

# London is “Waiting for Its Bomb”: History, Memory, and Fear of Destruction in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*

*Chung-jen Chen*

## ABSTRACT

Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* is a Condition of England novel inspired by the collective fear of destruction embodied in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In this paper I explore the way in which McEwan extends his distinctive engagement with confrontation and destruction through his recollection of historical incidents. McEwan’s strategy in recollecting and measuring fear in historical moments, usually in the form of Henry Perowne’s soliloquies, provides a chance to reflect upon the contemporary moment and to estimate possible developments of current crises. If fear is something unexpected, unmanageable, and unimaginable, then recalling memories of past fears will constitute a route plan orienting us towards an understanding of what we are now (by knowing what we were before) and what we will become (by excluding what we will not become).

This paper attempts to read fear as represented in McEwan’s works in light of risk and fear theories. As this paper argues that fear is unpredictable and unpreventable, it also reveals a social and historical dimension to its complexity. I use Maurice Halbwach’s theory of collective memory critically to clarify McEwan’s representation of fear in this post-9/11 novel, *Saturday*. Successive resurgences of historical incidents reconvene a post-9/11 traumatic memory. A collective sense of urgency brought about by the lurking presence of past incidents turns out to intensify the presence of pressing dangers. In this way, personal memory becomes a major site to which a sense of insecurity is summoned and transformed into fleeting moments of fraternity in the wake of disasters. Most importantly, recalling memories of chaos and fear presents a chance for communication, compassion, and reconciliation because it evokes a sense of concurrence which we all inhabit and in which we all survive.

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Chung-jen Chen, Assistant Professor, Graduate Institute of Humanities in Medicine,  
Taipei Medical University, Taipei, Taiwan  
E-mail: cameralover@mail2000.com.tw

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# 倫敦「正等著他的炸彈」： 麥克伊旺《星期六》的歷史、記憶與 毀滅恐懼<sup>\*</sup>

陳重仁\*

## 摘 要

當代英國作家伊恩·麥克伊旺（Ian McEwan）在 2005 年出版的作品《星期六》（*Saturday*），是一本受到九一一事件啟發的小說。故事由恐怖攻擊引發的想像開始，透過疾病的隱喻與呈現，探討人類在集體面臨創痛之後，對於生命、政治、倫理等議題產生的深刻省思。

本文處理麥克伊旺在《星期六》呈現的籠罩於後九一一恐怖攻擊恐懼中的英國現狀，藉由探究麥克伊旺藉由角色對白拼湊出的歷史拼貼，探詢何以過往毀滅恐懼的記憶不但提供一個對照現狀時局的參照基準，也提點出恐懼反射在歷史未來發展的期待與焦慮。如果毀滅攻擊陰影中的恐懼是一種無法預測、無法管理、無法想像的威脅，對於過往毀滅記憶的探詢或許有助於摸索現狀與未來的路徑。本文試圖恐懼在集體記憶扮演的積極角色，面對恐怖攻擊，人類感受到的恐懼往往不只是自身的安全受到威脅，在召喚集體恐懼記憶的過程中，往往更能夠深切思索當下面對的困境。個人對於恐懼的記憶此時經常與集體記憶產生連結，在面對恐懼的過程中浮現想像的集體感受，一股重新啟動溝通、和解與憐憫的後續反應或許因此變得可能。

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<sup>\*</sup> 陳重仁，臺北醫學大學醫學人文研究所助理教授。  
E-mail: cameralover@mail2000.com.tw

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"So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt's First Inaugural Speech

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake registering 9.0 on the Richter scale occurred off the north-eastern shore of Japan. The massive earthquake, the largest in magnitude ever to strike Japan and the fifth largest in recorded history, caused a devastating tsunami that drowned the systems required to cool the nuclear materials in the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi complex. There subsequently occurred a series of nightmares: explosions at the plants, untamable high temperatures, the specter of total meltdown, releases of high levels of radiation into the environment, and, as of the date of this writing, who knows what next? As one of the world's leading economies, with its proud history of technological innovation and manufacturing efficiency, Japan, to the surprise and agony of the world, has shown little ability to control its nuclear monster. The world is stunned by this Armageddon-like destruction, anxiously estimating whether changes in the direction of the winds will blow radiological menace across their borders.

The precarious and treacherous essence of the major disaster unfolding in Japan that we faced as this paper was being written reveals a ghastly version of our apocalypse now. The menace that we are facing is something beyond our expectation and imagination. Even as we are devastated by the compound calamity, we do not know what can happen next. At the core of this disaster is the worst fear ever imaginable: the kind of fear it arouses is such that we do not know how to be afraid or what to be afraid of. Suffice it to say that the sense of unknowability as embodied in the Fukushima nuclear disaster is self-evident in many major disasters in human history. What is really haunting us is less the scene at the site of the calamity but rather the anticipation of what will happen next.

What happened in Japan is not the only disaster that has shocked the world. The twentieth-first century commences with no lack of catastrophes, human-made or natural. Outbreaks of "swine flu," "avian flu," SARS, or a few years earlier, Ebola, and West Nile Virus, have demonstrated the potential for destructive forces to eradicate human existence. Hurricane Katrina hit the U.S. in 2005; lethal floods struck India and Australia; massive earthquakes

devastated Haiti, Chile, Peru, and China in early 2011; another huge earthquake launched a tsunami across the shores of countries around the Indian Ocean in 2003. All of these events, and each of them individually, serve as violent reminders that human civilization has long been traumatized by the devastating power of nature. Concerns over clear signs of the degradation of our living environment, such as global warming, carbon dioxide emissions, and holes in the ozone layer have flooded the media and public opinion forums. Human-made disasters, moreover, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 7/7 London bombings have defined how the world perceives international confrontation: with a dread intensified to an extent heretofore unwitnessed in history.

