One day Colin and Mary went to the beach and on their way home they decided to go to the house where Robert and Caroline lived. Unfortunately, it was a bad decision because one of them never left the house. Robert took Colin at first to his bar. Robert and Caroline were leaving for some time and he was going to sell his bar to someone else.

When Robert and Colin were at the bar Mary was with Caroline. The apartment looked different. The decorating was not there anymore, the main stuff was packed, and they even had their luggage prepared for the trip. Caroline made tea for Mary, and when she drank it up, she started to feel odd. When Mary was in this condition Caroline began to tell her the secrets of their life and what they did. It turned out that Caroline was not exactly the typical woman who was mistreated, but she was mishandled "only" while having sexual intercourse. As written before, the topic of sadomasochism attracts McEwan. Robert hit her regularly and both of them knew that one day, Caroline was about to die by Robert's hand.

When Colin and Robert arrived, their plan could move to the end, Robert and Caroline could finish it. Seeing Mary, who was sick, Colin was worried about her.

Caroline claimed that Mary had sunstroke because of being on the beach, but Colin wanted Mary to tell him whether she is ill:

The faintest sound, barely more than a breath, left her lips. Colin leaned close and put his ear to her mouth. 'Tell me,' he urged, 'try and tell me.' She drew breath sharply, and held it for several seconds, then articulated from the back of her throat a strangled, hard C. 'Are you saying my name?' Mary opened her mouth wider, she was breathing quickly, almost panting. (McEwan 2006: 93)

Mary wanted to warn Colin, to tell him that he should leave, because he was endangered. However, she was not able to speak, she was kind of paralyzed and even moving her lips was almost impossible. She wanted to save Colin: "She held Colin's hand in a ferocious grip."⁶⁸ It seemed that she was scared as she already knew the situation was dreadful, but Colin was not aware of it yet. Finally, she managed to say what she wanted: "Colin pressed his ear closer to her lips. Robert too was leaning over. With another immense effort she managed 'G ... G', and then whispered, 'Go.' 'Cold,' said Robert. 'She's cold.'"⁶⁹ Here it can be seen that Robert needed to check what she was saying to intervene on time. They needed Colin to stay because the plan was already on.

The first moment when Colin started to panic came in the situation mentioned above. Colin heard Mary saying *go*, which could have meant that she wanted both of them to go home. He could not have guessed that he should leave the house. Colin also thought that it was necessary to get Mary a doctor but this twisted couple told him that the phone has already been disconnected:

'Where's your telephone. Surely you've got a telephone.' There was panic in his voice. Robert and Caroline, still keeping close, were following him, blocking her view of him. She tried once more to make a sound; her throat was soft and useless, her tongue an immovable weight on the floor of her mouth. (McEwan 2006: 93)

⁶⁸ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 93.

⁶⁹ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 93.

The behaviour of Robert and Caroline was even creepier. At this moment, Colin must have known that there was something terribly wrong. He did not know why they were in a situation like this: " 'What do you want?' 'Want?' Robert said. He had taken something from his sideboard, but he kept his hand round it, and Mary could not see what it was. 'Want isn't a very good word.' Caroline laughed delightedly. 'Nor is need.' "⁷⁰ He promised them to do whatever they wanted if they would get a doctor for Mary, who was not able to move, and therefore was forced to watch the "film" in front of her eyes: " 'Very well,' Robert said and reached for Colin's arm, and turned his palm upward. 'See how easy it is,' he said, perhaps to himself, as he drew the razor lightly, almost playfully, across Colin's wrist, opening wide the artery."⁷¹ Colin's last word was "Mary?". The life of Colin violently evaporated in front of her eyes. She had to watch how her boyfriend is being murdered by a twisted couple. They were looking at each other in the last moment of being together. Neither of them could do anything to invert the situation. After finishing their plan, Robert and Caroline left for their journey. When Mary was conscious again she saw her dead man in a pool of blood.

Conclusion

In this novel Ian McEwan does not provide any conclusions why the story went this way. He does not explain anything. He just shows the pure evil that happens in our world and very often without any reasons. Maybe the murdering couple was bored, or Robert wanted to try to kill someone before he would do that to his wife. Maybe Caroline was desperate with her own health condition, and she wanted to cause troubles to other people. All in all, the act was terrible and McEwan brought the atmosphere of the book onto the readers. They might feel that Colin and Mary are making mistake when they are going to that house again, they might keep their fingers crossed so that nothing happens to Colin and Mary. While reading, the readers know that something evil is going to happen in the end

⁷⁰ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 96.

⁷¹ McEWAN, I. *The Comfort of Strangers*. p. 96.

because the evil goes through the whole story. There is something sinister lurking beyond Mary and Colin's story.

Actually, it is typical that some of McEwan's books are written like this – there is almost nothing happening in the bigger part of the story, but coming to the end, something bad happens. There were, of course, some hints such as the behaviour of Robert who was obtrusive and too friendly to completely unknown people. Waking up naked at Robert's apartment and finding out that their clothes were hidden and locked until they promise to come again is also fairly weird. The obsession with Colin is also strange – why exactly him? There are many beautiful people all over the world, so why they chose him? Mary did not attract them so much; they did not want to kill her. Maybe the fact that she was forced to watch her boyfriend dying pleased them. This is one of the questions that will never be answered. Only Ian McEwan knows the answer. Or, maybe, there is no answer. He could just have had the idea to describe people who murder for no reason and without any side thoughts. Maybe the next victim of this couple would be a beautiful woman of another couple.

When the reader thinks about it, Robert and Caroline behaved really suspiciously, but the main characters could not have seen everything, like the reader have. In addition, the readers have the advantage of knowing that the end will be dreadful, and while reading they expect that IT must happen sometime. The readers might roll their eyes when Colin and Mary go to that house again in spite of the fact that they do not have to, they can go to the hotel, stay there for a few days until the vacation will be over and leave contentedly for their homes, but their decision is different. The reader knows it because of having some expectations, but they cannot know it.

Ian McEwan has the ability to make the reader sympathize with the victims. To be honest, they are not such characters who the reader would like. In fact, there is no reason why the reader should like them. There is nothing special about them.

Actually, in some situations the reader might want to yell at them – they did not take their maps, they do not have anything to drink, they are wandering through the town and they do not know where they should go. In a foreign town it is not the best idea to leave the maps in the hotel when going out. The reason why the readers may keep their fingers crossed, is the fact that there is the expectancy of a violent crime happening to them. Nobody should be assaulted violently and here Colin and Mary are assaulted for no reason – nobody attacks them to steal their money, but just for sadistic fun. And this might be the reason why the readers wish that Colin and Mary survive their vacation, even if they may not like them.

If the purpose of the novel was to make the readers think about life and violent death it worked. On one hand it is a good intention to write a novel with an opened ending – it pushes the reader to think about it and to talk about it. But there are also readers who hate opened endings. In this novel the opened ending is upsetting because there was a crime and the villains left the crime scene and we do not know, if they will be ever punished, which is very vicious.

AMSTERDAM – IAN McEWAN

Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam* (1998) is a story about friendship, strange contract, death and betrayal. While reading this book, the reader may have the feeling that he has read something similar before. There are some similarities with McEwan's previous work *The Comfort of Strangers* – death, specifically murder, in a foreign country.

This chapter is again divided into several parts according to the topics that McEwan deals with. The most important topic is probably the moral decision that both main characters have to deal with. Clive's moral decision is connected with an attempt of rape he witnessed; Vernon faces the chance to save his newspaper by publishing delicate photographs of the Foreign Secretary taken by their former lover Molly, which basically means to betray dead Molly. Death is the topic that could be felt in the whole story; there is both natural death and murder. McEwan is again concerned with illness that occurs also in other novels, and contemporary problems of today's population such as political situations and euthanasia.

There are several main characters in this novel: Clive Linley, Vernon Halliday and Julian Garmony. All of them are former lovers of one woman named Molly. Clive Linley was Molly's friend since 1968, they lived together for a while. Vernon Halliday lived with Molly in Paris in 1974. Her next lover was the foreign secretary Julian Garmony. This work contains a lot of descriptions of Clive and Vernon's jobs. Clive is composing a big symphony and the reader can spot the steps that precede the complete symphony. It is quite interesting to see how difficult job it is, especially for a reader who has no awareness of being a musician. The life of a musician is being described also in other McEwan's book, namely *Saturday* where the main character's son is in a band. McEwan also describes the day of Vernon Halliday, who works as editor of the newspaper

called *The Judge*. Partially, the reader can "see" what happens at a politician's home when a skeleton in his closet is being pulled out.

Illness and Death

The story begins with a funeral. It is a funeral of Molly Lane, who died of an unspecified disease, apparently Alzheimer's. It started with tingling in her arm and her death came quickly. At the funeral four of her lovers met.

Instead, she was sent for tests and, in a sense, never returned. How quickly feisty Molly became the sick-room prisoner of her morose, possessive husband, George. Molly, restaurant critic, gorgeous wit and photographer, the daring gardener who had been loved by the Foreign Secretary and could still turn a perfect cartwheel at the age of forty-six. (McEwan 1999: 3)

According to the mentioned quotation, Molly was quite young, lively; many men fell in love with her. And she died helpless. And when she was dying her husband was taking care of her. Her friends were surprised because George, obviously, was not the man who would normally interest Molly: "George, the sad, rich publisher who doted on her and whom, to everyone's surprise, she had not left, though she always treated him badly."⁷² It seems that he truly loved Molly and Molly was satisfied with him.

Vernon and Clive thought that Molly would choose suicide instead of dying the way she died:

'I mean, to die that way, with no awareness, like an animal. To be reduced, humiliated, before she could make arrangements, or even say goodbye. It crept up on her, and then...' He shrugged. They came to the end of the trampled lawn, turned and walked back. 'She would have killed herself rather than end up like that,' Vernon Halliday said. (McEwan 1999: 4-5)

Her friends thought that it must have been terrible for her to die helpless.

⁷² McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1999. ISBN 0-676-97217-9. p. 5.

Clive Linley felt strange pain in his arm, which reminded him of Molly again. He was thinking about life, death and illness, especially serious illness followed by death scared him: "Wasn't this the kind of sensation Molly had when she went to hail that cab by the Dorchester? He had no mate, no wife, no George, to care for him, and perhaps that was a mercy. But what instead?"⁷³ Clive was alone with his music. But is it enough? Would he have thought about his loneliness, if his hand had not started hurt him? It seems that he regrets not having a wife or girlfriend only because of his selfishness – he does not have anyone who would take care of him if he was dying. This depicts Clive's personality. He lives only for his music and nothing else interests him. This will be proved later.

Molly's Affairs

The friends of Molly who made up the funeral gathering would have preferred not to be at a crematorium, but George had made it clear there was to be no memorial service. He didn't want to hear these three former lovers publicly comparing notes from the pulpits of St. Martin's or St. James's, or exchanging glances while he made his own speech. (McEwan 1999: 8)

It is obvious that Molly's friends and her husband George would never understand each other's behaviour. He is not happy about her former lovers being at her funeral. According to Molly's friends, funeral at the crematorium is not the best choice. It seems that they are convinced that Molly would not choose being at the crematorium. But they have to respect George's decision since he was Molly's husband and she chose him. There was a war between George and Molly's friends but they handled their meeting at the funeral well: "At last Clive was gripping George's hand in a reasonable display of sincerity. 'It was a wonderful service.' 'It was very kind of you to come.' "⁷⁴

⁷³ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 25.

⁷⁴ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 9.

Clive Linley evidently has had some feelings for Molly since they met. When meeting Hart Pullman, the Beat generation poet, he started to be jealous: "Clive concealed his disquiet as he did the sums. She would have turned sixteen in the June of that year. Why had she never mentioned it?"⁷⁵ Clive decided to find out what happened between him and Molly and why Molly did not tell him about Pullman. It was none of his business, Molly was dead and he was jealous of something that happened approximately 30 years ago. This may be the proof that Clive must have been in love with Molly for his whole life. He figured out that it happened three years before they met and that it must have been statutory rape.⁷⁶ Clive seems to be angry and attacks him verbally: " 'You never fucked her, you lying reptile. She wouldn't have stooped to it.' "⁷⁷ He is totally disgusted with his discovery. The same feeling occurs while talking to the Foreign Secretary Julian Garmony: " 'Perhaps it was nothing more than a mistake, Molly and Garmony. Either way, Clive now found it unbearable.' "⁷⁸ Again, it was none of Clive's business and again he was jealous of someone else who Molly liked. He was not able to deal with the fact that Molly's attitude to men was more than hearty. It is interesting that he looks down on other Molly's lovers. Is he really better than anyone else? This behaviour shows his self-confidence and it also proves that he is self-centred and arrogant.

Julian Garmony, the Foreign Secretary, wants to talk to Clive. According to Clive's friends he was an enemy. And Clive himself had the same opinion of him:

The enemy indeed. What had attracted her? He was a strange-looking fellow: large head, with wavy black hair that was all his own, a terrible pallor, thin unsensual lips. He had made a life in the political marketplace with an unexceptional stall of xenophobic and punitive opinions. Vernon's explanation had always been simple: high-ranking bastard, hot in the sack. But she could have found that anywhere. There must also have been the hidden talent that had got him to where he was and even now was driving him to challenge the PM for his job. (McEwan 1999: 13)

⁷⁵ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 10.

⁷⁶ cf McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 10.

⁷⁷ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 11.

⁷⁸ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 15.

It seems that Molly made many decisions that none of her friends understood. She was apparently controversial personality who did not care about what people think of her actions. She must have been self-confident and content with herself. Her lovers did not understand what attracted her to other lovers. In Garmony's case it was not only his appearance but also his political attitudes what made her friends wonder why she liked him. Vernon has also quite radical opinion on Garmony.

Garmony and Clive are kind of connected because Garmony voted for Clive to get the opportunity to compose The Millennial Symphony. Clive Linley is a famous composer. Obviously, Garmony has the feeling that Clive owes him. Garmony demonstrates his power after Clive makes him angry by pulling out the skeleton in his closet:

"The very last time I saw Molly she told me you were impotent and always had been.' 'Complete nonsense. She never said that.' 'Of course you're bound to deny it. Thing is, we could discuss it out loud in front of the gentlemen over there, or you could get off my case and make a pleasant farewell. That is to say, fuck off.' The delivery was rapid and urgent, and as soon as it was over Garmony leaned back, beaming as he pumped the composer's hand, and called out to the aide, 'Mr. Linley has kindly accepted an invitation to dinner.' (McEwan 1999: 16)

This may be a perfect example of intimidating somebody with something that should stay hidden while pretending being friends because of the people or journalists standing around and trying to overhear the conversation. It is very effective – the enemy is knocked out and the audience think that the intimidator is a nice person. What Garmony said was not nice at all but Clive was provoking him the whole conversation. He deserved it. The question is whether what Garmony said was true or he was just trying to hit every man's weak spot. According to Clive's acute reaction Garmony might have been right. It could also be an answer why Clive was so jealous of every other Molly's lover.

