

= Saturday (novel) =

Saturday (2005) is a novel by Ian McEwan set in Fitzrovia , London , on Saturday , 15 February 2003 , as a large demonstration is taking place against the United States ' 2003 invasion of Iraq . The protagonist , Henry Perowne , a 48 @-@ year @-@ old neurosurgeon , has planned a series of chores and pleasures culminating in a family dinner in the evening . As he goes about his day , he ponders the meaning of the protest and the problems that inspired it ; however , the day is disrupted by an encounter with a violent , troubled man .

To understand his character 's world @-@ view , McEwan spent time with a neurosurgeon . The novel explores one 's engagement with the modern world and the meaning of existence in it . The main character , though outwardly successful , still struggles to understand meaning in his life , exploring personal satisfaction in the post @-@ modern , developed world . Though intelligent and well read , Perowne feels he has little influence over political events .

The book , published in February 2005 by Jonathan Cape in the United Kingdom and in April in the United States , was critically and commercially successful . Critics noted McEwan 's elegant prose , careful dissection of daily life , and interwoven themes . It won the 2005 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction . It has been translated into eight languages .

= = Composition and publication = =

Saturday is McEwan 's ninth novel , published between Atonement and On Chesil Beach , two novels of historical fiction . McEwan has discussed that he prefers to alternate between writing about the past and the present .

While researching the book , McEwan spent two years work @-@ shadowing Neil Kitchen , a neurosurgeon at The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in Queen Square , London . Kitchen testified that McEwan did not flinch in the theatre , a common first reaction to surgery ; " He sat in the corner , with his notebook and pencil " . He also had several medical doctors and surgeons review the book for accuracy , though few corrections were required to the surgical description . Saturday was also proof @-@ read by McEwan 's longstanding circle of friends who review his manuscripts , Timothy Garton Ash , Craig Raine , and Galen Strawson .

There are elements of autobiography in Saturday : the protagonist lives in Fitzroy Square , the same square in London that McEwan does and is physically active in middle age . Christopher Hitchens , a friend of McEwan 's , noted how Perowne 's wife , parents and children are the same as the writer 's . McEwan 's son , Greg , who like Theo played the guitar reasonably well in his youth , emphasized one difference between them , " I definitely don 't wear tight black jeans " .

Excerpts were published in five different literary magazines , including the whole of chapter one in the New York Times Book Review , in late 2004 and early 2005 . The complete novel was published by the Jonathan Cape Imprint of Random House Books in February 2005 in London , New York , and Toronto ; Dutch , Hebrew , German , French , Spanish , Polish , Russian , and Japanese translations followed .

= = Synopsis = =

The book follows Henry Perowne , a middle @-@ aged , successful surgeon . Five chapters chart his day and thoughts on Saturday the 15 February 2003 , the day of the demonstration against the 2003 invasion of Iraq , the largest protest in British history . Perowne 's day begins in the early morning , when he sees a burning aeroplane streak across the sky . This casts a shadow over the rest of his day as reports on the television change and shift : is it an accident , or terrorism ?

En route to his weekly squash game , a traffic diversion reminds Perowne of the anti @-@ war protests occurring that day . After being allowed through the diversion , he collides with another car , damaging its wing mirror . At first the driver , Baxter , tries to extort money from him . When Perowne refuses , Baxter and his two companions become aggressive . Noticing symptoms in Baxter 's behaviour , Perowne quickly recognises the onset of Huntington 's disease . Though he is

punched in the sternum , Perowne manages to escape unharmed by distracting Baxter with discussions of his disease .

Perowne goes on to his squash match , still thinking about the incident . He loses the long and contested game by a technicality in the final set . After lunch he buys some fish from a local fishmonger for dinner . He visits his mother , suffering from vascular dementia , who is cared for in a nursing home .

After a visit to his son 's rehearsal , Perowne returns home to cook dinner , and the evening news reminds him of the grander arc of events that surround his life . When Daisy , his daughter , arrives home from Paris , the two passionately debate the coming war in Iraq . His father @-@ in @-@ law arrives next . Daisy reconciles an earlier literary disagreement that led to a froideur with her maternal grandfather ; remembering that it was he who had inspired her love of literature . Perowne 's son Theo returns next .

Rosalind , Perowne 's wife , is the last to arrive home . As she enters , Baxter and an accomplice ' Nige ' force their way in armed with knives . Baxter punches the grandfather , intimidates the family and orders Daisy to strip naked . When she does , Perowne notices that she is pregnant . Finding out she is a poet , Baxter asks her to recite a poem . Rather than one of her own , she recites Dover Beach , which affects Baxter emotionally , effectively disarming him . Instead he becomes enthusiastic about Perowne 's renewed talk about new treatment for Huntington 's disease . After his companion abandons him , Baxter is overpowered by Perowne and Theo , and knocked unconscious after falling down the stairs . That night Perowne is summoned to the hospital for a successful emergency operation on Baxter . Saturday ends at around 5 : 15 a.m. on Sunday , after he has returned from the hospital and made love to his wife again .