My study in this paper was stimulated by such questions as: At the sight of destruction and disaster, why are we afraid and what are we afraid of? Do we fear that the same calamities we witness are likely to strike us? Are we afraid because we empathize with loss and pain as we watch images of devastation on television? Or, are we afraid simply because we do not know what to be afraid of? Most importantly to my purposes here, what meaning is attached to fear in those who watch horrors from a safe distance and to those who ponder them in reflection versus real time?

I aim in this paper to explore the significance of the collective fear of Ian McEwan's 2005 novel, *Saturday*. I explore the way in which McEwan extends in this work his distinctive engagement with confrontation and destruction in his representation of historical incidents and disasters, especially his reflections on the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers. I discuss how McEwan's strategy in recollecting and measuring historical moments, usually in the form of Henry Perowne's soliloquies, provides not only a parallel to the contemporary moment but also a commemoration of fear summoned up from collective memory. I argue that McEwan's recollection of fear departs from risk theory and Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory. As McEwan weaves fear in the real world into his fiction, he aims at a higher end. I am of the opinion that by revealing individuals' memories as sites in which sociohistorical movements are fabricated, a collective sense of fear of historicity is conjured. I attempt to make sense of the successive resurgences of historical disasters and incidents deliberately recollected in this novel. As *Saturday* reconvenes a post-9/11 traumatic memory brought about by the lurking threat of present dangers, I hold that personal memory becomes

a vital site where a sense of insecurity is summoned and transformed into fleeting moments of fraternity in the wake of disasters. Paradoxically, memory of chaos and fear presents a chance for communication, compassion, and reconciliation, because it evokes a sense of concurrence of the here and now which we all inhabit and in which we survive.

## **Be Afraid, be Very Afraid**

Franklin Roosevelt's perhaps too-often-repeated quote, "The only thing to fear is fear itself," is inadequate to solve anxieties about the unknown future in the wake of disasters like that in Fukushima. Facing economic depression or unemployment, humans at least have the ability to imagine a security in their personal safety. At war, we have conventionally had a visible enemy to be recognized from their uniforms and the flags they carry. However, in catastrophes like Fukushima, 9/11 or 7/77, when there is no recognizable enemy in sight and no precedent to consult, all people can do is to fear. Roosevelt's quote may have rightly indicated that the worst fear is the free association of fear itself: what if we don't know where our fear comes from or what the object of our fear is?

It is not only in the wake of a massive calamity that collective or individual fear attains urgency. According to a survey of the use of the term "at risk" published in UK newspapers in the years from 1994 to 2000," there was an upsurge in the occurrence of the word from 2,037 in 1994 to 18,003 in 2000 (Furedi xviii). It has been proposed that the nine-fold growth in the use of the term indicates a change of attitudes in everyday life among the British readership. This is exhibited not only in newspapers; preoccupations with fear have been particularly prevalent in contemporary British novels. Notable British writers such as Julian Barnes, A. S. Byatt, Salman Rushdie, Graham Swift, and Kazuo Ishiguro, among many others, have explored the association between fear and the representation of the present and the past of Britain. Some critics such as Del Ivan Janik, Tony E. Jackson, and Mariadele Boccardi have claimed that the dominant factors that have marked these endeavors since the 1970s are attempts to reveal fear and anxiety associated with the fascination with history in its "potential for meaning" (Janik 161). This collective sentiment in "the return to history" was based on the lament and regret of British readers and writers alike over their gradually relinquished position as a superpower, and writing fiction became an attempt by British

writers to readjust the focus on the fear of declinism (Boccardi 2; Jackson 170). Some critics, Dominic Head for example, suggest that the inclination towards themes of fear and risk among prominent British writers springs not from the decline of the empire but instead represents a more generalized urge to respond to “a variety of key social and political changes” (5). Major changes such as the fading of colonialism, the dissolution of the British class structure, educational reform, the transformation of the family, and the second wave of feminism were shaping the new face of Britain in a way never imagined before. Whatever the true reason behind this tendency, it seems evident that fear writing has become a feature in contemporary British novels since the Thatcher years.

British sociologist Frank Furedi defines fear, not hope, as the crucial shaping force of the cultural imagination in the early twenty-first century. He suggests that the salient feature of the culture of fear currently permeating western society indicates the belief that humanity is confronted with destructive forces that threaten the existence of human civilization. Such a pessimistic perspective on fear is associated not only with apprehension about the survival of humanity, but also the free-floating and ever-expanding quality of unknowable fear. The worst fear comes in the form of the unpredictable and unknown, which is therefore impossible to speculate with human knowledge:

The unpredictable character of fear points to its free-floating and dynamic character. Its volatility is enhanced by its unstable and unfocused trajectory. In contemporary times, fear migrates freely from one problem to the next without there being a necessity for casual or logical connection. The free-floating dynamic of fear is promoted by a culture that communicates hesitancy and anxiety towards uncertainty and continually anticipates the worse possible outcome. The culture encourages society to approach human experience as a potential risk to our safety. Consequently every conceivable experience has been transformed into a risk to be managed. (Furedi 8)

Just as fear in cultural imagination is free to associate with a variety of unconnected experiences, the spectrum of fear necessarily reflects confusion and uncertainty on the part of its receivers. If there is anything that can be



predicted about collective fear itself, it is its very unpredictability. We have no idea what next fear awaits us, and worse, we don't know what our worst fear might be.