Working Environment

Since Molly's funeral Vernon Halliday has felt weird as if he did not exist.⁷⁹ Vernon's reputation among people of this business was quite bad: "He was widely known as a man without edges, without faults or virtues, as a man who did not fully exist. Within his profession Vernon was revered as a nonentity."⁸⁰ What could be worse than being nobody? Could a person like this be respected as a superior? Vernon's position at the newspaper was not easy at all. There was even a legend of how he had become the editor of *Judge*:

[...], at a dinner for the German Ambassador, a congressman mistook Vernon for a writer on the *Washington Post* and tipped him off about a presidential indiscretion - a radical hair implant procured at taxpayers' expense. It was generally accepted that 'Pategate' - a story that dominated American domestic politics for almost a week - had been broken by Vernon Halliday of *The Judge*. (McEwan 1999: 30-31)

He became an editor of *The Judge* by coincidence, which was probably the reason why he was not really respected at that position. Vernon's task was yellow journalism: "Jack Mobey, the board's own placeman, had failed to take the venerable broadsheet far enough downmarket. There was no one left but Vernon."⁸¹ Also according to the articles that occur in *Judge* it is likely that *The Judge* is a tabloid. McEwan shows the reader what a job of an editor involves. It is interesting for readers who do not know anything about it. However, for some readers it may be boring just as the description of a composer's day. There is another similarity with Clive's life and that are the thoughts about his own life and death. He feels empty, dead: "Perhaps the word was *dead*. His right hemisphere had died. He knew so many people who had died that in his present state of dissociation he could begin to contemplate his own end as a commonplace - [...]"⁸² It is probably common reaction to think about death when people around die. Both Clive and Vernon had

⁷⁹ cf McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 29.

⁸⁰ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 30.

⁸¹ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 31.

⁸² McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 31.

these thoughts. And they both summarized their lives, what they did, what they did not and what they regret.

The connection between Vernon and George Lane, the husband of the deceased Molly Lane, was caused not only through Molly but also due to the fact that George was the owner of one and a half per cent of *The Judge* and he also financially supported the relaunch that was followed by the fall of the previous editor and Vernon's elevation.⁸³ Technically, George was Vernon's boss or, at least, he thought so. Vernon may have thought that his life is linked with George who he hated.

Euthanasia and the Strange Deal

Almost at the beginning of *Amsterdam* one of the reporters wants to write an article dealing with a scandal in Holland concerning doctors who misuse euthanasia. An attentive reader could have the feeling that this mention is not random.

The crucial topic of *Amsterdam* is probably the pact between Vernon and Clive – both of them were thinking about death due to what happened to Molly. Clive was brave enough to express out loud what lay heavy on him.

I'd like to know there was someone who'd help me to finish it ... I mean, help me to die. Especially if I got to the point where I couldn't make the decision for myself, or act on it. So, what I'm saying is this - I'm asking you, as my oldest friend, to help me if it ever got to the point where you could see that it was the right thing. Just as we might have helped Molly if we'd been able... (McEwan 1999: 49)

Clive was sure that Molly would have rather committed suicide than let her life end helplessly. He was scared that something similar would happen to him, and what terrified him probably the most was the fact that he would end up lonely in a

⁸³ cf McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 33-34.

nursing home. To be able to avoid this end he needed his old friend Vernon. He may have expected that Vernon would agree immediately, but even a good friend could not expect that a request for mercy killing would emerge from a statement: "I need to *see* you. It's important."⁸⁴ Vernon was caught off guard, but he promised to consider his request. It is essential to say that mercy killing or euthanasia is illegal in the United Kingdom. Clive knew it and he explained Vernon what would be necessary to do in case he agreed with it – taking him to Holland. Later on the same day, he made the decision, and agreed, but on condition that Clive will do the same for him. Again, the reader can see Clive's selfishness: "It was no comfort that Vernon had asked the same for himself; all it cost him was a scribbled note pushed through the door."⁸⁵ He must have expected that Vernon may have the same request, especially, when taking into account their fear of their own death after Molly has passed away. On the one hand, Clive wants Vernon to do this serious issue, but on the other hand he is not comfortable with doing the same for Vernon. It does not look like a fair friendship. This is exactly what it is according to Clive's opinion – "certain... imbalance in their friendship"⁸⁶. Both of them knew that Clive was the one who was keeping their friendship alive and Vernon was only taking advantage of it: "He had given, but what had he ever received? What bound them? They had Molly in common, there were the accumulated years and the habits of friendship, but there was really nothing at its centre, nothing for Clive."⁸⁷ Vernon lived at Clive's house and did not pay rent, Clive helped him during his divorce, he visited him when he was ill, and many similar examples of Clive being helpful. Therefore, it is difficult to judge Clive's character. Maybe the only issue they had in common was really Molly; Molly, who was dead now. Molly's death could also depict the end of their friendship.

⁸⁴ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 42.

⁸⁵ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 64-65.

⁸⁶ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 65.

⁸⁷ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 65-66.

Moral Decision

Along with the topic of euthanasia there are two conflicts between Vernon and Clive that are the next topic of the book. These conflicts refer to morality. The first conflict arises from the fact that Clive disagrees with Vernon's intention to discredit the foreign secretary Julian Garmony by publishing Garmony's secret photographs taken by Molly. Those pictures were given to Vernon by George Lane, Molly's husband, who may have had his own reasons, why to publish these photographs. However, he told Vernon that he needs a scoop to avoid the decline of *The Judge*, and he was sure that Garmony's photographs would make a really big story.⁸⁸ There was Garmony dressed like a woman in the pictures. He was wearing make-up, pretending to be a woman and posing while Molly was taking the photos. It might be a serious problem if these photographs came out. This hobby of Garmony was obviously something that attracted Molly to him; his secret life might have been her cup of tea: "A puzzle had been solved. This was what had drawn her to Garmony, the secret life, his vulnerability, the trust that must have bound them closer. Good old Molly."⁸⁹ Clive does not agree with Vernon's intention to publish it because it contradicts his previous actions when he justified sexual revolution, queer people and others:

'Isn't this the kind of sexual expression you're so keen to defend? What exactly is Garmony's crime that needs to be exposed?' 'His hypocrisy, Clive. This is the hanger and flogger, the family values man, the scourge of immigrants, asylum seekers, travellers, marginal people.' (McEwan 1999: 73)

Normally, he would stand by people who differ from the average majority, but not now, not in Julian Garmony's case who he hated. This upset Clive despite the fact that he hated Garmony himself. We can see again that he still has had some feelings for Molly:

⁸⁸ cf McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 74.

⁸⁹ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 70.

'Because of Molly. We don't like Garmony, but she did. He trusted her, and she respected his trust. It was something private between them. These are her pictures, nothing to do with me or you or your readers. She would have hated what you're doing. Frankly, you're betraying her.' (McEwan 1999: 75)

Nevertheless, Vernon's intention was not only discredit Garmony because of personal reasons. Well, it was, but it may have been only marginal intention. The most important thing was to prevent him from becoming prime minister. He was afraid that his election would be a disaster for the country – more people living in poverty, more imprisoned people, more homeless people and more crime. Actually, this deed would mean a lot; Vernon would save *The Judge*, discredit Garmony and "save" the country. According to Vernon, Clive had no idea what is going on in real life, he lived only for his symphonies.⁹⁰ It was a serious fight which was followed by another one. This was the first moral question the book deals with.

As for Clive's symphony, he had a deadline to meet. He needed inspiration, which led him to Lake District where he was walking in the hills and valleys. Thinking about his symphony he saw a couple which did not mean anything for him. He tried to ignore these people. He started to write the fragments of the symphony, he wanted to finish it, but he saw that the couple was fighting. The man did not fit in the surroundings; he was not dressed properly for a walking trip. He attacked the woman, the woman shouted and Clive sat hidden behind a rock and pretended not being there. He needed to finish his symphony and did not care about anything else. There was only his symphony.

The man had hold of her wrist and was trying to drag her round the tarn towards the shelter of the sheer rock face directly below Clive. She was scrabbling on the ground with her free hand, possibly looking for a stone to use as a weapon, but that only made it easier for him to jerk her along. ... She made a sudden pleading whimpering sound and Clive knew exactly what it was he had to do. Even as he was easing himself back down the slope he understood that his hesitation had been a sham. He had decided at the very moment he was interrupted. (McEwan 1999: 88)

⁹⁰ cf McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 73.

Clive intentionally did not help a woman who was maybe fighting for her life. He knew that she is in trouble in the middle of nowhere and he refused to interrupt his job for a good reason. It might have been his duty to help a person in need. And he knew that probably it is wrong, but still he ignored what was going on there. He cowardly walked away and found a calm place to finish his task. He tried to justified his behaviour, because the picture he has seen was somewhere in his head. After finishing his notes he left for the city.

I want you to go to the police now and tell them what you saw..." "Out of the question." "You could identify this man." "I'm in the final stages of finishing a symphony which..." "No, you're not, dammit. You're in bed." "That's none of your business." "This is outrageous. Go to the police, Clive. It's your moral duty." "An audible intake of breath, another pause as though for reconsideration, then, "You're telling me my moral duty? You? Of all people?" "Meaning what?" "Meaning these photographs. Meaning crapping on Molly's grave... (McEwan 1999: 119)

Clive told Vernon about it, but Vernon wanted him to go to the police, which Clive refused again. Twice in a short while he refused to do the right thing in spite of not working at that moment. He just did not want to help the police to capture a rapist who can attack other women. According to Clive's behaviour in this matter it is clear that he had no character. Pointing out that Vernon did something bad too, was not an ideal way of excusing his own actions. These two moral failures should not be compared. The only person Clive ever cared about was apparently Molly Lane. He should not have wondered that he was so lonely. No matter what Vernon is like, at least, he lives in a real world and wants to do something good for people in his country. This second serious fight led to mutual hatred between them. The last straw might have been reporting Clive to the police, which caused that he had to stop working on his symphony.

Betrayal

Betrayal is a big issue in *Amsterdam*. According to Clive, Vernon betrayed dead Molly when he published Garmony's photographs. Vernon's decision to publish

the photographs turned out to be devastating for him. Garmony knew that his pictures were in the wrong hands and he had to decide what to do. He told his wife and she saved the whole delicate situation by holding a press conference. This move smashed Vernon's article, because everybody found out about Garmony's pictures and his wife stood by his side: "Mr. Halliday, you have the mentality of a blackmailer, and the moral stature of a *flea*."⁹¹ The Garmonys knew that *The Judge* was going to publish the photos and Rose Garmony mentioned even specifically Vernon Halliday, which could have meant that George may have informed the Garmonys, which means that he betrayed Vernon. Informing both Halliday and Garmony about the photos would help George to kill two birds with one stone:

Finally, after two hours of meander and backtrack, George Lane had a good idea. 'Look, there was nothing wrong in purchasing those photographs. Actually, I can tell you this, I heard he got a jolly good deal. No, Halliday's mistake was in not pulling his front page the moment he saw Rose Garmony's press conference. He had plenty of time to turn it around. He wasn't going out with it till the late edition. He was quite wrong to have gone ahead. On Friday the paper was made to look ridiculous. He should have seen which way the wind was blowing and got out. If you're asking me, it was a serious failure of editorial judgement.' (McEwan 1999: 127-128)

George managed to destroy two of Molly's lovers, because he lost his position of editor of *The Judge*. The new editor has become Frank Dibben who was toadying to Vernon and informing him about his co-workers, because he apparently had the feeling that Vernon's position was endangered due to the decline of *The Judge*, and it might have been Frank's chance to be promoted. Vernon trusted him and even showed him what he had on Garmony. According to Frank, Vernon had to publish it because it could ruin Garmony's chance to become prime minister.⁹² Vernon should have expected that Frank's intention was not pure. He was too intense when promising him that he could spy on the other journalists. Possibly, he did it only to gain better position, maybe he did not want to ruin Vernon's

⁹¹ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 125.

⁹² cf McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 107.

career, but the way of achieving his goal was questionable. However, betraying a colleague is quite common way of getting better job.

Murder

Probably the biggest betrayal was the mutual one between Clive and Vernon that led to double murder – they betrayed one another and their friendship.

Lying on the bed beside him was a venomous little card gloating over his downfall, written by his oldest friend, written by a man so morally eminent he would rather see a woman raped in front of him than have his work disrupted. Perfectly hateful, and mad. Vindictive. So it was war. Right then. Here we go, don't hesitate. (McEwan 1999: 147)

Clive left a note for Vernon in which he wrote that he deserved being fired. This note stood obviously for personal declaration of war. Clive left for Amsterdam to perform his symphony there. Vernon decided to go there, too:

The hours passed, and Vernon picked up his copy of *The Judge* several times to read again about that medical scandal in Holland. Later on in the day he made a few phone enquiries of his own. More idle hours passed while he sat about in the kitchen drinking coffee, contemplating the wreck of his prospects, and wondering whether he should ring Clive and pretend to make peace, in order to invite himself to Amsterdam. (McEwan 1999: 149)

Both of them knew that Holland has quite lenient policy concerning mercy killing. It is interesting that both of them had the same idea at the same time. They took part in a cocktail party, which was a great opportunity to do what they intended. Both of them had two glasses of champagne, one of which contained a drug that is used to kill people when undergoing euthanasia: " 'Look,' Clive said. 'I had a drink all ready for you.' 'And I got one for you.' 'Well...'"⁹³ They each presented a glass to Lanark. Then Vernon offered a glass to Clive, and Clive gave his to Vernon." They patched up, or they pretended to, and decided to have a rest before having dinner together. Both of them died almost at the same time realizing that they

⁹³ McEWAN, I. *Amsterdam*. p. 164.

were mutually betrayed. Their dying was accompanied by hallucinations of Molly who reminded them of their last days. Two previous friends who used to love one woman killed themselves as revenge. This betrayal is likely the biggest one of the whole book.

The most ridiculous fact was that George Lane and Julian Garmony went to Holland to accompany Vernon and Clive's coffins back to England. Four of Molly's lovers who despised each other were together at the same place again, although two of them were dead.

Conclusion

Amsterdam begins and ends with death. The book is full of villains, or at least negative characters. All of the protagonists did something bad. Even Rose Garmony was a negative character, because she knew about her husband's actions, covered them, and stood by his side publicly. She also attacked Vernon verbally during her press conference naming him a flea. It is interesting that one dead woman could link several people and even lead them towards death. If Molly was alive, she would be probably the only positive character, but it is difficult to say that concerning her promiscuous love life – people like Molly are not usually considered good people. But this is a matter of preference.

As written at the beginning of this chapter, McEwan deals with the political situation – Garmony is a xenophobe, which is somehow funny concerning his delicate photographs. He might have been a little ashamed that he had these desires, and therefore he had xenophobic attitude.