= = Themes = =

= = = Happiness = = =

McEwan 's earlier work has explored the fragility of existence using a clinical perspective , Hitchens hails him a " chronicler of the physics of every @-@ day life " . Saturday explores the feeling of fulfilment in Perowne : he is respected and respectable but not quite at ease , wondering about the luck that has him where he is and others homeless or in menial jobs . The family is materially well @-@ off , with a plush home and a Mercedes , but justifiably so ? Perowne and his wife work hard . McEwan tells of his success rate and keeping cool under pressure ; there is a trade off , as he and his wife work long hours and need to put their diaries side by side to find time to spend together .

Perowne 's composure and success mean the implied violence is in the background . His personal contentment , (at the top of his profession , and " an unashamed beneficiary of the fruits of late capitalism ") provides a hopeful side to the book , instead of the unhappiness in contemporary fiction . McEwan 's previous novels highlighted the fragility of modern fulfilled life , seemingly minor incidents dramatically upsetting existence . Saturday returns to a theme explored in Atonement , which plotted the disruption of a lie to a middle @-@ class family , and in The Child in Time , where a small child is kidnapped during a day 's shopping . This theme is continued in Saturday , a " tautly wound tour @-@ de @-@ force " set in a world where terrorism , war and politics make the news headlines , but the protagonist has to live out this life until he " collides with another fate " . In Saturday Perowne 's medical knowledge captures the delicate state of humanity better than novelists ' imaginations : his acquaintance with death and neurological perspective better capture human frailty .

= = = Political engagement = = =

The burning aeroplane in the book 's opening , and the suspicions it immediately arouses , quickly introduces the problems of terrorism and international security . The day 's political demonstration and the ubiquity of its news coverage provide background noise to Perowne 's day , leading to him

to ponder his relationship with these events . Christopher Hitchens pointed out that the novel is set on the " actual day the whole of bien @-@ pensant Britain moved into the streets to jeer at George Bush and Tony Blair " and placed the novel as " unapologetically anchored as it is in the material world and its several discontents " . The Economist newspaper set the context as a " world where terrorism and war make headlines , but also filter into the smallest corners of people 's lives . " McEwan said himself , " The march gathered not far from my house , and it bothered me that so many people seemed so thrilled to be there " . The characterisation of Perowne as an intelligent , self @-@ aware man : " .. a habitual observer of his own moods ' [who] is given to reveries about his mental processes , " allows the author to explicitly set out this theme .

" It 's an illusion to believe himself active in the story . Does he think he 's changing something , watching news programmes , or lying on his back on the sofa on Sunday afternoon , reading more opinion columns of ungrounded certainties , more long articles about what really lies behind this or that development , or what is surely going to happen next , predictions forgotten as soon as they are read , well before events disprove them ? "

Physically , Perowne is neither above nor outside the fray but at an angle to it ; emotionally his own intelligence makes him apathetic , he can see both sides of the argument , and his beliefs are characterised by a series of hard choices rather than sure certainties .

He is concerned for the fate of Iraqis ; through his friendship with an exiled Iraqi professor he learned of the totalitarian side of Saddam Hussein 's rule , but also takes seriously his children 's concerns about the war . He often plays devil 's advocate , being dovish with this American friend , and hawkish with his daughter .

= = = Rationalism = = =

McEwan establishes Perowne as anchored in the real world . Perowne expresses a distaste for some modern literature , puzzled by , even disdaining magical realism :

" What were these authors of reputation doing ? grown men and women of the twentieth century ? granting supernatural powers to their characters ? " Perowne earnestly tried to appreciate fiction , under instruction from his daughter he read both Anna Karenina and Madame Bovary , but could not accept their artificiality , even though they dwelt on detail and ordinariness .

Perowne 's dismissive attitude towards literature is directly contrasted with his scientific world @-@ view in his struggle to comprehend the modern world . Perowne explicitly ponders this question , " The times are strange enough . Why make things up ? " .

Perowne 's world view is rebutted by his daughter , Daisy , a young poet . In the book 's climax in chapter four , while he struggles to remain calm offering medical solutions to Baxter 's illness , she quotes Matthew Arnold 's poem Dover Beach , which calls for civilised values in the world , temporarily placating the assailant 's violent mood . McEwan described his intention as wanting to " play with this idea , whether we need stories " . Brian Bethune interpreted McEwan 's approach to Perowne as " mercilessly [mocking] his own protagonist ... But Perowne 's blind spot [literature] is less an author 's little joke than a plea for the saving grace of literature . "

Similarly he is irreligious , his work making him aware of the fragility of life and consciousness 's reliance on the functioning brain . His morality is nuanced , weighing both sides of an issue . When leaving the confrontation with Baxter , he questions his use of his medical knowledge , even though it was in self @-@ defense , and with genuine Hippocratic feeling . While shopping for his fish supper , he cites scientific research that shows greater consciousness in fish , and wonders whether he should stop eating them . An Iraqi professor he treated has told him of the brutality of Saddam Hussein 's rule , but also takes seriously his children 's concerns about the war .