The unknowable and unpredictable qualities of fear are also asserted by Lars Svenden and Zygmunt Bauman. Both agree that it is the unknown and uncertain that we are actually afraid of. Svenden proposes that the fear which is ubiquitous and has no definite source renders the sense of security all the more impossible. If fear can be embodied in a certain object, the problem current civilization faces is that we do not know for sure "what it is about the object that you fear" and "how the object is going to manifest itself" (Svenden 36). Bauman, in his intricate articulation of what he calls a "liquid fear" or "derivative fear," propounds a fear that is aroused neither by the presence of a threatening object nor by the experience of having been exposed to such an object. It is, rather, a fear that manifests itself as a feeling of uncertainty. At the core of fear in contemporary society is a feeling that there are always possible dangers that may strike without warning and that this globalizing world is an insecure place, vulnerable to any possible attack from within or beyond human civilization (Bauman 3). Fear, both Svenden and Bauman agree, comes from its unpredictability and unpreventability in the sense that fear can arise at anytime, from anywhere, and can be about anything:

Most fearsome is the ubiquity of fears; they may leak out of any nook or cranny of our homes and our planet. From dark streets and from brightly lit television screens. From our bedrooms and our kitchens. From our workplaces and from the underground train we take to get there or back. From people we meet and people whom we failed to notice. From something we ingested and something with which our bodies came in touch. From what we call "nature" . . . or from other people . . . . (Bauman 4-5)

Having identified and sorted out a variety of fear, Bauman puts forward an idea of "the ubiquity of fear" to demonstrate the possibility that there is always something in the known or in the unknown, in forms of the imaginable or unimaginable, in the forces of the manageable or unmanageable, that awaits, somewhere around any corner, its chance to prey on us. We know for sure of its existence or its possibility, and we may know the probability of its

eruption, but there is no knowing when, where, or how it will hit us. Bauman rightly suggests the ubiquity of fears in showing the ambiguous composition of fear, and the state of inertia and impotence in knowing of the unknown, that is fated to strike at its full sway.

## London is “Waiting for Its Bomb”

Nowhere is Bauman’s notion of “the ubiquity of fear” best demonstrated than the astonishment aroused by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Who could have imagined that the most ordinary sight of passenger planes flying over the skylines of modern cities could turn out to be the most efficient of killers? Who could have imagined that a method of traveling from one place to another in which we find the embodiment of modernity would suddenly become a source of massive trauma? The tragic and the dramatic dimension of the 9/11 attacks and many other calamities lie in the fact that they were unforeseen, unimaginable, and therefore unpredictable from all experience in human history. The ubiquity of fears here comes from the fact that the 9/11 attacks manifested themselves from beyond the most untamed of imaginations.

*Saturday* begins on the morning when the protagonist Henry Perowne witnesses a plane on fire streaking across the sky and succumbs to anxiety, as revealed by his searching for the expected coverage of disaster on television with his son. McEwan arranges the beginning of this novel in a skillful way to reveal a most straightforward and unforgettable collective memory of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001.<sup>1</sup> McEwan’s obvious attempt in depicting an event which is redolent of the 9/11 attacks initiates his elaboration on the unimaginable dimension of that insanity. His passage about watching colossal disasters happen on television certainly echoes the collective and personal

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<sup>1</sup> Ian McEwan is one of the first major writers to come to grips with 9/11. Even now, 10 years after the tragedies, McEwan’s *Saturday* remains the most well-known and well-read 9/11 novel written by an English novelist. When 9/11 happened, McEwan has just published *Atonement*, his book preceding *Saturday*. When McEwan wrote newspaper articles after the attack, he claimed that he started the novel about the terrorist attacks about 18 months after the incident. In interviews with Carlos Caminada and Jeffrey Brown, he admits that *Saturday* is “set not about that event, but its shadow, and it casts a very long shadow, not only over international affairs, but in the very small print of our lives.” Then, as he confesses in an interview with Laura Miller, he estimated that early in 2003 when the anti-Iraq-War march, the main aftershock of 9/11 in the UK, took place, he was working on *Saturday* and he also included this demonstration in his novel. All in all, there should be no dispute that *Saturday* is a direct inspiration of and a critical reflection on the traumatic impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

memories of the 9/11 attacks. The ubiquity of fears relies in "the familiarity of a recurrent dream" (McEwan 15), in the imagination that the sight of airplanes, meteors, and comets are familiar images endowed with the potential to cataclysmic destruction:

He doesn't immediately understand what he sees, though he thinks he does. In this first moment, in his eagerness and curiosity, he assumes proportions on a planetary scale: it's a meteor burning out in the London sky, traversing left to right, low on the horizon, though well clear of the taller buildings. But surely meteors have a darting, needle-like quality. You see them in a flash before their heat consumes them. This is moving slowly, majestically even. . . . It's a comet, tinged with yellow, with the familiar bright core trailing its fiery envelope. (McEwan 13)

The irony of the unimaginable scenario of long-haul passenger airplanes turned into colossal killers resides in that, even if it has happened once, when it is about to happen again, no one will expect it. The sight of an airplane on fire is unimaginable; the familiarity with this flaring image in variation is even more unimaginable. The ubiquity in the sight of airplane-turned-killer remains such that no one expects it to happen again, as the first exchange between Perowne and his son Theo shows:

By way of greeting, Theo lets his chair tip forward onto four legs and raises a hand. It's not his style to show surprise.  
 "Early start?"  
 "I've just seen a plane on fire, heading into Heathrow."  
 "You're kidding." (McEwan 29)

In this sense, *Saturday* touches upon the most sensitive nerve surrounding 9/11 because it handles the event as taboo: there is an unwillingness to talk about it because it is unspeakable. As long as literary reproduction resembling the already familiar sight is still assumed as potentially traumatic to its readers, any gesture to paraphrase or rhapsodize the original historical incident still holds the wicked charm of unpredictable danger.

A major source of fear in *Saturday* resides in its collages of historical

moments, 9/11 among them, that display the implications of the widening divides of race and class. The disparity in the social status between the neurosurgeon and the street-thug foreshadows the pervasive sense of chaos and fear. Moreover, such fear is enlarged by the excessiveness in the use of force, as summoned up by the brutality of interpersonal confrontation. Such sense of excessiveness is even enhanced by their affiliation with the world in reality. The massive anti-Iraq-War demonstration depicted as the background setting is the largest march in London history. Perowne's house, into which the street thugs are to intrude, is identifiable as a real site in the city of London which carries the unexcelled honor of having been inhabited by Virginia Woolf and her brother. Descriptions of Perowne looking out from his window suggest that this house is located at one of the many downtown façades reconstructed after wartime Luftwaffe bombing. Recollections of London's past glory surface throughout Perowne's inner soliloquys: his joyful morning reflection, his relaxing drive in his luxurious car, his trip to visit his sick mother, descriptions of his drive from his work at the hospital, even the plans of the route of the massive demonstration, all help to assert the represented yet real existence of the settings in this work of fiction.