Moral decisions play an important role in *Amsterdam*. The main characters faced an uncomfortable task. Vernon's aim was to protect the country from a politician who would not bring anything good. Of course, he wanted also to humiliate Garmony, but there was something positive in his decision. Clive decided not to

help a woman in need because of writing his symphony. His attitude was very twisted because he heard a woman screaming and he ignored it intentionally. It is up to the readers to choose who actually was worse. Compared to Henry Perowne in *Saturday*, these men did not make a good decision. It is difficult to say what would have been the best in Vernon's case, but Clive definitely failed as a human. Henry Perowne did not misuse the chance to avenge his family, and he morally won over the criminal.

Euthanasia is important for the novel because both Vernon and Clive would rather die with dignity if they had an incurable disease than dying slowly in pain and degradation without even noticing that. They were sure that Molly would have had the same opinion. And euthanasia also played a significant role in their deaths, specifically misusing the drugs that are being used for euthanasia.

McEwan not only points out important topics but he also wrote an interesting story that makes the reader think of the sense of life, vulnerability of humans and what people are capable of when it comes to achieving their goals.

SATURDAY – IAN McEWAN

Ian McEwan's *Saturday* was published in 2005, but the story is set in 2003. The author describes one day of a neurosurgeon Henry Perowne. It's Saturday February 15, 2003 and this day should totally change Perowne's life.

This chapter covers several topics that repeatedly occur also in McEwan's previous works such as illness, sexual harassment, morality, crime, death and topics that appear only in *Saturday* such as terrorism. McEwan also describes the workplaces of his characters in detail. Whether it was the editorial department in *Amsterdam*, carrying out a surgery in *Saturday* or the job of a physicist in *Solar* – all this gives the impression of credibility.

The reader is going through the day with Henry Perowne minute after minute. He is basically in Perowne's head because the author describes not only what is going on during this day, but also what he is thinking of. This might sometimes be a problem for the readers since some of Perowne's thoughts are rather complicated.

As mentioned above, McEwan presents one Saturday in the neurosurgeon's life. Perowne and his wife Rosalind expect a visit of their daughter Daisy, who lives in Paris, and Rosalind's father John Grammaticus, a famous poet living also in France. There is also Perowne's son Theo at this family gathering.

There are several storylines; the main plot takes place in the present, but McEwan tells several stories retrospectively. It is necessary, so that the reader understands all the events that occur in their family. In these retrospective moments the reader gets to know all the members of Perowne's family including the ones who cannot be at the gathering. The author introduces also the parents of main protagonists. It means deflection of the present but it is necessary for understanding the relationships within the family. The readers meet Mrs Perowne, who Henry Perowne is visiting in a home for people with serious diseases; she suffers from

dementia and her son is not able to take care of her anymore. Rosalind's father John Grammaticus is taking part in the family gathering. McEwan mentions also Rosalind's mother and Henry's father who have already been deceased.

This novel contains many events that were happening in the world at that time, but they are also valid in 2014. Perowne cares about the situation in the world; he is not one of the people who do not care what is going on around them, although he is really keen on his job. It is not like anything else does not interest him. He even tries to understand other family members' hobbies. His daughter Daisy is a literate, her book of poems is going to be published soon, and she tries to persuade him that literature is not a waste of time, although he is a rational person who thinks that literature is based on romantic ideas.

McEwan's Strategy

McEwan introduces the reader the whole family. Apparently it is necessary for better understanding of the story and the relationships among the characters. His father-in-law John Grammaticus, whom he does not really like, was important for what Perowne's children have become. Grammaticus was a well-known poet, who taught Lily how to like literature and Theo how to like music. When reading about Grammaticus' character and rather promiscuous lifestyle, the reader gets to know Henry Perowne's character as well. He is a man of traditional values: "Perowne, constitutionally bound to love one woman all his life, has been quietly impressed, especially as the old man advances into his seventies."⁹⁴ Also during the day is he thinking of his wife several times. It seems that they are satisfied in their marriage.

While reading the reader knows that something is going to happen, more specifically something terrible. Just as in *The Comfort of Strangers* and in *Amsterdam* the story goes on slowly and then at one moment it bursts out. The

⁹⁴ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. Great Britain: Vintage, 2006. ISBN 9780099469681. p. 129.

reader expects it, the protagonist does not know about it, but according to certain signs, he feels somehow nervous for no reason. McEwan plays with readers' nerves. It is typical also for the novels mentioned above, but in *Saturday* it is even worse. It takes too long to get to the climax. For the reader it is uncomfortable that the rest of the family does not have a clue what is going to happen; they are just looking forward to meeting the whole family. McEwan is an expert in writing a story of suspense.

There is an important part in this novel – a quarrel on the street between Henry Perowne and three aggressors. After the quarrel, the readers know for sure that the three aggressors will have a significant role in the story – it works the same way as in the previous novels. There was a situation that followed to the subsequent crime which was supposed to happen. But the author waited quite a while until the crime happened and he obviously tried to calm the readers down by changing the subject - in this case McEwan started to describe his father-in-law and talents of his children. This method works because the reader is thrilled and looks forward to what exactly is going to happen next.

There were several remarks about cars looking just like Baxter's car during the day. Perowne had the feeling that Baxter might have been stalking him; paranoia haunted him through the day. Parking in front of his house he looked up to the windows of the house: "As he looks up from the car, he notices that the house is in darkness. Naturally, Theo is still at rehearsal, Rosalind will be picking her way through the last fine points of her court application."⁹⁵ Perowne was also trying to remember what exactly Theo did say earlier which did not trouble him at all.⁹⁶ These two tiny remarks remind the readers of what they are actually reading – McEwan did not mention anything about Baxter for a while and the readers might be calmed down, but now he wakes them up. It is pretty sure that there is someone in the house. Why would he write about dark windows and remarks of Theo? Later on, it was found out that McEwan was playing the readers again; there was

⁹⁵ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 175.

⁹⁶ cf McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 175.

nobody in the house at that moment. However, it was great tool to make the atmosphere gloomy and dramatic.

Family Affairs

Thinking of his children's artistic talents Perowne admitted to himself that until Theo turned 14 he had not considered Theo's talent seriously, which he regrets today: "Theo, still only fourteen, improvised a sweet and melancholy solo. Perowne, sitting apart with his wine by the pool, bare feet in the water, was touched too and blamed himself for not taking his son's talent seriously enough."⁹⁷ He might not have thought about doing music as a real job because of being too realistic. Art does not mean a lot for him. Perowne as a doctor and Rosalind as a lawyer, work in total different branch than their artistically gifted children.

Perowne was expecting that there may have been a conflict during the dinner – Grammaticus and Lily were going to meet after a few years of ignoring themselves. Grammaticus' apprentice Lily got bigger than her master, which made an old jealous man angry. This family gathering might have been a perfect chance to patch up. In the end, Perowne was right because there was a conflict, however, not only between Lily and Grammaticus, but also between him and his daughter.

The reason why Grammaticus and Daisy had a fight must have been jealousy. Daisy won Newdigate Prize for her poem which Grammaticus harshly criticised. He was drunk and unable to deal with the fact that she have chosen her way and might be better than him. Her poem about a girl after a sexual intercourse may have showed him that she has found someone else who helped her to develop:

⁹⁷ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 131.

This may have been why Grammaticus took against the poem – his protégée had struck out and found other men. Or it may have been one more pitiful attack of status anxiety – in forming Daisy's literary education he hadn't intended to produce yet another rival poet. (McEwan 2006: 135)

This poem was a little bitter for Henry too for his little daughter grew up and he was not the most important man in her daughter's life anymore:

Vaguely religious, mellifluously erotic, the poem suggested to a troubled Perowne that his daughter's first year at university had been more crowded than he could ever had guessed. Not just a boyfriend, or a lover, but a whole succession, to the point of serenity. (McEwan 2006: 135)

The incident with Grammaticus was the reason why she did not come for a visit for the next two years. And now, her book of poems *My Saucy Bark* will be published and they are going to meet at Perowne's house for the first time. Although Grammaticus excused himself for his criticism in a long letter, uncomfortable situation might occur.

After Daisy arrived she greeted her father, but unfortunately they started to talk about the demonstration, which led to a quarrel for Daisy could not understand that her father supported the war. She was convinced that it would have had bad consequences in the future: " 'Do you think we're going to be any safer at the end of all this? We'll be hated right across the Arab world. All those bored young guys will be queuing up to become terrorists...' " ⁹⁸ That was apparently not what Perowne had expected when planning the family gathering.

Daisy did not have a calm evening; at first her own father's political opinions made her angry and after that her grandfather did the same because of poetry. It seemed that nothing worked out according to Perowne's plan. In the end, the family members calmed down and Perowne was satisfied:

⁹⁸ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 189.

Nothing matters much. Whatever's been troubling him is benignly resolved. The pilots are harmless Russians, Lily is well cared for, Daisy is home with her book, those two million marchers are good-hearted souls, Theo and Chas have written a fine song, Rosalind will win her case on Monday and is on her way, it's statistically improbable that terrorists will murder his family tonight, his stew, he suspects, might be one of his best, all the patients on next week's list will come through, Grammaticus means well really, and tomorrow – Sunday – will deliver Henry and Rosalind into a morning of sleep and sensuality. Now is the moment to pour another glass. (McEwan 2006: 201-202)

Terrorism

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the story is set in 2003. Due to the terrorist attacks in 9/11 and the impending war against Iraq there were demonstrations in several cities, such as the demonstration in London in this novel. People were scared that another terrorist attack is going to happen, and McEwan used this situation for his novel.

The story begins in the morning when Henry Perowne woke up earlier than usually and while looking out of the window, he saw that there was a plane crash - this event seems to be not important for the plot, but later on the reader finds out that it was essential for Perowne is afraid that the crash might be a terrorist attack. McEwan presents the world as we know it – people listen to news reporting about terrorist attacks or terrorist threats basically every week. Perowne's fear could be a fear of every person in the world who cares about what is happening around. No one ever knows when they will be attacked in the name of religion or Allah, pupils do not know if they come back from school since there are suicide bombers or maniac killers at schools several times in a year. It can happen even in a small town in Europe. Nowadays people live in a constant fear of an unknown threat. But are we really afraid of it? People fear after something has happened but it is impossible to think of possible menace all the time. The world is shocked but afterwards everything is getting back to normal and life goes on. Probably the most petrifying terrorist attack was in 9/11. The world literally stopped for a while, everyone must have been astounded when watching the news referring to

terrorist attacks. McEwan deals also with this issue. There is a demonstration in London, therefore several streets are closed and the accident happens because of driving in a street that is closed. The reason for the demonstration is Iraq war. Finding out that according to the Internet rumours the pilots might be radical Islamists (the one is a Chechen the other Algerian)⁹⁹ and that the Koran was found in the plane wreck assures him that bad things are coming to London. Perowne is thinking of it the whole day.

As well as in McEwan's other novels there are a lot of descriptions of people, buildings, surroundings and events such as the demonstration against Iraq war that was up-to-date when the book was being written. There is a constant fear in society that it is inevitable that something bad is going to happen in the world, or in this concrete case in London:

There are people around the planet, well-connected and organised, who would like to kill him and his family and friends to make a point. The scale of death contemplated is no longer at issue; there'll be more deaths on a similar scale, probably in this city. Is he so frightened that he can't face the fact? (McEwan 2006: 81)

Perowne even thinks of the perfect place where a terrorist attack could be performed: "London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities. Rush hour will be a convenient time. [...] Berlin, Paris, Lisbon. The authorities agree, an attack's inevitable."¹⁰⁰

There is another mention of terrorism. Perowne was sure that it was unlikely that terrorists would kill his family that night. Perowne was calm, satisfied, everything was good at the moment as he did not have any reasons to be worried. For the first time on this Saturday he was really relieved how the things were working out.

⁹⁹ cf McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 151.

¹⁰⁰ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 276.

Violence For No Reason

The twist of Henry Perowne's day is caused by a car crash that is rather banal. Nothing serious happened; no one got injured; only the cars are damaged a little. But he is angry because he was heading to play squash with his colleague and this car crash caused that he will be late. There are three men in the car behind him. Everyone is waiting who will do the first step to solve this situation. Henry saw these guys couple of seconds before rushing from a bar that is known for lap-dancing, which makes them suspicious in his eyes:

As far as he's aware, lap-dancing is a lawful pursuit. But if he'd seen the three men hurrying, even furtively, from the Wellcome Trust or the British Library he might already have stepped from his car. That they were running makes it possible they'll be even more irritated than him by delay. (McEwan 2006: 83)

Finally, all of them got off the car and tried to solve the problem. In this part, the readers get to know the main villain of the book - a young man called Baxter. He introduced himself and also his two friends in crime, Nigel and Nark. Perowne wanted to act according to the law and swap their insurance details, or call the police, but the men had a "better" idea:

'Fortunately for you, I got a mate does bodywork, on the cheap. But he does a nice job. Seven fifty I reckon he'd sort me out.' Nark rouses himself. 'There's a cashpoint on the corner.' And Nigel, as though pleasantly surprised by the idea, says, 'Yeah. We could walk down there with you.' (McEwan 2006: 90)

It looks like those men wanted to get money in a dirty way. After rejecting this offer Perowne got hit on his sternum. While observing Baxter's behaviour during their conversation, Perowne noticed that his behaviour is strange: "And a jazzy walk, an interesting tremor, the occasional lordly flash of temper or mood swing might in their milieu mark out a man of character."¹⁰¹ His behaviour reminded him of a neurological disease and he tried to save himself using his medical

¹⁰¹ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 95.

knowledge: " 'Your father had it. Now you've got it too.' "¹⁰² This might be the reason why Baxter decided to do what he later did. Perowne asked him questions to find out his family anamnesis, which is rather interesting in his situation because by asking certain questions about his family Perowne was taking risk that Baxter will lose his temper, which would not probably end up very well for him. He even mentioned a certain disease and according to Baxter's reaction the readers know that Perowne was right: " 'Has anyone mentioned Huntington's Disease to you?' [...] Baxter is looking at the ground. Perowne takes his silence as confirmation."¹⁰³ Despite the fact that both of them knew that this disease cannot be cured, Perowne tried to persuade Baxter that there might have been a chance to help him. And Baxter needed to make sure that there really was not a cure:

Perowne is familiar with this impulse in patients, this pursuit of the slenderest leads. If there's a drug, Baxter or his doctor will know about it. But it's necessary for Baxter to check. And check again. Someone might know something he doesn't. (McEwan 2006: 97)

The character of Baxter can be seen as a cliché:

He's an intelligent man, and gives the impression that, illness apart, he's missed his chances, made some big mistakes and ended up in the wrong company, Probably dropped out of school long ago and regrets it. No parents around. And now, what worse situation than this could he find himself in? There's no way out for him. No one can help. But Perowne knows himself to be incapable of pity. (McEwan 2006: 98)

It is quite common in literature or movies that the villains or people who destroyed themselves using drugs are in fact good. If there was someone at a particular point who would help them they would not become what they have become. As the author mentions, Perowne is not capable of pity considering his job - doctors cannot pity every single patient. And the reader should not pity Baxter because his childhood might not have been exemplary. It might be an

¹⁰² McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 94.