= = Genre and style = =

Saturday is a " post 9 / 11 " novel , dealing with the change in lifestyle faced by Westerners after the 11 September attacks in the United States . As such , Christopher Hitchens characterised it as " unapologetically anchored as it is in the material world and its several discontents " . " Structurally ,

Saturday is a tightly wound tour de force of several strands " ; it is both a thriller which portrays a very attractive family , and an allegory of the world after 11 September 2001 which meditates on the fragility of life .

In this respect the novel correctly anticipates , at page 276 , the July 7 , 2005 bombings on London 's Underground railway network , which occurred a few months after the book was published :

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 .

The book obeys the classical unities of place , time and action , following one man 's day against the backdrop of a grander historical narrative ? the anti @-@ war protests happening in the city that same day . The protagonist 's errands are surrounded by the recurring leitmotif of hyper real , ever @-@ present screens which report the progress of the plane and the march Perowne has earlier encountered . Saturday is in tune with its protagonist 's literary tastes ; " magical realism " it is not . The 26 @-@ hour narrative led critics to compare the book to similar novels , especially Ulysses by James Joyce , which features a man crossing a city , and Virginia Woolf 's Mrs. Dalloway , of which Michiko Kakutani described Saturday as an " up @-@ to @-@ the @-@ moment , post @-@ 9 / 11 variation . "

The novel is narrated in the third person , limited point of view : the reader learns of events as Perowne does . Using the free indirect style the narrator inhabits Perowne , a neurosurgeon , who often thinks rationally , explaining phenomena using medical terminology . This allows McEwan to capture some of the " white noise that we almost forget as soon as we think it , unless we stop and write it down . " Hitchens highlighted how the author separates himself from his character with a " Runyonesque historical present (" He rises ? " " He strides ? ") that solidifies the context and the actuality . "

= = Reception = =

Saturday was both critically acclaimed and commercially successful , a best @-@ seller in Britain and the United States . It spent a week at No. 3 on both the New York Times Best Seller List on 15 April 2005 , and Publishers Weekly (4 April 2005) lists . A strong performance for literary fiction , Saturday sold over 250 @,@ 000 copies on release , and signings were heavily attended . The paperback edition sold another quarter of a million .

Ruth Scurr reviewed the book in The Times , calling McEwan " [maybe] the best novelist in Britain and is certainly operating at the height of his formidable powers " . She praised his examination of happiness in the 21st century , particularly from the point of view of a surgeon : " doctors see real lives fall to pieces in their consulting rooms or on their operating tables , day in , day out . Often they mend what is broken , and open the door to happiness again . " Christopher Hitchens said the " sober yet scintillating pages of Saturday " confirmed the maturation of McEwan and displayed both his soft , humane , side and his hard , intellectual , scientific , side .

Reviewers celebrated McEwan 's dissection of the quotidian and his talent for observation and description . Michiko Kakutani liked the " myriad of small , telling details and a reverence for their very ordinariness " , and the suspense created that threatens these . Tim Adams concurred in The Observer , calling the observation " wonderfully precise " . Mark Lawson in The Guardian said McEwan 's style had matured into " scrupulous , sensual rhythms , " and noted the considered word choice that enables his work . Perowne , for example , is a convincing neurosurgeon by the end of the book . This attention to detail allowed McEwan to use all the tricks of fiction to generate " a growing sense of disquiet with the tiniest finger @-@ flicks of detail " .

The " set @-@ piece " construction of the book was noticed by many critics ; Mrs Scurr praised it , describing a series of " vivid tableaux " , but John Banville was less impressed , calling it an assembly of discrete set pieces , though he said the treatment of the car crash and its aftermath was " masterful " , and said of Perowne 's visit to his mother : " the writing is genuinely affecting in its

simplicity and empathetic force . " From the initial " dramatic overture " of the aircraft scene , there were " astonishing pages of description " , sometimes " heart @-@ stopping " , though it was perhaps a touch too artful at times , according to Michael Dirda in The Washington Post . Christopher Hitchens said that McEwan delivered a " virtuoso description of the aerodynamics of a squash game , " enjoyable even " to a sports hater like myself " , Banville said he , as a literary man , had been bored by the same scene . Zoe Heller praised the tension in the climax as " vintage McEwan nightmare " but questioned the resolution as " faintly preposterous " .

John Banville wrote a scathing review of the book for The New York Review of Books . He described Saturday as the sort of thing that a committee directed to produce a ' novel of our time ' would write , the politics were " banal " ; the tone arrogant , self @-@ satisfied and incompetent ; the characters cardboard cut @-@ outs . He felt McEwan strove too hard to display technical knowledge " and his ability to put that knowledge into good , clean prose " .

Saturday won the James Tait Black Prize for fiction ; and was nominated on the long @-@ list of the Man Booker Prize in 2005 .

= = Influence = =

According to songwriter Neil Finn , the Crowded House song " People Are Like Suns " , from Time on Earth (2007) , begins with lyrics inspired by the beginning of Saturday , stating " ... when I wrote it , I was reading Ian McEwan 's novel Saturday , which begins with a man on his balcony watching a plane go down , so the first lines borrow something from that image . "