McEwan's representation of fear affiliated with fear in the world of reality conveys a larger-than-real-life message in its extended associations with the domestic and the native, the present and the past. Real names, real places, and real incidents all add up to a fabricated sense of real danger, real fear. A typical constellational association of McEwan's, "the familiarity of a recurrent dream," may run like this:

Despite the troops mustering in the Gulf, or the tanks out at Heathrow on Thursday, the storming of the Finsbury Park mosque, the reports of terror cells around the country, and Bin Laden's promise on tape of "martyrdom attacks" on London, Perowne held for a while to the idea that it was all an aberration, that the world would surely calm down and soon be otherwise, that solutions were possible, that reason, being a powerful tool, was irresistible, the only way out; or that like any other crisis, this one would fade soon, and make way for the next, going the way of the Falklands and Bosnia, Biafra and Chernobyl. But lately, this is looking optimistic. . . . No going back. The nineties are looking like an innocent decade, and who would

have thought that at the time? . . . the New York attacks precipitated a global crisis that would, if we were lucky, take a hundred years to resolve. *If we were lucky.* (McEwan 33; italics original)

The scale of this evocation of recent incidents in world history is large enough to initiate a miniature representation of the geopolitical confrontations of recent decades. America, Continental Europe, South America, Russia, dominant players on the stage of world politics, now dwindle to caricatures on McEwan's map of "the familiarity of a recurrent dream." A time period ranging through the 70s, 80s, and 90s, into the new millennium reveals a chronology of fear. Details devoted to the reassembly of the urban space have the potential to boast the writer's play with the details of his knowledge of this city and world history. Moreover, this collage of historical facts embedded in fictional creation offers an ideal setting in which to reconvene a sense of fear out of familiar ubiquity.

In this sense, McEwan writes in *Saturday* that London is "waiting for its bomb." Of course, McEwan is not prophesying the fate that lies ahead of London. Given that he wrote *Saturday* in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, no one could have predicted that in the same year of its publication, a group of suicide bombers were to devastate the sense of security of this city. At the same time that these bombs hidden in backpacks were set off, a collective sense of fear among its city dwellers and travelers was aroused. London seems to be fragile and vulnerable under the shadow of bombshells, its citizens immune to any possible threat, and its urban space open to any imaginable and unimaginable form of destruction. McEwan writes,

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. It might resemble the Paddington crash—twisted rails, buckled, upraised commuter coaches, stretchers handed out through broken windows, the hospital's Emergency Plan in action. Berlin, Paris, Lisbon. The authorities agree, an attack's inevitable. (McEwan 276)

London *is* waiting for its bomb. Not in the sense that London welcomes one but that the city is expecting one, or at least considering the possibility of

its happening. Whether its dwellers are ready for its arrival or not, it will come when it comes. Although McEwan claims that “*Saturday* was an attempt to describe happiness in a troubled world” (Cook et al. 130), a pervasive sense of insecurity easily dominates the narration of the story. Characters are waiting for the worst fears in their imaginations to materialize: Perowne is busy preparing the paperwork for the national emergency plan for the hospital; Theo is preparing for a confrontation of values with his father and the final physical attack from the intruders; Perowne’s daughter Daisy is preparing for the unknown future of her marriage and pregnancy; Perowne’s lawyer wife Rosalind is waiting for a variety of confrontations in her professional practices; Perowne’s father-in-law has endured the eruption of the long pent-up and intensely-suppressed hostility between himself and his son-in-law; Baxter the intruder is waiting for Huntington’s disease to take his life, if, in fact, he can recover from the brain surgery performed by Perowne. Readers are easily overwhelmed both by the probability of being visited by yet another unimagined and unexpected form of fear and by the fragility of this massive city with its great heritage. The 7/7 bombings add to the long list of infamies and fears comprising the collective memory of fear accumulated through London’s long history, materializing yet eliminating another unimagined and unpredicted destructive event. This most unlucky coincidence topped-off the expected unexpectedness, the imagined unimaginable of the worst fear of destruction permeating throughout this novel.

## **Memory of History, Recollection of Fear**

To begin with, in discussing the chronology of fear in McEwan’s *Saturday*, there emerges the urgent question of the criterion of selection: Which memory of fear? Whose memory of fear? Or, to put it bluntly, why this memory of fear? Why not others? Basically, these are the questions with which any writer of fiction will be confronted if he or she decides to write against the grain of the collective fear of destruction. This line of inquiry ends up with an equivalence of what we were and what we will be. If the publishing and reading of newspapers and novels is a collective ritual, as Benedict Anderson famously claims in his analysis of “print-capitalism,” in establishing the imagined community of the shared and respected tradition of a nation state, then, the demand to reflect upon the criteria of selecting and excluding what to make of the collective memory of fear remains important to

our understanding of what we were, what we are, and what we will become. In the end, the question remains focused on the activity of remembering fear in the process of writing about historical events: Who remembers fear? Why remember fear? And how does one remember fear? And what is the criteria in selecting what to remember to fear?

Maurice Halbwachs, a Durkheimian sociologist and arguably the most important figure in French sociology in the interwar years, was probably the first to elaborate a social constructionist perspective of memory (Cosser 1). Halbwachs believes that the past is to be known through the symbols and practices of rituals and other social activities. Therefore, previous concerns about autobiographical memory in historic and sociological studies should be mended because personal and interpersonal memories are entitled to be lost, fragmented, or forgotten. These personal and interpersonal memories only become active when the bonds between participants in the recollection of memory are reinforced. For example, husbands and wives remember their anniversaries, or fathers and mothers celebrate the birthdays of their sons and daughters on their special days.