¹⁰³ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 96

interesting question whether there are any readers who pity Baxter while reading what he later did. There is also the difference in social status of these two men – a doctor with a university degree against a street man with possibly the lowest education (there is no mention of it; Perowne only assumes that he may be a dropout). According to Baxter’s behaviour and speech, it could be supposed that he really does not have any higher education. Perowne’s refined manners might look unsuitable when it comes to a street dispute with people who are rude and vulgar - the whole situation appears to be ridiculous. It would be interesting, if there was a man with a higher education instead of Baxter. Would he also react that violently? Probably not. As written before, there were definitely more factors which influenced how Baxter acted.

Perowne was thinking about the whole situation with Baxter later when playing squash. He doubted if he acted properly:

Did he, Henry Perowne, act unprofessionally, using his medical knowledge to undermine a man suffering from a neurodegenerative disorder? Yes. Did the threat of a beating excuse him? Yes, no, not entirely. ... Only a fool would stand there and take a kicking when there was a way out. So what’s troubling him? Strangely, for all the violence, he almost liked Baxter. That’s to put it too strongly. He was intrigued by him, by his hopeless situation, and his refusal to give up. (McEwan 2006: 111)

Every person would do anything possible to save their life facing the danger. It is normal reaction. But still Perowne thought that he might have gone too far when using his knowledge. It may not have been the best idea to confront Baxter with his disease in front of his accomplices, but it helped to keep Baxter distracted from attacking Perowne once again. The question is what made Baxter decide to “visit” Perowne at home. Was it the desire for revenge, or the fact that Perowne might have really been right and there was a possibility to be cured? The other reason why Perowne was thinking of this man again was his reluctance to give up; every little possibility that there was a cure gave him hope.

The first person finding out about Henry's street conflict was his son Theo, who informed him that he had made a mistake when dealing with Baxter: " 'You humiliated him. You should watch that.' 'Meaning what?' 'These street guys can be proud. Also, Dad, I can't believe we've lived here all this time and you and Mum have never been mugged.'"¹⁰⁴ At this point, the reader is assured that Theo had predicted the near future.

There were several heralds about the nearest future of Perowne's family. When Perowne's father-in-law John Grammaticus arrived he stood in front of the house looking at a tower. Henry left the house to join him and they had a little chat outside. Henry noticed that there were two figures sitting on a bench: "Their backs are turned and they're sitting close together, hunched forward, so that Perowne assumes that a deal is in progress. Why else sit out here so intently on a cold February night? Sudden impatience comes over him; [...]"¹⁰⁵ Again, Perowne felt somehow strange for no reason. Was it his paranoia once more? He knew that there were some unusual things on this day, but he did not expect that there was more going to happen than just a family dinner with a possible conflict between Daisy and her grandfather.

There is an essential question related to this part – is any violence meaningful? Compared to *The Comfort of Strangers*, Baxter's violent reaction might have been meaningful because his car got crashed. But it was just a car and the damage was not so vast; he had a right to be angry, but it was definitely inappropriate to attack Perowne. Robert from *The Comfort of Strangers* had no reason to murder Colin; he was just a sick man, who did it to satisfy his twisted needs. There is of course violence that might be meaningful, or at least understandable such as parents avenging the murder of their children. It may be a natural instinct that people protect what belongs to them. However, acting violently due to a crashed thing is exaggerated. There might be the influence of Baxter's disease on his behaviour, but it is impossible to take into account all potential reasons why people act how

¹⁰⁴ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 152.

¹⁰⁵ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 197.

they act. If Perowne had killed Baxter during the surgery, it would have been a violent act, but it would have been understandable for the society; Perowne would have taken revenge for his family.

Illness and Death

McEwan is concerned with serious diseases in all novels mentioned above; in *Saturday* as well, even twice. There is the violent man with Huntington's disease, and also Perowne's mother suffering from dementia. The description of Perowne's visit in a nursing home is realistic and sad. The readers identify themselves with Henry and his feelings, especially if they have the same experience.

Being with her isn't so difficult. The hard part is when he comes away, before this visit merges in memory with all the rest, when the woman she once was haunts him as he stands by the front door and leans down to kiss her goodbye. That's when he feels he's betraying her, leaving her behind in her shrunken life, [...]. Despite the guilt, he can't deny the little lift he feels, the lightness in his step when he turns his back and walks away from the old people's place and takes his car keys from his pocket and embraces the freedoms that can't be hers. (McEwan 2006: 153)

Every ordinary person has definitely the same feeling as Henry. This could also be a moral question. People usually do not want to forget about their family members dying slowly in nursing homes, but visiting their relatives at these places might be sometimes too harsh. No one wants to be sad, but places like that affect people's mood and feelings for they actually are sad. People from the outside could feel despair and death. Is it immoral to pretend that the relatives do not exist anymore, if a person cannot handle seeing them wrecked? What if the dying person does not remember them and basically does not care whether someone comes or not? The residents of nursing homes do not have any hope to get better and leave, it is the last station before death and everybody knows it, except for patients whose memory does not function anymore, which was Lilian Perowne's case: "And she hardly possesses the room because she's incapable of finding it unaided, or even

of knowing that she has one. And when she is in it, she doesn't recognise her things."¹⁰⁶ Henry's attitude was great since it was difficult for him to see a woman who used to be his beloved mother, but at the moment she did not know that she had a son. It must have been even harder for him because as a doctor he knew what was going on in her head.

Perowne was thinking of his mother's life and realized that she had unconsciously led him to become a doctor.

She liked a good exploratory heart-to-heart with her neighbours. The eight-year-old Henry liked to flop on the floor behind the furniture and listen in. Illness and operations were important subjects, especially those associated with childbirth. That was when he first heard the phrase 'under the knife' as well as 'under the doctor'. 'What the doctor said' was a powerful invocation. This eavesdropping may have set Henry on his career. (McEwan 2006: 155-156)

Perowne regretted several things related to his mother. He would have never thought that her habits could influence him. He was sure that she would have admired the same niceties as he, such as the clean headwear, the short fingernails.¹⁰⁷ But he had never showed her these features of his job and he regretted it since it was pointless at the moment; she was not able to perceive it. The other thing he regretted was considering his mother rather trivial because of her desire to have everything tidied up and cleaned and because of the topics of her discussions with neighbours. Again, he realized too late that he had not been right. He could not redeem his opinion anymore because his mother did not care: "Lilian Perowne wasn't stupid or trivial, her life wasn't unfortunate, and he had no business as a young man being condescending towards her. But it's too late for apologies now."¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, people usually realize too late that they might have been wrong and that a sincere apology would not harm.

¹⁰⁶ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 153.

¹⁰⁷ cf McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 155.

¹⁰⁸ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 156.

When visiting his mother Perowne realized that the situation could change in a few years – he could sit in a room that he will not recognize talking to his children who will not listen what he will talk about. He realized his own vulnerability considering his lifestyle and the limited time that people are given to. He wanted to live, which he became aware of while visiting a nursery home full of patients with no future. It was not the first time when death occurred in *Saturday*. However, this kind of death is natural, not violent, but still painful:

[...] – and Henry, sipping the thick brown tea, half listening, half asleep in the small room's airless warmth, thinks how in thirty-five years or less it could be him, stripped of everything he does and owns, a shrivelled figure meandering in front of Theo or Daisy, while they wait to leave and return to a life of which he'll have no comprehension. High blood pressure is one good predictor of strokes. [...] He isn't ready to die, and nor is he ready to half die. [...] He'll be ruthless with himself in his pursuit of boundless health to avoid his mother's fate. Mental death. (McEwan 2006: 165)

Criticism of Nowadays' Humankind

When cooking the dinner Perowne felt that he needed to watch the news to obtain new information about the plane crash. And that is actually what the most people do – in case of an accident they need to watch the news and share the fear together with the majority of the world: "It's a condition of the times, this compulsion to hear how it stands with the world, and be joined to the generality, to a community of anxiety."¹⁰⁹

The government's counsel – that an attack in a European or American city is an inevitability – isn't only a disclaimer of responsibility, it's a heady promise. Everyone fears it, but there's also a darker longing in the collective mind, a sickening for self-punishment and a blasphemous curiosity. Just as the hospitals have their crisis plans, so the television networks stand ready to deliver, and their audiences wait. Bigger, grosser time. Please, don't let it happen. But let me see it all the same, as it's happening and from every angle, and let me be among the first to know. (McEwan 2006: 176)

¹⁰⁹ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 176.

McEwan criticizes the needs of today's population. And he is right since people really want to see things that would have surprised the population of the last decades. The progress is fast and people have more opportunities that they use. Humans are curious and it is natural that they want to know what is happening. However, in some cases it is somewhat sick how nosy they are. It seems like they are convinced that they had the right to know about everything their neighbours do. Why would people watch reality shows? Why do the people want to see terrible pictures of car accidents? All this is connected with the need to have all the possible information and the media offer it. The reporters are being sent to the crime scene to inform the viewers about everything. And people watch it. They might long for hearing something horrible just to assure themselves that their lives are not bad at all. This novel points out that the humankind is sick and it is good to think about it a little. What is more, McEwan also calls attention to the constant fear that people live in – the whole society awaits dreadful events to happen.

Crime

The first real crime happened when everybody was awaiting Rosalind coming from work. They did not expect what they got. Rosalind was neither greeting her family nor was she enthusiastic about the evening; she was pale and when she showed up in the living room she looked scared:

She warns them off with her eyes, with a furtive movement of her hand. It isn't only fear they see in her face, but anger too, and perhaps in the tensing of her upper lip, disgust. [...] From Rosalind's reaction they sense a figure coming into the room before they see it. And still, the shape Perowne can see in the hall hangs back: he realises well before the others that there are two intruders in the house, not one. (McEwan 2006: 206)

At his particular moment, the event that had been awaited since the car accident has happened. All the previous seemingly insignificant hints occurred for a reason. Perowne was wrong about the improbability of terrorists attacking his family on that day. Although they were no terrorists, they came to attack his

family. Just the forced entry into someone's house is horrible enough. The family will know forever that their privacy has been intruded. They will likely feel the violent criminals in their house for a long time. The reader knows immediately that the person in Perowne's house was not a random ruffian who has spontaneously chosen a house to break in. And Perowne knew it as well:

As the man enters the room, Perowne instantly recognises the clothes; the leather jacket, the woollen watch cap. Those two on the bench were waiting for their chance. A moment before he can recall the name, he recognises the face too, and the peculiarity of gait, the fidgety tremors as he positions himself close, too close, to Rosalind. [...] 'Knife, ' she says as though to him alone. 'He's got a knife.' (McEwan 2006: 206)

Rosalind tried to be brave because a panic would probably not have helped. The knife meant that these men were capable of everything and she and the rest of the family must have expected the worst. There was no time for playing a hero; they had to obey the orders and try to survive. This night was going to be a tough one.

Perowne tried to see the whole situation through Baxter's eyes, so that he could reveal Baxter and his accomplice's intentions:

[...] the girl and the old fellow won't be a problem; the boy is strong but doesn't look handy. As for the lanky doctor, that's why he's here. Of course. As Theo said, on the streets there's pride, and here it is, concealing a knife. When anything can happen, everything matters. (McEwan 2006: 207)

Considering the knife, it might have been expected that Baxter would use it without hesitation if it was necessary. Perowne needed to protect his family and tried to find Baxter's weak spot. Henry was the only one in the living room, who knew, who these people were and why they showed up, or at least he thought that he knew why:

With her eyes and a faint shake of her head Rosalind is urging him away. She doesn't know the background; she thinks these are mere burglars, that it is

sensible to let them take what they want and hope they will leave. Nor does she know the pathology. All day long, the encounter on University Street has been in his thoughts, like a sustained piano note. (McEwan 2006: 207)

Normally, in a situation of danger, people might obey the orders to escape unscathed, but not Henry; he tried to lie when Baxter told him to hand his cell phone over, which made Baxter mad: " 'Now you.' Perowne says, 'It's upstairs charging.' 'Don't make it worse, cunt,' Baxter says. 'I can see it.' The top of the phone is visible above the curving cut of his jeans' pocket."¹¹⁰ Apparently, Henry did not think of his actions and made the situation worse. But this might have been a typical feature of his personality – never giving up. He just did not want to obey a couple of bullies who violently entered his house. The same feature could have been traced up at the beginning of the novel at the time when Perowne was playing squash with his fellow worker. He was fighting until the end of the game never letting his counterpart win without effort. However, playing squash differs a lot from trying to stay alive. His father-in-law had the same attitude - he took a stand against the ruffians when they wanted his phone, too. Maybe a glass of gin had encouraged him: " 'Actually, I don't own one. And if I did, I'd be inviting you to ram it up your cowardly ass.' "¹¹¹ Probably the worst thing to do when people are endangered is to provoke a person possessing a gun. Perowne was aware of his fault in this case. He was the one who got his family into this situation because he just could not watch his mouth:

Perowne himself is also responsible. He humiliated Baxter in the street in front of his sidekicks, and did so when he'd already guessed at his condition. Naturally, Baxter is here to rescue his reputation in front of a witness. He must have talked Nigel round, or bribed him." [...] Why could he not see that it's dangerous to humble a man as emotionally labile as Baxter? To escape a beating and get to this squash game. He used or misused his authority to avoid one crisis, and his actions have steered him into another, far worse. The responsibility is his; Grammaticus's blood is on the floor because Baxter thinks the old man is Perowne's father. A good start's been made on dishonouring the son. (McEwan 2006: 210-211)

¹¹⁰ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 208.

¹¹¹ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 209.

Baxter's reaction to the old man's remark proved his determination to do anything. Although Perowne tried to discourage Baxter from attacking Grammaticus, he did not mind who he had a quarrel with and punched Grammaticus into his face. The rest of the family was relieved realizing that it had not been the hand with that knife which had hit Grammaticus' face.¹¹² Anyway, Grammaticus was beaten up and would not cause problems anymore. This specific moment demonstrates how unscrupulous Baxter was.

Until now, Henry suddenly sees, he's been in a fog. Astonished, even cautious, but not properly, usefully frightened. In his usual manner he's been dreaming – of 'rushing' Baxter with Theo, of pepper sprays, clubs, cleavers, all stuff of fantasy. The truth, now demonstrated, is that Baxter is a special case – a man who believes he has no future and is therefore free of consequences. And that's simply the frame. Within it are the unique disturbances, the individual expression of his condition – impulsiveness, poor self-control, paranoia, mood swings, depression balanced by outbursts of temper, some of this, or all of it and more, would have helped him, stirred him, as he reflected on his quarrel with Henry this morning. (McEwan 2006: 209-210)

The fact that Baxter might have thought he had no future, is the most disturbing. No one can predict what people would do when they do not care about the consequences. Baxter believed that there was no cure, and he could do whatever he wanted to since he will not live long enough to be punished. Henry was aware of what his family was facing.

As Theo mentioned before his father had offended a street person who was definitely proud and he did it in front of other people. Baxter arriving at the Perownes' might have had more than just this reason to avenge. He also needed to do it in front of his companion's eyes to prove again that he was the boss and the street conflict did not mean anything. What is more, he had to hurry up because his illness was going to affect his whole body soon:

His kind of criminality is for the physically sound. At some point he'll find himself writhing and hallucinating on a bed he'll never leave, in a long-term

¹¹² cf McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 209.

psychiatric ward, probably friendless, certainly unlovable, and there his slow deterioration will be managed, with efficiency if he's in luck. Now, while he can still hold a knife, he has come to assert his dignity, and perhaps even shape the way he'll be remembered. [...] The story of Baxter deserted by his men, defeated by a stranger who was able to walk away unscathed, all that will be forgotten. (McEwan 2006: 211)

Baxter also may have thought that his doctors could have overlooked something and there was a tiny chance for him to be cured. Even when he knew that there was no future, there was still a "what if". Maybe Perowne did not lie earlier that he could help him although he was trying to save himself.

The next problem occurring might have been because of Daisy, who attracted Baxter. He wanted her to strip naked while threatening her that he would slit her mother's throat if she refused doing it: " 'Shut up. I haven't finished. You watch my hand and listen. All right? You mess, about, we're lost. You listen carefully. Take your clothes off. Go on. All of them.' "¹¹³ To express how serious he was, Baxter cut the sofa above Rosalind's head. Daisy would not have a choice if she wanted her mother not to get hurt. Not only was it humiliating for her as she did not want to get naked in front of these people and her whole family, but she has not told her parents yet that she was expecting a baby:

But he knows that this young woman will be intensely aware of what her parents are discovering at this very moment in the weighted curve and compact swell of her belly and the tightness of her small breasts. How didn't he guess earlier? What perfect sense it makes; her variations of mood, the euphoria, that she should cry over a dedication. She's surely almost beginning her second trimester. (McEwan 2006: 218-219)

Baxter and his accomplice prevented Daisy from the pleasure of telling her parents the news herself. Every woman should have the right to tell this kind of information on her own. Now, it was clear to Perowne why she had been so irritated when discussing politics. It was a reaction of her pregnant body and Perowne wondered how come that he did not find it out on his own earlier. It

¹¹³ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 217.

seemed that Perowne was convinced he was perfect and as a doctor should have been able to discover everything.

Perowne tried to talk to Baxter again and persuade him that there might have been a chance to get into a trial which could restore him to health. Of course, he was lying again. But is that so bad to lie in case of emergency? After all, it is natural behaviour of all living creatures, not only humans, to take care of their own life no matter what it takes. He was just using the fact that Baxter was confused and started to believe that Perowne really might help him. And it was thanks to Daisy who had charmed him with a poem which he thought was hers: "Baxter says eagerly, 'How could you have thought of that? I mean, you just wrote it.' And then he says it again, several times over. 'You wrote it!'"¹¹⁴ After hearing the poem he was so distracted that he completely forgot that he had threatened them. The only thing he wanted was the book of poems and Perowne getting him into the trial that actually did not exist:

'I'm going on that trial. I know all about it. They're trying to keep it quiet, but I see all the stuff. I know what's going on. [...] 'Yes, the American trial. It's upstairs, in my office.' He had almost forgotten his lie. He looks again at Theo who now seems to be prompting him with his eyes to go along with this. But he doesn't know that there's no trial. And the price of disappointing Baxter will be high. (McEwan 2006: 224-225)

Moral Questions

Going upstairs was not Baxter's best decision. He got knocked out by Henry and Theo cooperating. Baxter has sustained severe injuries when falling down the stairs. He suffered a spinal injury and his life was practically in Perowne's hands. Instead of letting him die, he and Theo gave him first aid and called the ambulance. Later at night, Perowne had a phone call from the hospital. His co-worker Jay Strauss wanted him to come to the OR and perform the operation on Baxter for he was the best neurosurgeon:

¹¹⁴ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 223.

There are other surgeons Jay can call on, and as a general rule, Perowne avoids operating on people he knows. But this is different. And despite various shifts in his attitude to Baxter, some clarity, even some resolve, is beginning to form. He thinks he knows what it is he wants to do. 'Henry? Are you there?' 'I'm on my way.' (McEwan 2006: 233)

The reader may ask what Perowne wants to do. Is he going to unsuccessfully deliver the surgical procedure by accident? No one could say a word if Baxter died, it happens with massive injuries. It is nothing unusual that people die in surgeries. Perowne's family got attacked and threatened with a knife, his daughter got humiliated in front of her family's eyes and Perowne has the perfect chance to avenge himself. What is he going to do? This moral question might be difficult. If he 'killed' Baxter in the OR, he would have to live with it for the rest of his life and only he would know that it was intentional. Perowne's wife Rosalind was suspicious about his decision to perform the surgery: "She says, 'I think so. Look, I'm worried about you going in.' 'Meaning?' 'You're not thinking about doing something, about some kind of revenge are you? I want you to tell me.' 'Of course not.'"¹¹⁵ Did he lie again as he did several times on that day?

As mentioned before, there was one more moral question Henry Perowne had to deal with. First of all, it was placing his mother into a nursery home after she was not able to take care of herself at all.

After the surgery, Perowne came to visit Baxter: "Baxter is lying on his back, arms straight at his sides, hooked up to all the systems, breathing easily through his nose. There's no tremor in the hands, Perowne notices. Sleep is the only reprieve. Sleep and death."¹¹⁶ He met the promise he had given to his wife and did not do anything foolish.

Perowne was talking to his wife about what she was feeling when it was over and they were lying in bed: "She adds, 'And terrified still, of them.' As he's starting to reassure her they'll never come back, she speaks over him. 'No, no. I mean, I feel

¹¹⁵ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 239.

¹¹⁶ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 262.

they're in the room. They're still here. I'm still frightened.' "¹¹⁷ She felt that way because their territory had been violated. The criminals had intruded on their privacy and she could feel them there. Strangers had been in their house; they had touched their stuff and threatened them. It is normal that it will take a lot of time to get over it. Rosalind was also scared of what she felt:

When she's calm at last she says in her usual, level voice, 'I'm angry too. I can't help it, but I want him punished. I mean, I hate him, I want him to die. You asked me what I felt, not what I think. That vicious, loathsome man, what he did to John, and forcing Daisy like that, and holding the knife against me, and using it to make you go upstairs. I thought I might never see you again alive...' [...] 'When I talked to you at the front door, about revenge I mean, it was my own feelings I was afraid of. I thought that in your position I'd do something really terrible to him. I was worried that you were having the same ideas, that you'd get in serious trouble.' (McEwan 2006: 265)

Rosalind was afraid that Perowne had had the same thought of doing something bad to Baxter. In certain situations it is rather common that people have the desire to revenge hard. After surviving such a terrible experience people have the right to be emotional. In this case, Rosalind was mistaken and Perowne did not think about being vindictive during the procedure.

There was a difficult task waiting for him: "He must persuade Rosalind, then the rest of the family, then the police, not to pursue charges. The matter must be dropped. Let them go after the other man."¹¹⁸ Henry still felt responsible for what had happened. If he had not driven through the street that was closed, there would not have been a car crash with Baxter and the day would have developed in a different way. In that particular moment when Baxter was charmed by the poem recited by Daisy, Perowne felt his craving for live. Perowne knew how short his life will be and wanted to give him the chance to live the rest of his miserable life out of jail.¹¹⁹ It is more than possible that his family will make a stand against him and he could not be surprised considering all the bad things Baxter had done. This

¹¹⁷ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 264-265.

¹¹⁸ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 278.

¹¹⁹ cf McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 278-279.

decision could ruin his family. Especially after listening to Rosalind telling him how much she hated that man. Does this decision mean that Perowne is able to forgive? Perowne had the chance to kill that man without facing the consequences, however, he decided to save the man's life and even give him the chance to go unpunished. Why did he make this decision? Was it kind of a moral victory of the doctor over the criminal? Maybe Perowne did not want to descend to the level of a criminal. There may be also the reason that according to the Hippocratic Oath, the doctor has to act in the best interest of sick people. Perowne dealt with Baxter according to his good manners, no matter how incomprehensible it might be. After certain time, his family will recover from this dreadful experience, and Perowne will not have to live with the guilt of killing a human being. McEwan left this novel with an open ending and the readers have to decide what the reaction of the family will be.

Final Thoughts

Henry could not sleep after coming back home and was thinking of the future regarding his family. He knew that his mother will die soon because her dementia does not leave her much time. Then Grammaticus will die. His children will live their own lives and come home just for a visit. Perowne himself will turn fifty and start to live calmer. Rosalind will write her book. And they will live alone. That is the circle of life that people have to deal with and respect it. It is inevitable.

Henry finds himself different than before the assault. Now he has no desire to be in a war: "At the end of this day, this particular evening, he's timid, vulnerable, he keeps drawing his dressing gown more tightly around him."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ McEWAN, I. *Saturday*. p. 277.

Conclusion

Ian McEwan demonstrates in *Saturday* that the world is not just black and white. There is not pure evil and pure good. He tries to think of possible factors that make people evil, and he is doing it through the eyes of Henry Perowne. It would be easier to let Perowne kill Baxter, but it might be too predictable and probably the easiest way of dealing with the villain. McEwan presumably wants the readers to think about the fact that it is not good just to take revenge when people are angry. He displays other ways to solve complicated problems. His novels are the kind of books that the reader cannot just put away after reading to the end. He makes the reader think of the story and possible consequences for the future, not only regarding the story itself (the ending of *Saturday*), but also the topics that he deals with aside such as terrorism, or situation in the world.

SOLAR – IAN McEWAN

Solar is a contemporary novel that reminds the reader of the novel *Saturday*. Both of these novels take place in contemporary Britain (Solar also in the States; a place that Beard referred to as North Pole...), and McEwan deals with current issues that the humankind faces every day. In this case it is the climate change. He wants to warn the readers about the disaster that may happen in a couple of years, if the attitude towards the nature does not change. *Solar* is an important message for people written in a humorous way. Although there are several parts concerning physics it is not difficult to understand and what is more, it does not contain parts that might be boring for someone who is not interested in physics at all. It is a story about a man who has more problems than he can handle.

As written above, the main topic is probably solar energy, but this topic takes place behind the personal story of Michael Beard. McEwan's typical topics occur as well. They are death, betrayal, adultery, violence, fraud, illness and, of course, moral questions. In *Solar* the moral question is even more difficult than in *Saturday*. Whereas the main character of *Saturday* was a good man who was successful in his job and people liked him, the protagonist of *Solar* is different. He is also a successful scientist, but his character is far from good. He is definitely not a role model. Michael Beard is a Nobel Prize winner who benefits the whole life from winning the award. The novel is divided into three parts - the readers follow his steps in three stages of his life.

Adultery

The first part is set in 2000 when the character's fifth marriage was falling apart. In this case his wife was cheating on him, which was a completely new situation for Beard. He was used to cheating on his wives, and at that time he had to deal with his wife Patrice cheating on him. Even worse was the fact that Patrice was

dating a builder who had worked on their house. Beard would have never thought that it would be so hard for him: "Beard was surprised to find how complicated it was to be the cuckold. Misery was not simple. Let no one say that this late in life he was immune to fresh experience."¹²¹ He was a typical cheater who thinks that it is normal to cheat on his wife, but if his wife did the same and furthermore she did not even bother to hide it, he was mad. He realized that he loved Patrice and wanted to get her back: "Had Beard at last located within himself a capacity for sexual masochism? No woman had ever looked or sounded so desirable as the wife he suddenly could not have."¹²² The question is if she found a lover after discovering that her husband had had an affair with a mathematician from Berlin, or if she just told him about her romance at that moment to demonstrate that she could also do whatever she wanted. Her choice of the lover did not appeal to Michael at all because Rodney Tarpin, the builder, was rather a simple man:

[...] – and this was when she revealed the identity of her lover, the builder with the sinister name of Rodney Tarpin, seven inches taller and twenty years younger than the cuckold, whose sole reading, according to his boast, back when he was humbly grouting and bevelling for the Beards, was the sports section of a tabloid newspaper. (McEwan 2011: 6-7)

According to this quote, Michael Beard might have thought that he was better than other people just due to his high education. However, he was also critical of himself and knew his weaknesses. He was fifty three in that year and Patrice thirty four, he was overweight and not interested in healthy lifestyle at all: "How could he possibly keep hold of a young woman as beautiful as she was? Had he honestly thought that status was enough, that his Nobel Prize would keep her in his bed? Naked, he was a disgrace, an idiot, a weakling."¹²³ He thought that he was not in a good shape and handsome enough to deserve a woman like Patrice. Did he think that Patrice was such a shallow woman caring only about external appearance? Or

¹²¹ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. Great Britain: Vintage, 2011. ISBN 9780099555346. p. 4.

¹²² McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 5.

¹²³ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 7.

was she really so shallow? Beard thought that he could not compare himself to Tarpin who was in a good form considering his job as a builder.

Beard did not want to share his wife with someone else. He even realized that he wanted to win her back, but Patrice apparently did not have any interest in it, and kept dating Tarpin. At that moment he was not satisfied at work, and he decided at least to save his marriage: "Yes, yes, he had been a lying womaniser, he had it coming, but now that it had arrived, what was he supposed to do, beyond taking his punishment? To which god was he to offer his apologies? He had had enough."¹²⁴ The atmosphere at home was quite bad – the couple lived together in their house, but they almost did not talk to each other, and Patrice did not conceal that she was seeing another man. She also deliberately provoked Michael when preparing herself before she left for her date. It must have been unbearable for Beard, especially when he decided that he wanted his wife back. It was surprising for him when he found out that Patrice had known about all of his affairs, specifically eleven affairs in five years of their marriage. In general, Beard's moral corruption is from the start suggested by the number of affairs with women and his selfishness.

In 2009 Beard was not married, but he had a girlfriend Melissa. Even though Beard had Melissa and a daughter Catriona he did not change his habits and was still seeing other women, especially a waitress called Darlene who he had met in the US. Michael thought that something would change after Catriona's birth, but it did not – his life was the same, he travelled as before, and was seeing other women: "The surprise was this: his existence since Catriona's birth was much as before. His friends had told him he would be astonished, he would be transformed, his values would change. But nothing was transformed. Catriona was fine, but it was the same old mess."¹²⁵

¹²⁴ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 30.

¹²⁵ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 310.