Evocations of memories are only meaningful and understandable to those who have similar experiences. However, when it comes to the collective memory of a nation or a time, no any single individual can know and remember all events without mistake. The experiences beyond the reach of individuals can only be shared and imagined in indirect ways, such as through reading, watching, listening, during any commemorative or festive occasions. To this, Halbwachs adds the historical dimension of collective memory. Halbwachs' approach orientates from his sociological background which posits the family as the founding unit of the formation of a collective memory. However, Halbwachs seems to ignore the function of deliberate public rituals in consolidating the collective memory of a nation. Religious rituals, memorial celebrations, and festive enactments can all contribute to the fabrication of a collective memory, maybe in a more efficient and coercive way than personal accounts. Halbwachs emphasizes especially the importance of written or recorded images of the past in their sway in gathering people together to remember shared deeds and accomplishments, whereas he seems to miss considering practices of public ceremony as contributing to the making of a collective memory and a collective identity in a larger unit of human community, such as the population of a society or a nation.

Commemorations of a national day, for example, when national flags are hanged, national songs are sung, and images of national heroes are worshipped, constitute rituals common to all nation states.

Halbwachs' major contribution remains in his interpretation of how and why the present generation becomes conscious of itself in associating with its own constructed past. Halbwachs argues that collective memory comprises recollections of the past that are determined and shaped by the concerns, worries and interests of contemporary times. In Halbwachs' sense, there is no such thing as an authentic or inherent history but rather "a series of snapshots taken at various times and expressing various perspectives" (Coser 26). Notions of snapshots and perspectives suggest the essence of collective memory: it is forged and fabricated according to the needs and preferences of the criteria used in the choice of the components. In this sense, collective memory of the past, according to Barbie Zelizer, can be both "mobile and mutable" (216): mobile because issues of historical accuracy or interpretation of historical events are contained in comprises in order to accommodate to contemporary versions of the configuration of collective memory ; mutable because memory is constructed in accordance with current constructions of past experience.

Halbwachs' notion of collective memory as construction formulated and consolidated with the present was pathbreaking at the time of his writings. Memory is no longer the unchangeable past that determines the way we are now. If most national commemorations are celebrations of the commencements of a nation, these activities most certainly would have an effect upon the formation and recreation of our memory. Therefore, it is not our history that decides our memory, but the other way around: a nation's or a society's collective memory is a reconstruction of the past, framed by the concerns, interests, anxieties, and of course, fear of the present. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion, so much so that the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present. It is the present situation that determines the filters through which past moments are perceived; it is the beliefs and aspirations of the present day that shape the various views of the past. In this sense, "the past no longer exists" in that we who try to recollect are "free to choose from the past the period into which we wish to immerse ourselves" (Halbwachs 50-51). Any recounting of the past is obliged to adjust



to the only world, the one we live in now. As Halbwachs argues,

the collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society. (40)

Halbwachs dismisses the notion of accuracy and authenticity of memory in the making of a collective memory. Halbwachs breaks from previous approaches in historical and sociological study which put too much stress on personal and autobiographical memories. Instead, he emphasizes the fact that no matter how hard one may try, history is not totally based on individual memory. He claims "the person does not remember events directly" (Halbwachs 24). The individual is, instead, "dependent on society" for "having the capacity to remember" (Halbwachs 54). Halbwach's resort to the notion of a more institutional and collective dimension of the overall social mentality indicates a notion that collective memory is constructed out of current concerns. In framing the collective memory, in Halbwachs' words, it is the "social frameworks for memory" (38), "social milieu" (44), the "totalities" of society (45), or "the general attitude of the group" (59) that shape our need of reconvening memory. Given the unprecedented pervasive dismay, depression, and distrust of individual ability that lead to the collective trauma of two world wars during the time of Halbwachs' writing, it is plausible for Halbwachs to resort to the collective construction of memory to highlight the distrust in *a priori* proposition of rationality. In the reconstructed picture of history, Halbwachs does not hesitate to point out the fallibility and invalidity of individual recollection in contrast to the dominant and overwhelming shaping and defining power of the "totality" and "social milieu" in framing what we know about the past.

### **"Somehow Everything Is Connected, Interestingly Connected"**

Writing about collective fear via the depiction of historical incidents

generates a way of reflecting current concerns and needs. The recent reemergence of historical novels in British literature may facilitate consent to this trend. As Richard Bradford notes, “since the 1970s the historical novel has become fiction’s most prominent and enduring subgenre and has, moreover, unshackled itself from its earlier image as a somewhat lowbrow cousin to serious writing” (83-4). Then, the questions to be asked are: What are the defining “social frameworks for memory” in McEwan’s works? What is the “social milieu” that shapes the needs and expectations of the current situation? If collective fear is linked to something we are not sure of, can past memory of destruction help to determine “the general attitude of the group” toward the present and the future?

I am referring to the historical novel in probably the most loose and general sense of those that associate fictional narratives with history and historiographic projects, not necessarily under the strict definition of the classic form of, for example, Walter Scott’s historical romances in which plot is set amidst historical events, or in which the author uses real events but adds one or more fictional characters or events or changes the sequence of historical events. To be precise, the term as I intend to apply it implies novels making reference to historical events. In this sense, many of McEwan’s works, marked as they are with his particular preoccupation with the past, can be largely classified as manipulating historical events to fit the purpose of reflecting what-went-wrong in his novels. To consider a few examples of this, *The Child in Time* (1987) relates the loss of a child in Thatcherite Britain; in *Black Dogs* (1992) memories of war resurface constantly in a couple’s relationship; *Atonement* (2002) reflects upon the dramatic impact brought by the Second World War; *On Chesil Beach* (2007) is set at the turning point when the fifties gave way to the sixties. In this sense, *Saturday* (2005), with its astonishing tribute to our memory of the 9/11 attacks and with its setting of the story-in-one-day on the day of the London demonstration against the Iraq War in the spring of 2003, is certainly one of the most prominent of his reflections on current conditions by way of an assembly of historical incidents.