Melissa knew that Michael was seeing someone, and she made up an imaginary lover to show him that she was doing the same. It was the same as with his ex-wife Patrice – Michael did not approve that his wife might have cheated on him too. He did that all the time, and was always offended when a woman did that too: "Oh yes, that. The tired old argument from equivalence. The level playing field. Rationality gone nuts, feminism's last stupid gasp."¹²⁶

When he thought about it now he was in two minds. He was angry and jealous and wanted to claim Melissa for himself and stuff Terry's baton down his throat. On the other hand, this Terry was his permission, his passport to more fun with good old Darlene. How much fun of this kind did he have ahead of him? And perhaps this was the point – he had the perfect situation after all. But then he thought of this man in Melissa's bed, or reading Beatrix Potter to his daughter, and he realised that he must give up Darlene and get back to London as soon as he could. But then, what about Darlene? (McEwan 2011: 315)

Beard was kind of selfish and chauvinist – he wanted everything: his girlfriend Melissa, their daughter, and his lover Darlene. And he was jealous when hearing that Melissa was also seeing another guy. He could not have been uninterested in his own family when it bothered him that Terry might have met his daughter. Maybe he felt a little endangered because Melissa's place was basically his home, and suddenly there was an intruder. However, he also wanted Darlene. He liked the way she acted because it was totally different from decent Melissa. Darlene was rather a simple woman, a little trashy; her way of living was totally different from what he knew:

The point about Darlene was that she said yes, and she was good-natured and funny and liked to drink with him. On his last trip to Lordsburg they had got drunk together in the trailer and in a wild moment he had agreed to marry her. But it was while they were making love, it was rhetorical, a mere expression of excitement. (McEwan 2011: 310)

Darlene took his "yes" for granted, and even informed Melissa that she and Mr Beard were going to marry, which resulted in the meeting of these two women at the end of the novel.

¹²⁶ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 313.

Beard's behaviour reminds of the seven deadly sins – he is in breach of several of them such as gluttony, pride, lust, sloth and also wrath.

Violence

McEwan mentions also the issue of domestic violence, but he does not really occupy himself with it in *Solar*. It serves only as one of the proofs of Tarpin's violent behaviour.

Pointless to go after her when she did not want him, and it did not matter now, because he had *seen*. Too late for her hand to conceal the bruise below her right eye that spread across the top of her cheek, black fading to inflamed red at its edges, swelling under her lower lid, forcing the eye shut. (McEwan 2011: 17-18)

Finding out that Tarpin hit Patrice made Beard angry. He thought about going to Tarpin's to "explain" him how to treat a woman. Unfortunately, he fell asleep when thinking his plan through. McEwan mentions tormented women when Michael thinks of making Patrice stay in their marriage:

There were bruised and broken women who could not stay away from their violent men. Organisers of women's refuges often lamented this quirk of human nature. If she was addicted to her fate there would be more blows to the face. His beautiful Patrice. Unbearable. Unthinkable. What *then*? She could be sickened as much by Michael's sympathy as by Rodney's violence, and want to be shot of them both. (McEwan 2011: 45)

McEwan expresses the opinion that many people have. That is the fact that abused women cannot leave their partners even though they have the chance. Some of them might think that they deserve to be beaten up, and suffer from the violence of their husbands. There is something wrong in their thinking.

Demonstrating Tarpin's aggression against people is important for the story. He not only attacked Patrice, but also Beard when he came to his place to talk about

Tarpin's affair with Patrice. He came without any plan; he did not even know what he wanted to tell Tarpin:

Tarpin said, 'What I do with your wife is my business,' and he laughed at his own joke. 'And you can fuck off out of it.' Beard was stalled for a moment, for it was not a bad line, and in this hiatus it occurred to him that what he wanted, no, *intended* to do, any second now, was to kick Tarpin's bare shin very hard, hard enough to break a bone. (McEwan 2011: 60)

Unfortunately, his intention was too predictable, and Tarpin's reaction faster. Beard got slapped in his face and ear barely realizing what had just happened. Tarpin threatened: " 'The next one'll hurt,' he said."¹²⁷ Beard thought that this slap hurt enough. McEwan's sense of humour can be seen in this quotation.

In this situation McEwan apparently prepares the ground for adjusting Beard's behaviour later on when Tom Aldous dies in his house. It is the proof of McEwan's excellent narrative strategy.

Beard's Professional Life

Thanks to his Nobel Prize Beard earned a certain reputation that enabled him to lend his name to several institutes so that the institutes get money for their projects. He wrote reviews, gave lectures and speeches, but has not really done anything valuable since winning the award:

Perhaps that was enough, perhaps he had achieved all he could during one brilliant summer in his youth. One thing was certain: two decades had passed since he last sat down in silence and solitude for hours on end, pencil and pad in hand, to do some thinking, to have an original hypothesis, play with it, pursue it, tease it into life. The occasion never arose – no, that was a weak excuse. He lacked the will, the material, he lacked the spark. He had no new ideas. (McEwan 2011: 19)

¹²⁷ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 61.

Beard knew that he got stuck and was not moving forward, but he also knew that he was too lazy to do anything to change it. He seems to be sort of satisfied with his situation even though he did not like it. A certain security in life appealed to him. There was a new government centre that was concerned with renewable energy, and Beard was the head in this centre although the real work was done by a man called Jock Braby, who was a senior civil servant.¹²⁸ Beard doubted sometimes, if he really was the same man who had invented the Beard-Einstein Conflation:

It sometimes seemed to Beard that he had coasted all his life on an obscure young man's work, a far cleverer and more devoted theoretical physicist than he could ever hope to be. He had to acknowledge the fact – that twenty-one-year old physicist was a genius. But where was he now? Was he really the same Michael Beard whose paper caused Richard Freynman to explode with excitement and interrupt the proceedings of the 1972 Solvay Conference? (McEwan 2011: 69-70)

It seems that Beard himself was not really satisfied that the Conflation was actually the only invention he came up with. But what could he do with it when his laziness was stronger than the desire to be acknowledged for other things, too.

There were six post-doctoral scholars in the centre. Beard and Jock Braby called them 'the ponytails'¹²⁹ because two of them actually had a ponytail. Beard who had problems to recognize faces thought that they all looked similar. He did not really care that they did not. He also may have been convinced that he was great and deserved more respect:

And none of these young men appeared as much in awe of Michael Beard, Nobel laureate, as he thought they should. Clearly, they knew of his work, but in meetings they referred to it in passing, parenthetically, in a dismissive mumble, as though it had long been superseded, when in fact the opposite was true, the Beard-Einstein Conflation was in all the textbooks, unassailable, experimentally robust. As undergraduates the ponytails would surely have witnessed a demonstration of the 'Feynman Plaid', illustrating the topographical essence of Beard's work. (McEwan 2011: 27-28)

¹²⁸ cf McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 19-20.

¹²⁹ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 27.

This opinion demonstrates that Beard must have been self-important. He was not satisfied that the post-docs did not worship him, but he did not bother to distinguish among them because it was easier to consider them to be one person. However, the worst for him was the fact that he sometimes did not understand what they talked about because he got stuck for twenty years:

Some of the physics which they took for granted was unfamiliar to him. When he looked it up at home, he was irritated by the length and complexity of the calculations. He liked to think he was an old hand and knew his way around string theory and its major variants. But these days there were simply too many add-ons and modifications. (McEwan 2011: 28)

In 2000 Beard's personal life was falling into pieces, and he also found out that the group of young physicists might have known more than him. Beard must have felt humiliated. One of the ponytails started to be too obtrusive:

His name was Tom Aldous. He told the Chief in that first chat that he had applied to work at the Centre because he thought the planet was in danger, and that his background in particle physics might be of some use, and that when he saw that Beard himself was going to lead the team, Beard of the Beard-Einstein Conflation, he, Tom Aldous, excitedly assumed that the Centre would have as its prime concern solar energy, particularly artificial photosynthesis and what he called nano-solar, about which he was convinced... (McEwan 2011: 33-34)

Introducing Tom Aldous was crucial for the novel because his role in Beard's life was significant. McEwan also presents the main topic of the book, and that is solar energy. At that first moment, Beard knew the term "solar energy", but he basically did not believe in it. Despite the fact that Tom Aldous obviously looked up to him Beard did not like that guy. On one hand he wanted to be admired and respected, but on the other hand he probably did not like toadies. Aldous was too pushy, he expressed his opinions that the planet is in danger all the time, proposed ideas how to save the planet, and Beard was annoyed: "Shrinking inside his Harris tweed jacket, he listened to Tom Aldous, who spoke with the lilting confidence of

a prize pupil providing the answers he thinks he knows his teacher wants."¹³⁰ Aldous thought that the solution to save the planet is photovoltaics. Beard was not impressed at all, he thought that Aldous was too optimistic, but in the end he was giving speeches on that topic using absolutely the same sentences as Aldous. That was after Tom Aldous's death.

Death

Coming back from a business trip Beard discovered that there had been someone in his house when his wife was at work. Of course, he expected Tarpin to be in his house.

Recklessly, with no other thought than to throw the intruder out, Beard strode along the water trail and entered the room. It could not have been clearer, for there he was on the sofa, with dripping hair, wearing a dressing gown, Beard's dressing gown in black silk with a paisley pattern, a Valentine's gift from Patrice, and he was sitting upright, startled, the newspaper unfolded in his lap. But he was not Tarpin – this was the difficult adjustment, and it took beard seconds to realign. The man on the sofa was Aldous, Tom Aldous, the post-doc, the Swan of Swaffham, the tip of whose ponytail released a droplet, which fell onto a cushion as the two men stared at each other in silence. (McEwan 2011: 115)

It must have been really shocking for Beard that specifically Aldous, who was enthusiastic about science, was dating his wife. Beard wanted to throw Aldous out of his house and also work, but Aldous was so impertinent that he started to explain him that Beard was acting irrationally. Aldous wanted to run at him and made him change his mind, but suddenly an accident happened. An accident that has changed Beard's life. Aldous stumbled and his head hit a rounded corner of a table while falling down. Aldous died.

¹³⁰ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 35.

Moral Decision

Beard wanted to call the police, but it did not seem like a good idea when he started to think of the situation:

Here was how it looked: a man returns from abroad to find his wife's lover in the house. A confrontation follows. Twenty minutes later the lover is dead from a blow to the back of the head. He slipped, I tell you, he slipped on the rug as he ran across the room towards me. Oh yes? And why was he running, Mr Beard? To throw his arms around my knees and plead with me not to have him sacked, to beg me to join with him to save the world from climate change. There would be sceptics. For the last time, Mr Beard, did you not smear blood on the corner of the table? And what have you done with the murder weapon, Mr Beard? Innocence would come at a high cost. It would have to be earned, fought for. Media interest would be lacerating. Sex, betrayal, violence, a beautiful woman, an eminent scientist, a dead lover – perfect. (McEwan 2011: 125-126)

The situation really did not look well for Beard. The question is whether it really would have been as Beard thought. If he was scared that nobody would have believed him, he could have left the house and pretended not to be there, but he decided to get rid of Tarpin while solving the problem with the dead body. He set the crime scene that way that it looked like that Tarpin had killed Aldous. It was a perfect plan – Patrice had more lovers who had found out that there was someone else except for the husband, they fought, one killed the other and the husband was a poor thing who was being cheated on. Beard recalled that there was a bag in the garage that Tarpin had forgotten there and decided to use the content:

What he was about to do could not be undone. He would be putting his innocence behind him. He dipped the head of the hammer in the puddle of blood, smeared the handle, and set it aside to dry. Next, he took the used paper tissue and bloodied that too, and pushed it under the sofa, well out of sight. The comb was trickier, just as he had anticipated. He pulled away some hair from between the teeth and managed to place some between Aldous's fingers. (McEwan 2011: 128)

Beard was afraid that he had forgotten something. He actually did not have any ideas what exactly the police would investigate, there could have been so many

mistakes to do that would have cost him his freedom. Apparently, he did not even realize what had happened, as if it was someone else who was messing with the crime scene. He could not believe it:

It amazed him, what had happened. Each time he thought about it, it was as if for the first time. He marvelled at what he had done and how he had acted so calmly, without reflection, behaved like a murderer covering his tracks, while obliterating the truth that could have saved him. He was now in deep, the sole witness of his own innocence. (McEwan 2011: 130)

It seems that he was shocked what he was able to do. Tarpin was not an innocent man, he attacked his wife and him, he also hit Aldous, but it was nothing so serious that he would deserve to go to the jail. Beard had the right to be mad, but this action was far beyond being mad. He avenged himself disproportionately. As Tarpin told him later, it was his fault that Patrice started seeing another man: "But you didn't love her. You fucked everything in sight. You didn't look after her. You could have had her all to yourself, but you drove her away." ¹³¹ Beard was lucky that Tarpin did not have an alibi because he had stayed at home that day. Aldous got threatening postcards and phone calls from him that were recorded. There was the bruised eye that he had done to Patrice. He definitely looked like the offender. And Beard was the poor husband whose wife was unfaithful. Tarpin basically had no chance because everything stood against him. He got sixteen years in jail. Patrice told in an interview for TV that it was not enough, but "[...] Beard considered sixteen years was just about right." ¹³² He was astonished how easy it was to start to believe his own made-up story:

Was it not true that if Patrice had not had an affair with Tom Aldous, he would still be alive today? And was it not also true that Tarpin would probably have wanted Aldous dead? There was no pretence on Beard's part, he was genuinely aggrieved by what Tarpin had done, and it was right to hold Patrice to account. She owed her husband an apology. (McEwan 2011: 138)

¹³¹ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 357.

¹³² McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 143.

Beard convinced himself that Aldous had really been murdered by Tarpin, and he also thought that it was all Patrice's fault. It seems that Beard thought the only innocent person in this case was Beard himself – the man who helped to put Tarpin in prison.

The reason why Aldous's death has changed Beard's life was Aldous's conviction that Beard can save the planet according to his notes. He tried to talk about it right before he died, and he kept a file for Michael Beard in his office. According to Michael: "It was brilliant or insane – he was not sure."¹³³ He started to work on it because it was something he could have done to honour Aldous's death.¹³⁴

Beard's Love Life

The second part of the novel is set in 2005. It covers another four years in Michael Beard's life. At that time he worked as an energy consultant for solar energy and travelled the world. He also had a new girlfriend, but he and Melissa did not share the same attitude towards their relationship:

Would he commit to her for the rest of his life and father her child? She longed for the baby that circumstances had denied her. [...] She was at that age when a childless woman should be in a hurry. If he would not step up to perform his duties, he should bow out. She surely would need a period of adjustment, and then time to find a replacement. But she did not want him to go, and he could not bring himself to leave. And yet – to be an inadequate husband all over again, for the sixth time, to be father of an infant at sixty. Ridiculous regression! (McEwan 2011: 166)

Michael knew that Melissa's dream was to have a child, and he knew that she did not have much time left. Maybe it was his laziness again that he was keeping the relationship. He knew that it was a crazy idea to have a child at the age of sixty, and also with the job he had – the child would not see its father a lot. Being on business trips all the time is probably not the best condition for a serious

¹³³ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 142.