Since the 90s, McEwan’s writings have achieved a wider panorama of social and historical scope (Malcolm 7; Delrez 7; James 86). In *Saturday*, along with McEwan’s later publications, the inferences about historical and current socio-political background show much more depth and complexity

than those in his earlier works. Though some may criticize McEwan's works as being devoid of London's "vibrant multicultural scene" (Wallace 465), this does not reduce their affiliation with the world in reality. Because a great majority of his novels are set in the recent political and social backgrounds of Europe and England, also because his novels reveal much of his concern for the current state of his native country, his novels, peculiarly since the 1990s, can be safely placed in the category of "Condition of England novels" (Ross 75). Critics observe that McEwan attempts to create a sense of "unease" at the current status of England in his novels (Morrison 254) that is so "malleable, wondrous, and infinitely complex" as to indicate "a continuous shift from the present to the past and back again" of the English and world history (Slay 207). McEwan recounts the collection of memories of the past England accordingly with his representation of fear and unease in contemporary England.

The reemergence of interest in historical incidents in contemporary British novels does not so much demonstrate the revolutionary need to initiate "an ideological preparation" for revolutions, to transform the "unreasonable" society into a "reasonable" state as Georg Lukács famously argued (20) as it reflects a communal anxiety arising in reaction to the decline of the Empire. Jim Tomlinson argues that historical awareness since the 1980s represents one dimension of a larger communal sense of waning significance, an essential inquiry into the question "what went wrong?" that impacted nearly every stratum of British society (3). Or, as Tim S. Gauthier elaborates, the British upsurge of interest in historical novels is a phenomenon that reveals, on one hand, a desire to create a nostalgic link with a past that was more stable and more certain, and on the other, a resolution to break with a past in which Britain somewhere took a wrong turn (4-5). By constructing historical narratives that allow a sense of mastery over the past, a sense of claiming an active role and redrawing a lack of control is regained in the process of writing. In this sense, contemporary British novels set in clear historical settings were occupied with fear of her waning influence as a former superpower.

Following Tomlinson and Gauthier in their notion of the revival of historical novels in Britain, McEwan's writing about the British past could be regarded as a response to the reflection of the nuances of the English class structure and the gradual erosion of the welfare state in a time of confusion.

Here, McEwan's writing of history and memory by way of fear, paradoxically, indicates a route of departure from Halbwachs. Fear is unpredictable and unpreventable, yet McEwan attempts to represent fear of the present in light of our collective memory of past feats. In this aspect, McEwan is under Halbwachs' influence. However, McEwan's construction of fear based on current concerns with past cataclysmic disasters and major incidents reveals a forward moving momentum for future development. While Halbwachs' collective memory consolidates the collective concern of the moment, McEwan's interest in collective memory concentrates not only on the contemplation of what went wrong but also with the futuristic projection of what will become of us. In this sense, if the current revival of historical novels reflects a collective anxiety about historical stability in an unstable age, then, McEwan's *Saturday* can be regarded as an endeavor to configure a new order after the traumatic terrorist attacks of 9/11. It is in the surfing and watching of this colossal tragedy that viewers summon a collective memory of disaster. It is in the sense of imagined community, a sense that we all live here in the same period in history and that we are all dreading the possibility of future terror, that a notion of wholeness is evoked and embodied. The preoccupation with disasters evokes a feeling of temporal concurrence across time zones: the past memory of disasters, an immediately felt danger in the present, and the imaginable or unimaginable nightmares of the most massive and vicious destruction foreshadowed in the future, all reconvened at this flashing moment. While McEwan's representation of the collective memory of fear is based on current concerns, it forecasts a potential to project anticipation to the future. To be more precise, it is in times of fear that there arises a collective endeavor to look back into the collage of historical incidents so that we may retain a chance to restore our confidence.

As Gauthier notes, *Saturday* "reveals an anxiety about the future, derived from an analysis of contemporary events that echo those that took place in the recent past" (84). In constructing the traumatic evocation of a terrorist attack, *Saturday* emphasizes "the construction of narrative as a means of establishing a moral framework by establishing connections between past and present, creating a context whereby the moral value of events can be endorsed or contested" (Gauthier 83). In the thread of fear evoked from crises of the past and running through the dangers of the present, what *Saturday* proposes is the potential that this thread of risk will sustain itself into the

future. More than this, what *Saturday* provokes is not only a sense of concurrence of time but also of place. It is a convergence of the British not only with its past, present and future but also with the world that are pressed into a sense of collective fear.

McEwan's concern is actually one that transcends the question of "what went wrong" with Great Britain. Instead, his concern with the collective memory of fear is not restricted to the history of the British Empire in her decline. McEwan shows a more open, even a more cosmopolitan view of world history. Perowne is mindful of the impact of past history on the current situation when he says, "whatever is to happen will be in the past" (McEwan 17). It is the collective past not just of English history alone but also of world history that projects its influences on this novel's upper-middle-class neurosurgeon protagonist. It is under the shadow of the terrorist hijacking of airplanes that memories of tragic and major disasters are concomitantly mustered. It is the mass anti-war protest in London that associates all characters in this novel. It is, throughout the story, a cosmopolitan awareness that what has happened, domestically and abroad, has changed the lives of the Perowne family. Theo's comment, "somehow everything is connected, interestingly connected" (McEwan 30), revealed the fact that what has happened in different ages and different countries helps to rekindle a sense of community at the moment of convergence. A collective awareness transcending the boundaries of nations and borders of time is thus summoned up:

The September attacks were Theo's induction into international affairs, the moment he accepted that events beyond friends, home and the music scene had bearing on his existence. At sixteen, which was what he was at the time, this seemed rather late. Perowne, born the year before the Suez Crisis, too young for the Cuban missiles, or the construction of the Berlin Wall, or Kennedy's assassination, remembers being tearful over Aberfan's in 'sixty-six'—one hundred and sixteen schoolchildren just like himself, fresh from prayers in school assembly, the day before half-term, buried under a river of mud. (McEwan 31-2)

Besides the Suez Crisis, the Berlin Wall, and Kennedy's assassination,

additional major international events or confrontations are brought together. Major disturbances and events that made newspaper headlines, such as the meeting of Tony Blair and George Bush, Saddam Hussein's reign of terror, the UN-led investigation into weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the oppression of the Falun Gong by the Chinese Communist Party, and the burgeoning shopping power of Chinese tourists, all are part of Perowne's contemplation. These prominent incidents and figures that leave marks on the track of history now become topics for father-son small talk in the kitchen. The scenario of this small talk is set in an apartment in downtown London, but its scope reveals a cosmopolitan awareness in its framing of imagined community.

### **“Plastic Fork in Hand”**

Ironically enough, fear of certain destructive disasters has united those who are expecting that the worst is yet to come. Our worst fear is the belief that humanity is threatened by powerful forces conspiring to destroy our existence. But what puts us in a panic here arises not just from the probability of harm. What is really in our concern is the potentiality of the risk that we will have to take on ourselves. In other words, even when we are looking at miseries taking people's lives on a colossal scale, it is not only casualties of the disasters but the epiphany of what if: What if the same thing happened here? What if the same natural disaster happened at our own nearby nuclear facility? What if it were us suffering the pain and fear? This awareness of a possible common fate is the ultimate source of empathy, the ability to imagine ourselves in other people's shoes, the ability to unite ourselves with them under a probability of shared destruction. However, it is this ability to sympathize that unites us with others, friends or strangers, in times of emergency. It is the awareness of the fact that no one is exempt from danger and the realization that everyone is included that binds people together. Whatever recollection of fear reveals to present concern, it is associated with endeavors to come to terms with our present condition. In this sense, when we watch survivors on-screen wailing for their losses, we think of ourselves. When we learn of casualties in disasters, we think of ourselves. When we think of the pain and misery of others, we think of ourselves. Then, the question at issue here remains, who are 'us' in front of fear? Who can be included as 'us'? What makes them 'us'? Who are not?

What I am talking about is not the traditional humanistic heritage of

fraternity, in the sense that we feel what other people feel and we share in what other people gain and lose. Sentiments of fear could be channeled through two categories, subjects and object. A great deal of discussions focus on objects, Furedi's and Svenden's discussion, for example; thereof, questions about "what are we afraid of?" are elaborated with intensity. However, questions such as "who are we that are afraid of something?" are seldom raised. We want to know what our worst fear can be. But we seldom challenge the subject that harbors the collective sentiment of fear: who can be counted in to share the same sentiment? Who shares particular memories of fears and chaos? Who shares with us the same knowledge of past disasters in history? If awareness of fear most certainly is evoked in comparison with similar sentiments recollected in history, then what binds us in the chronology of fear?

Richard Bradford suggests that McEwan's novels are consistent in presenting persistent "tectonic" elements in the sense that "two strata or planes of existence coming together, perhaps through an accident, with consequences that are numinous with significance but rarely explained" (18). In the accidental conjunction of fates, the ordinary experience may become the unimaginable and inextricable element that changes the meaning of life once and for all. Meanwhile, critics tend to agree with the notion that McEwan consistently shows a blend of the personal with the public. It has been argued that in McEwan's later works, "the private is linked to the public" (Finney 77); that he communicates "the political themes in current terms of family life" (Brown 2008, 80) so that he can draw "parallels between historical and private experience" (Hidalgo 90). However, McEwan does not restrict his concern with the shifting and malleable essence of time to his manipulation of narration. He also extends his concerns with insecurity to his treatment of domains both public and personal. Some agree with the observation that there is "a desire to braid together private happiness and public anxiety" in his works (Miller). Often in McEwan's novels, his protagonists find themselves suddenly lost in a world they were once familiar with, so that they are isolated and thus forced to look inward (Jensen 3; Ingersoll 241). In other words, McEwan's concern as revealed in his novels is with the impact of historical and social changes as reflected in individual lives. What Rebecca L. Walkowitz terms as the "homemade-ness" of McEwan's novel will never stay intact and is always open to conciliation with the outside

world (505); it is the disturbance of our accustomed world that isolates us in solitary reflections.

In *Saturday*, McEwan presents a skillfully yet urgently summoned sense of the concurrence within which we all dwell and survive. Such sense of concurrence is at once personal and collective. McEwan's representation of public and personal concurrence in time of disasters is similar to coexistence in disparity that Judith Butler announces. Butler challenges the notion of an isolated and well-protect us in times of mourning. Butler argues that "something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us" at the same time as we are all mourning for the loss (22). In the end, what is at issue here is an ultimate inquiry into "who 'am' I, without you?" (Butler 22)

As we watch our television screens, we share the impact of disasters on ourselves as individuals. Meanwhile, as we surf through news reports of colossal disasters, we join a community as participants in a common ritual. The experience of watching disasters on television is at the same time individual yet collective, personal yet public. The opening scene of the novel reveals Perowne's fear over what may have happened. He later describes how people are connected in watching calamity unfold on screens and how shared images enhance the awareness that we are all in the same boat. Facing disasters, a sense of synchronicity between personal life and the socio-political situation is evoked. As we are aware of the probability of watching calamitous events simultaneously with someone we know and don't know, such sense of synchronicity is further consolidated. The opening scene of *Saturday* resorts directly to our collective memory of what has happened to us and of what has changed us permanently. And the personal observation made by Perowne through his kitchen window is thus associated with the collective memory of witnessing the flaming planes flying into skyscrapers:

Plastic fork in hand, he often wonders how it might go—the screaming in the cabin partly muffled by that deadening acoustic, the fumbling in bags for phones and last words, the airline staff in their terror clinging to remembered fragments of procedure, the levelling smell of shit. But the scene constructed from the outside, from afar like this, is also familiar. It's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched, and



watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association. Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed. (McEwan 15-6)

What is at stake here is a sense of concurrence evoked across boundaries between the private and the public, the present and the historical. References to the demonstrators continually reappear in Perowne's reflections and create in him a delicate sense of the union of fates: as the story develops, the fate of Perowne and his family is changed by people he has never before seen in his life. But for the massive demonstration, major roads in London would not have been blocked, Perowne would not have been involved in the traffic accident, and Baxter would not have had the opportunity to intrude into Perowne's home. Here is a sense of blind concurrence whose sense of imagined community is not to be severed. It is thus in this strongly bound liaison that a collective sense of fate and a shared sadness and pain is to be felt.

This is why *Saturday*, while derived from its author's lived experience, transposes the attention to its readers' shared memory. This is also why the novel is concerned not only with the condition of England but also the predicament of humanity. In the presence of constant disasters, bygone calamities, and the imagination of what may lie ahead, a sense of the synchronization of the past, present, and future becomes tangible and malleable. Memories and imaginations of destructive calamities evoke a sense of urgency compressed together in the here and now. In other words, it is from the experience of surfing through television channels or in the common anxiety aroused when staring at images of burning planes on the screen that concurrence is summoned and secured.

Jeannette Baxter points out that McEwan's preference to write not about good, pleasant, and affirming experiences but about those that are bad, difficult and unsettling exemplifies his "willingness to descend imaginatively into the precarious territories of sublimation" (15). Similarly, Lynn Wells argues that, "McEwan's profound concern with the need for compassionate interaction among people in the difficult moral terrain of contemporary life" in his writing about "the ethical otherworld" remains central to his works (127). Baxter's and Wells's observations on McEwan's representation of the

good and the bad and encounters between self and the other lead to an ultimate moral and ethical concern. McEwan's rehearsal of collective and ubiquitous fear, in scenarios revolving around the confrontation of personal interest with social obligations, reveals an essential question posed throughout *Saturday*, and perhaps also throughout his entire body of work. The staging of fear, personal and collective, stands as critical in McEwan's attempt to examine moral scope. This staging of fear serves as a method of measuring and challenging our ability to adjust to an ethics of reading.

## Conclusion

If conflicts and disasters are best diagnosed as intrusive threats or intrinsic degeneration, then, it is through our perceptions evoked in times of danger that we can observe in ourselves of what we are made and what we will be. Fear of disaster transforms into the fear of disorder and destruction that weighs upon the reflexive monologue of Perowne. This anxiety materializes as he witnesses a trail of fire streaking across the sky in the early morning and as he is later trapped in a car collision. This sense of fear evoked out of a disaster that is experienced as *déjà vu* leads Perowne to experience a collective sense of insecurity: he feels his life aligned with unknown people, and that they are together facing an unknown future that seems to be synchronized with an uncomfortable recollection of past traumas. This sense of fear largely originates in the awareness of the unknowable, the indefinable, and the unidentifiable faces of strangers. However, it is the threat of intrusion and disorder that ironically convenes a collectivity of fates. In the story, the war, the anti-war protest, and the protest's subsequent confrontation that lead to a dimly felt fraternity; it is pressure under pervasive disorder that unites the fates of all the characters.

In addressing paralysis and destruction, the fear of destruction in this novel not only indicates an individual experience, but also amplifies a collective sense of insecurity in a wider cultural-social context. In the same manner that the traumatic memory of destruction arouses fear and despair for all, it summons a sense of solidarity evoked in the fleeting moment of the concurrence of fates. When the flashing moments of disasters are synchronized in the collective memory of fear, the walls that normally separate people, such as nationality, ethnicity, and political and social differences, come crashing down.

Examining post-1960s First World English fiction, Amy Elias seeks to uncover "post-traumatic consciousness" from narratives of the "historical sublime" (187). Elias argues that since history has revealed the inadequacies of First World narratives, a full-fledged scenario of fear remains something to be desired but that can never be known. She coins the term "metahistorical romances" to manifest the desire in narratives to explain the past while remaining skeptical about its outcome (159-72). Elias contends that desire and skepticism in narrations coexist side by side and that neither can extinguish the other.

Elias's statement may not be sufficient to describe McEwan's attempts in *Saturday*. McEwan is usually not regarded as a skeptic of the authenticity of narrations. It may be plausible to presume that McEwan feels overwhelming dedication to the desire in narratives to explain the "historical sublime" of past major conflicts. Either in Elias's term of "metahistorical romances" or in any other similar terms used to depict his devotion to the writing of history, McEwan shows resolution in rereading and reassessing humanities under the shadow of fear.

The notion that there exists a redemption at the moment of awakening that can be recollected in times of fear is essential to our understanding of McEwan's representation of danger in *Saturday*. The novel provides a chance for reflections guided under the workable principle of awakening at the moment of fear, at both the personal and collective levels. Therefore, it would be ostensible to call Ian McEwan's works, *Saturday* especially, Condition of England novels. Collages of fear in *Saturday* are set in the recent political and social background of England and reveal McEwan's strong and pervasive concern with fear for the current state of his native country and that of all human beings. His collages of fear recollected in times of danger provide a large common ground for reflection in their concern with the development of current social situations. Collective fear is thus dedicated as a space from which people reexamine the emergence of danger and reconvene a sense of collectiveness. In this sense, dedications to recollecting past memories are viable to initiate reflections of current situations in the flashing moment of the here and now. When all memories of past traumas, when all reflections on contemporary conflicts, and when all expectations of future developments are summoned in that flashing moment evoked at the time of danger, a sense of fraternity is thereby reconvened.

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