¹³⁴ cf McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 141.

relationship. However, this relationship was satisfactory for him – he always had a warm place where he could return to, and alongside Melissa he was seeing other women too, especially when he travelled.

The Power of the Media

There were several incidents that happened to Michael after 2005. He had a conflict with a professor of science studies Nancy Temple who misunderstood what he was saying and labelled him as a man who did not want women in physics. He was supposed to help to entice more girls to physics, and when having the speech he said that although there are talented women in physics they might always remain in a minority because this branch has always been interesting rather for men.¹³⁵ Mrs Temple got angry and made a mountain out of a molehill. The press started to look up all the information concerning his love life to publish them. He was supposed to take part in a debate with Nancy Temple organised by a newspaper, but she did not arrive and sent a replacement (another woman) instead of her. There was a demonstration held after the debate where he got attacked by an elderly woman with a tomato. He threw the tomato back and hit that woman's face, unintentionally – this incident reached its peak when the picture of the woman appeared in the newspapers all over the world:

In colour, it made a dramatic photograph. Taken from behind Beard, it showed him looming over a woman cowering on the ground, the victim of a gory assault. In Germany it was on the cover of a magazine with the headline 'Protester Felled By "Neo-Nazi" Professor'. [...] He could not help himself, he was genuinely amused. The tomato was so soft, his toss so gentle, the woman's reaction so comically overplayed, a policeman so solicitous in bending over her, another so self-important as he urgently radioed for an ambulance. This was street theatre. (McEwan 2011: 195-196)

After these pictures were published his career seemed to lie in ruins. He was forced to resign from the Centre; his lectures were cancelled because his name was connected with bad reputation. McEwan demonstrates the power of

¹³⁵ cf McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 184.

newspapers again as he did in *Amsterdam*. The environment of the newspapers occurred also in *Saturday*. People believe that what is written in the newspapers is also the truth; they do not realize that they are being manipulated. Journalists can write what they want, and there will always be many people who would believe everything. This part shows the readers that one article can ruin someone's career. He also indicates that everything could be forgotten when a new affair occurs:

For all that resolve, he thought his disgrace would mark him for years. And then what happened? Nothing. His avatar vanished. Overnight, he was airbrushed from the public prints, a soccer match-fixing story took his place, and the slow-healing amnesia began. For a while he was underemployed, then four months later, he gave six short talks about Einstein for the BBC World Service. A research group in Germany seduced him onto its letterhead. (McEwan 2011: 199)

After that Michael Beard was back. His story was forgotten. People did not care anymore. There were other important issues to write and read about.

Betrayal

The next problem that occurred was Melissa's pregnancy. As written above Beard did not want to become a father, but Melissa needed to act fast. He was sure what had to be done: "But this baby must not be, and all that was in question was how long it would take him to convince her of the fact. How could she not see it already, the folly of his shouldering this obligation, and the pathos of it – almost seventy years old and the child not yet ten!"¹³⁶ It might have been a reasonable decision for Beard, but he did not consider Melissa's point of view. Beard may have thought through his own situation, his job, his needs, but he did not care what Melissa wanted. And she wanted a baby with him. Beard had definitely the right to be angry because Melissa had deceived him – she had stopped taking contraception pills without letting him know what she was up to. It is totally

¹³⁶ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 240.

understandable that Michael felt betrayed. Melissa obviously did not care; she perfectly planned all of that:

'Try to see it from my side, Michael. In love with you, wanting a baby, not wanting anyone else, seeing you only occasionally and never knowing when, knowing you were seeing other women, and you not making any move to come closer or to leave, and four years drifting by like this. If I did nothing, I'd be at the menopause. And that would be the quiet choice you would have forced on me.' It sounded a rotten deal. (McEwan 2011: 245)

Melissa was completely calm and aware of what she had done. She knew that it was not really fair, but she did not have many choices. No one could probably wonder what she did – waiting for Michael knowing about his affairs, and still being distant must have been terrible for her. She did not want anything from him, he could have left and live his life as he did until then. Melissa did not force him either to stay or support them financially; she gave him time to decide what he wanted to do. However, it was not possible for Michael to pretend that there was no child in his life: "[...] How am I supposed to ignore the existence of my own child? Not possible for me. I guess you were counting on that, and this is what I object to. It's a form of blackmail..."¹³⁷ Apparently despite all the bad things he did, Michael was not a completely bad person. McEwan points out the contraceptive deceptions, which belongs to the issues of modern society. People wait longer before they have children, some men do not want any, and there will also be the kind of women who want a child no matter what it takes.

Michael's next problem in 2009 was Rodney Tarpin, the man who spent eight years in prison for committing a murder that had never happened. Tarpin wanted to talk to Michael, which was a little unsettling for him. He was sure that Tarpin wanted revenge:

Just as Beard had dreaded that the police and Patrice would assume that he, the jealous husband, had murdered Aldous, so Tarpin was bound to think so too.

¹³⁷ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 246.

Who else would want to frame him with the tools from his bag? So what did an unjustly imprisoned violent man, working out his bitter rage in the prison gym every day for eight years, do on his release? No shortage of cheap flights to Dallas. (McEwan 2011: 324)

He was afraid what Tarpin could do – he knew what he was capable of because of the slap eight years ago. But Tarpin surprised him. He seemed to be a totally different man still in love with Beard's ex-wife. Tarpin revealed some surprising facts about the "murder":

'I'll come straight to it then. First thing is this. I never killed Thomas Aldous.' 'I remember you saying in court.' 'It doesn't matter you don't believe me. No one believes me. I don't care, because the truth is, I would have killed him if I'd had half the chance. And this is the thing. I told Patrice to do it if she ever saw a way without getting harmed. And I swore to her, if she did it, I'd go down for it, if it came to that. She didn't say nothing, but she must have taken one of my hammers when she was round my place and got him when he was asleep on her sofa.' 'Hang on, ' Beard said. 'Why on earth would Patrice want to kill Tom Aldous?' (McEwan 2011: 352)

Tarpin did not come to avenge himself. He came to tell Beard what he considered to be the truth. He had no suspicion that Beard could have done it. He believed that Patrice had killed Aldous. According to Tarpin's claim Patrice hated Aldous, she wanted to get rid of him, but he did not want to leave her alone.¹³⁸ If Tarpin was not lying why Aldous wanted to be with Patrice even though she despised him? Was it because of Beard? Aldous obviously wanted to be close to Beard because he believed that only Beard could use his ideas regarding saving the world. It must have been a relief for Michael that Tarpin did not show up for the purpose of killing him. Apparently Tarpin has never thought of Beard having done it. Beard could not believe his ears:

'So you went to prison for my wife. And she came to see you, wrote you beautiful grateful letters?' 'It wouldn't look right, would it, visiting her lover's murderer. After a year I started writing to her. Every single day. But I heard nothing. Nothing in eight years. I didn't even know she was married again till I came out.' (McEwan 2011: 354)

¹³⁸ cf McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 352.

It looks like Patrice had her own plan and betrayed all the men who loved her. Maybe she would have killed Aldous, if he had not accidentally died. It may have been her exemption from her past – she could start a new life without Beard and two lovers who were somehow linked to him. It turned out that Tarpin was the biggest loser in this case – he spent eight years in prison for a woman who betrayed him, and still was in love with her even though she was married again.

Fraud

Michael Beard was working on Tom Aldous's file. He has been keeping Aldous's ideas alive and working hard to make them real. Aldous's ideas were really good, but it took Beard some time to find it out. Although it was not his fault that Tom died, he sometimes thought of him, and reproached himself for not fastening the rug that cost Tom his life. It seems that Beard did not think he was doing something wrong when developing Tom's ideas pretending that they belonged to him:

And since that time he had sweated, he had done and was still doing the hard work. He was securing the patents, assembling a consortium, he had progressed the lab work, involved some venture capital, and when it all came together, the world would be a better place. All Beard asked, beyond a reasonable return, was sole attribution. For what could precedence or originality mean to the dead? And details of surnames were hardly relevant when the issue was so urgent. In the only sense that mattered, the essence of Aldous would endure. (McEwan 2011: 258-259)

The problem was that Beard basically stole Tom Aldous's ideas. No matter that Aldous's wanted him to save the planet using his ideas. There was no mention of Tom Aldous; it all looked like everything came out of Beard's head. However, he did not know that someone might reveal the truth. Surprisingly he blamed himself because of Aldous, but not Tarpin. He essentially caused that Tarpin was put in prison for committing a murder that was not even a murder. According to Beard, Tarpin deserved what he got: "As for Tarpin the Builder – that a man guilty of two crimes, fucking Patrice and blacking her eye, should go down for another of

which he was innocent never troubled Beard much at all."¹³⁹ This attitude is sort of ridiculous because both Tarpin and Aldous had an affair with Beard's wife; the only difference was that Aldous was a clever physicist whose ideas were later used by Beard. Concerning some of his acts Beard seems to be a little schizophrenic.

Beard's Childhood and its Influence

The third part of the novel takes place in 2009. McEwan takes the reader back to Michael Beard's childhood to show the relationship among members of his family. Her mother Angela Beard lived for Michael; her husband Henry Beard did not interest her at all: "Early in the marriage, for reasons that remained private, she withdrew her love from him. She lived for her son and her legacy was clear: a fat man who restlessly craved the attentions of beautiful women who could cook."¹⁴⁰ That might have been the roots of Michael's obsession with women. That is why he was satisfied with Melissa's care for him – she was always there for him, and so was the food that she kept preparing. No wonder that Michael actually did not want to leave her even though he thought it would have been the best thing to do. Michael's father took care of his family well, and did not have a clue about his wife's affairs, or at least pretended not knowing about them:

[...] Angela Beard began a series of affairs that stretched over eleven years. Young Michael registered no outward hostilities or silent tensions in the home, but then, he was neither observant nor sensitive, and was often in his room after school, building, reading, glueing, and later took up pornography and masturbation full-time, and then girls. [...] He only heard of her adventures when she was dying of breast cancer in her early fifties. She seemed to want his forgiveness for ruining his childhood. (McEwan 2011: 268)

This might be the reason why Michael became a cheater. He saw at home that a marriage can work somehow even if people are unfaithful to each other. The marriage of his parents obviously lacked love, but they stayed together. It might

¹³⁹ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 259.

¹⁴⁰ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 266.

have seemed normal to Michael that married people date other people too. Probably it is possible to live like that without being noticed by a child. This paragraph provides a cliché about scientists – Michael spent a lot of time alone in his room, not having many hobbies apart from "nerdy" activities. As a college student he was not among the popular ones: "Beard knew many people but had no close friends. He was never exactly popular, but he was well known, talked about, useful to people and faintly despised."¹⁴¹ This image may be also "typical" – literature and movies often present scientists as strange people with messy hair, living in an abandoned place with no idea about the real world. McEwan describes Beard as a little weird; however, he lived in a real world and did real things.

As for Michael's father he was kind of a man who was not able to express his feelings:

He provided for his miniature family well and, in the fashion of the time, loved his son sternly and with little physical contact. Though he never embraced Michael, and rarely laid an affectionate hand on his shoulder, he supplied all the right kinds of present – Meccano and chemistry sets, build-it-yourself wireless, encyclopedias, model airplanes and books about military history, geology and the lives of great men. (McEwan 2011: 266)

He basically formed Michael to become a scientist. However, his attitude to his son was not really warm. Maybe his own parents were reserved too, and he just did what he saw at home. The closeness between the father and the son perfectly denotes the fact that Michael's father learned about his son's marriage after the divorce. The same attitude showed Michael Beard to his daughter Catriona: "Like his own father, Beard did not find it easy to be physically affectionate with a child. Like her mother, Catriona was prepared to love unequally, and did not notice his reticence. In all, he was an irresolute parent and lover, neither committing to nor decently abandoning his family."¹⁴² Beard was not often at home, and his daughter did not see him a lot. He knew before that it was not a

¹⁴¹ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 270-271.

¹⁴² McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 304.

good idea to have a child. To make it up to her he always gave her presents; he did the same as his father, but compared to his father his gifts were not proper: "When he did show up, he always brought a gift, clumsily chosen in an airport, often inappropriate – a pack of twelve rainbow T-shirts that were too small, a soft toy she thought too babyish but was too kind to say, an electronic game she did not understand, [...]."¹⁴³ McEwan usually uses stories from the past to demonstrate that the character of the protagonists was influenced by something that had happened in the past. In Michael's case it was not anything really bad, but he still grew up with a little twisted perception of life. Robert in *The Comfort of Strangers* was influenced much more.

Illness

In 2009 Beard and his friend and co-worker Toby Hammer were about to reach what they had planned:

'Sunlight, water and money make electricity makes more money! My friend. It's going to *happen*.' They agreed to have an early dinner and to stay the night and leave straight after Beard had seen his doctor. 'But listen, Chief, ' Hammer said as they took their places in the deserted dining room. 'Don't let him make you ill. This is not the time.' 'That's my worry too. A diagnosis is a kind of modern curse. If you didn't go and see these people, you wouldn't get whatever it is they want you to have.' (McEwan 2011: 294-295)

A disease can surprise everyone, no matter how young, rich, or busy people are. Mostly it comes when people do not have any time to deal with it. Also Beard was really busy at the moment when he found a strange shape on his hand. He did not have time for any illness, but he knew that it might have been serious. In the past he had a benign skin cancer, and he also waited too long until visiting his doctor. Unfortunately, this time it really was serious:

¹⁴³ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 302.

Beard was generally adept at avoiding inconvenient or troubling thoughts, but now that his spirits were low he was brooding about his health, and staring at the reddish-brown blotch, a map of unknown territory, on his wrist. The biopsy was in. Doctor Eugene Parks had confirmed in the morning that it was a melanoma and that it had grown just a half-millimetre deeper into the surrounding tissue than he would have preferred. He named a specialist in Dallas who could remove it tomorrow and start the radiation therapy. (McEwan 2011: 328)

It is typical that people do not want to admit their disease; they think that it cannot happen to them, and especially busy people try to avoid the treatment because there is always something more important than their health – Michael had the opening in Lordsburg, and he just could not miss it. It was probably not surprising that he was diagnosed with cancer – his mother died of breast cancer, his lifestyle was far from healthy, he was overweight, any kind of sports did not interest him at all, his job was connected with stress, and his personal life was also full of stress. People might think that they cannot afford to be sick. He knew that his lifestyle was poor that it was necessary to take up sports, but Michael Beard "would rather die than take up jogging or prance to funky music in a church hall with other tracksuited deadbeats."¹⁴⁴ McEwan points out diseases of civilization, which is a serious problem nowadays. Obesity belongs to this kind of diseases. People eat junk food, mostly in a rush, they do not exercise, and illness occurs. It is common in today's society that people fear they might be sick, but they do not go to the doctors because they are basically healthy until someone tells them the ugly truth.

The Fall of Michael Beard

In the third part of the novel the readers witness the fall of Michael Beard. His work from the past eight years fell into pieces when his previous co-worker at the Centre Jock Braby uncovers the truth:

'In the year 2000 my client personally made a copy of a three hundred and twenty-seven page document which we know to be in your possession. These were notes written by Mr Thomas Aldous before his death and while he was employed at the Centre for Renewable Energy, near Reading, England. [...] From

¹⁴⁴ McEWAN, I. *Solar*. p. 330.

their conclusions, parts of which have been seen by Mr Hammer here, we have every reason to believe that those applications were based not on original work by you, but on the work of Mr Aldous. Theft of intellectual property on such a scale is a serious matter, Mr Beard. The rightful owner of Mr Aldous's work is the Centre. These were the clear terms of his employment, which you can read yourself.' (McEwan 2011: 369)

Beard might have been thinking that no one ever would reveal that he had worked with Aldous's materials. Surprisingly, Beard was never afraid that this could ever happen. He was scared that the authorities would think that he had killed Aldous, that Tarpin would think he framed him, he feared Tarpin himself, but there was no mention of Beard being afraid that someone would accuse him of stealing intellectual property. He took for granted that Aldous's file was his property; he left Beard his notes so that Beard could save the planet by using his notes. It came out of the blue at the most inappropriate moment. His co-worker Hammer left him, he was in debt, the opening was ruined because Tarpin had broken all their panels after Beard had refused to employ him, and there was a probability that he would go to prison.

McEwan let the ending open. When seeing both Melissa and Darlene coming to talk to him Michael Beard felt strange pain in his heart. The reader does not know whether he will die, or not. The two furious women wanted to discuss their relationship with him, and his daughter wanted to greet him. The reader can only assume what is going to happen next. Will Michael die, or not? There are only two possibilities – Beard will die, or will end up in prison.

Conclusion

Similarly as in *Amsterdam* this novel does not contain any positive characters. The only innocent person is probably Beard's daughter Catriona who is a three-year-old child. The rest of the characters did something bad that negatively influenced lives of other people.

Michael Beard was not a good person, and his acts came back to him. He definitely deserved to be punished for what he had done, but no one ever would probably find out that Tarpin really was innocent. It did not bother Beard. He was the kind of person that does not have many friends, if any. People did not really like Michael, and according to several stories from his past he never had real friends.

Ian McEwan does not really provide any conclusion. There is a chance that Beard could be punished by the authorities, but it is more likely that he will die. The novel ends at the moment when Michael has a strange feeling in his heart, which could denote a heart attack. He was also diagnosed with cancer. His personal life was a mess again. It is possible that this might be his punishment.

FEATURES COMMON FOR ALL ANALYSED NOVELS

It is interesting that there are the same topics occurring in McEwan stories, such as serious disease (Baxter and Lily Perowne in *Saturday*, Molly in *Amsterdam*, Caroline in *The Comfort of Strangers*), drinking too much alcohol or using drugs (John Grammaticus in *Saturday*, Clive in *Amsterdam*, the central couple in *The Comfort of Strangers*), the environment of newspapers (Vernon in *Amsterdam*, Rosalind in *Saturday*, Michael Beard as a victim of the media in *Solar*), the environment of arts (Clive /a composer/ in *Amsterdam*, Theo /a musician/ and Daisy /a poet/ in *Saturday*, artists that Beard met in North Pole in *Solar*).

There was a moment in *Saturday* reminding of the novel *Amsterdam*. Henry promised to come to his son's rehearsal. McEwan describes the scene and what is going on on the stage when the musicians prepare their instruments for playing. In *Amsterdam* McEwan described Clive Linley presenting his symphony.

Saturday and *Solar* are similar due to the issues of today's society they deal with (terrorism in *Saturday*, climate change in *Solar*). The main heroes are both successful men connected with science (Beard is a scientist, Perowne is a doctor).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the topics of crime, violence and brutality in four novels written by Ian McEwan. They are *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam*, *Saturday* and *Solar*. The aim was also to define the motivational development of the topics mentioned above, and moral questions of guilt and punishment based on the analysis of Ian McEwan's *Solar*. The goal is to reflect problems of the society of the 21st century including the basic moral questions connected with the professional life and career of McEwan's characters.

The thesis contains analysis of all four novels. There is a crime in each of these novels, which is central topic of the thesis. The analyses deal with the motivation that lead to the crime and also with the consequences. To analyze the novels it was necessary to use primary as well as secondary literature. There are several authors that tried to analyze McEwan's work because in some cases it is not certain why his characters decided how they did. Actually it is very interesting to research what led McEwan to write about topics such as crime and violence. Another source that was used is the Internet – there are several things that the authors of publications about McEwan did not mention, but it can be found in some interviews with him. These can be found especially on the websites of British newspapers, or on McEwan's personal website.

Three of the analysed novels contain moral questions, which is along with crime central topic of the thesis. In *Amsterdam* both main characters face a moral decision. Clive's decision is more serious because it can save someone's life. He has to decide whether he helps a woman in danger or ignores it so that he can concentrate on his symphony. Vernon has to decide whether he publishes private pictures of the Foreign Secretary so that his chance to become Prime Minister declines. However, it involves betrayal of dead Molly who took these pictures. Both of them face one more moral decision - are they able to forgive each other, or will they avenge themselves? Both of them chose the second possibility, and

killed one another misusing the drugs used for euthanasia. These murders were committed in Amsterdam where euthanasia is allowed. They basically hit two birds with one stone because none had to live with betrayal - Vernon with the fact that he betrayed his former lover who is dead now, and Clive with the fact that he betrayed the principles of society when he decided not to help a woman who got attacked, just because he was too selfish and wanted to finish his symphony.

Henry Perowne in *Saturday* turned out to be a really innocent man when he decided not to kill a man who attacked his family. He wanted to give him a chance to live the rest of his life out of jail. *Saturday* is basically the only book analyzed in this thesis that has a real hero, of course that he has some negative features, but everyone has them. His decision was really mature, and it would be interesting to find out how many people would decide like him. All the Perownes were good people.

The last moral decision occurs in *Solar*. *Solar* is a novel with a negative protagonist. Michael Beard is a man who decides to frame his wife's lover so that he is put in prison for murder that he did not commit. There is one more decision, but Beard did not think of it, he just acted. He took the file that Aldous left him, and developed his ideas. It seems that he did not think of the possible consequences because what he did was a theft. Beard did not kill anyone, but he had to live with the fact that an innocent man spent eight years of his life in prison for nothing. And Beard did not care; he thought the man deserved it because of having an affair with his wife. He did not regret anything. What did McEwan want to point out? Maybe that people in nowadays society are without scruples, they are interested only in themselves, and do not care whether they hurt anyone. That is a sad illustration of today's society.

The Comfort of Strangers differ from these three novels because it is full of evil and it belongs to McEwan's early macabre works. The central topic of the novel is a macabre crime that was performed just for fun of a twisted couple. This novel is the most brutal of the analyzed novels. It is very disturbing that there is no

punishment – the couple leaves town after murdering an innocent man, and there is no hope left that they might be captured by the police. It leaves a horrible feeling after reading.

As written before there was a crime in all four novels. However, but the murders in *Amsterdam* were not that unsettling. It might have been because they lacked the brutality of the murder in *The Comfort of Strangers*. And also maybe because of the reason – Clive and Vernon’s act was not reasonable, but at least these men thought that they have a right to avenge themselves. Robert had no reason to kill Colin in *The Comfort of Strangers*. Vernon a Clive used drugs for euthanasia, which means that their deaths were not brutal, they were just hallucinating, and it probably did not make the reader sick. In *Saturday* no one committed such a serious crime as murder. Baxter did threaten the family with a knife, which was not a pleasure to read, but he did not kill anyone. The most important topic in *Saturday* is rather the decision that Henry Perowne has to make. In *Solar* there was a death which looked like a murder, but in fact it was an accident. The most important topic might be that Beard framed an “innocent” man, and certainly the fraud of stealing someone’s ideas. The character of Beard is really interesting, and it is no wonder if the readers do not like him. The only character that the readers could like is Henry Perowne in *Saturday*.

RESUMÉ

Cílem této diplomové práce bylo analyzovat témata zločinu, násilí a brutality ve čtyřech románech Iana McEwana. Tyto romány jsou *The Comfort of Strangers* (*Cizinci ve městě*), *Amsterdam* (*Amsterdam*), *Saturday* (*Sobota*) a *Solar* (*Solar*). Cílem bylo také vymežit motivický vývoj výše zmíněných témat a nastínit morální otázky viny a trestu na základě analýzy McEwanova románu *Solar*. Úkolem práce je reflexe společenské problematiky 21. století včetně základních morálních otázek doby v souvislosti s profesním a kariéřním růstem v podání McEwanových hrdinů.

Práce obsahuje analýzu všech čtyř novel. V každém románu se objevuje zločin, který je ústředním tématem této práce. Analýzy se zabývají motivací, která vede k danému zločinu a zároveň také následky tohoto zločinu. K analýze děl bylo nutné použít jak primární tak sekundární literaturu. McEwanovým dílem se již zabývalo několik autorů, neboť není většinou jasné, proč se postavy rozhodly jednat tak, jak jednaly. Je velice zajímavé zkoumat, co autora vedlo k tomu, aby psal o tématu zločinu a násilí. Dalším použitým zdrojem byl internet – autoři děl o McEwanově díle nezmínili některé věci, které lze dohledat v četných rozhovorech, které byly s McEwanem udělány. Tyto rozhovory je možno najít na webových stránkách britského tisku, případně na McEwanově osobní webové stránce.

Tři z analyzovaných románů obsahují morální otázky, což je spolu s tématem zločinu ústředním tématem celé práce. V románu *Amsterdam* čelí oba hlavní hrdinové morálnímu rozhodnutí. Clive má před sebou vážnější rozhodnutí, neboť jím může zachránit něčí život. Musí se rozhodnout, zda pomoci ženě v nebezpečí, nebo ji ignorovat, aby se mohl soustředit na psaní své symfonie. Vernon se musí rozhodnout, zda zveřejní osobní fotografie ministra zahraničí, aby tak zabránil tomu, že se ministr stane ministerským předsedou. Toto však zahrnuje zradu zemřelé Molly, která fotografie pořídila. Oba tak čelí rozhodnutí, zda si oba vzájemně odpustí, nebo se vzájemně pomstí. Oba se rozhodnou pro druhou

možnost, a tou je vzájemná vražda za pomoci léků užívaných při eutanazii. Obě vraždy jsou spáchané v *Amsterdamu*, kde je eutanazie povolena. Oba tak v podstatě zabijí dvě mouchy jednou ranou, neboť ani jeden z nich tak nemusí žít s tím, že zradili – Vernon zradil svou bývalou mrtvou milenkou a Clive zradil zásady společnosti, když se rozhodl, že nepomůže napadané ženě jen proto, že byl příliš sobecký, a chtěl dokončit svou symfonii.

Henry Perowne v románu *Saturday* se ukázal být skutečně nevinným mužem, když se rozhodnul nezabít muže, který napadl jeho rodinu. Chtěl mu dát šanci dožít zbytek svého života mimo vězení. *Saturday* je v podstatě jediný román z těchto čtyř, který má skutečného hrdinu. Samozřejmě, že i Perowne má záporné vlastnosti, ale ty má jistě každý. Jeho rozhodnutí bylo velmi vyspělé, a bylo by zajímavé zjistit, kolik lidí by se rozhodlo stejně. Všichni Perownovi byly kladné postavy.

Morální rozhodnutí musí učinit i Michael Beard v románu *Solar*. Beard je zcela negativní postava. Rozhodne se falešně obvinít milence své ženy z vraždy jejího dalšího milence, jehož smrt vůbec vraždou nebyla. Beard vykoná ještě další špatné rozhodnutí, aniž si to vůbec uvědomuje – převezme složku, kterou mu zanechá Tom Aldous, a rozvine jeho myšlenky. Zdá se, že ho vůbec nenapadlo, jaké následky toto jednání může mít, protože se jedná o krádež. Beard sice nikoho nezabil, ale musel žít s faktem, že nevinný muž strávil osm let svého života ve vězení, aniž by něco udělal. Neměl ani výčitky, neboť si myslel, že si dotyčný vězení zaslouží už jenom proto, že měl poměr s jeho manželkou. Ničeho nelitoval. Na co chtěl McEwan upozornit? Možná to, že lidé v dnešní společnosti jednají bez skrupulí, zajímají se jen sami o sebe, a je jim jedno, zda tím někomu ublíží. Toto je smutný obrázek dnešní společnosti.

The Comfort of Strangers se od předchozích třech románů liší tím, že je plný zla. Tento román patří mezi McEwanovu dřívější makabrovní tvorbu. Ústředním tématem je hrůzný zločin, který provede zvrácený pár jen pro své vlastní potěšení. Tento román je nejbrutálnější ze všech analyzovaných. Je znepokojující, že se

zvrhlý pár nedočká trestu – odjede z města ihned poté, co zavraždí nevinného muže, a není zde ani trochu naděje, že by mohl být dopaden. Po dočtení zanechá román špatný pocit.

Jak již bylo uvedeno, v každém z románů se vyskytuje zločin. Vraždy v románu *Amsterdam* však nebyly tak znepokojující. Tím důvodem možná bylo, že postrádaly brutalitu vraždy z románu *The Comfort of Strangers*. Dalším důvodem mohlo být, že ačkoli jednání Clivea a Vernona nebylo rozumné, minimálně oni dva si mysleli, že mají právo se pomstít. Robert neměl důvod zavraždit Colina v *The Comfort of Strangers*. Vernon a Clive zneužili léky podávané při eutanazii, čímž jejich, vraždy nebyly brutální. Oba muži měli pouze halucinace, což pravděpodobně nezpůsobilo čtenářům nepříjemné pocity. V románu *Saturday* nikdo nespáchal natolik brutální čin, jakým vražda bezpochyby je. Baxter ohrožoval rodinu Henryho Perowna nožem, což nebylo příjemné číst, ale k vraždě nedošlo. Nejdůležitějším tématem v románu *Saturday* je spíše rozhodnutí, kterému Perowne čelí. V románu *Solar* je nehoda, která vypadá jako vražda. Nejdůležitějším tématem je nejspíš obvinění “nevinného” muže, a také podvod, kterým krádež něčích nápadů nepochybně je. Postava Bearda je velmi zajímavá, a nebylo by divu, kdyby si ho čtenář neoblíbil. Jediná postava z těchto románů, kterou si čtenář může oblíbit, je Henry Perowne v románu *Saturday*.

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