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**REPRESENTATION OF THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN IAN  
MCEWAN'S NOVELS *THE CHILD IN TIME* AND *SATURDAY***

**MA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse the representations of the political contexts in Ian McEwan's novels *The Child In Time* and *Saturday*. The thesis compares the representations of the political and social contexts in the two novels and draws conclusions on the author's approach to depicting these contexts.

The thesis consists of an Introduction, two core chapters and a Conclusion. The introduction defines realist texts and gives an overview of Ian McEwan as a political writer and the main issues that are present in his works. It also gives a brief summary of the two novels and explains why these were chosen for analysis for this thesis.

The first chapter of the thesis provides a survey of the theoretical framework of the thesis, which is mainly based on Marxist cultural and literary criticism. It is concerned with the issues of discussing ideology in literary texts and regarding characters as representations of their society or social class.

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on the discussion of the novels based on the theoretical framework. The representation of ideology, characters and the structure of the plot of the novels are discussed in this part of the paper.

The results of the analysis and the comparison of the novels are presented in the conclusion.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ian McEwan is a contemporary British author who has been described as one of the most important living authors in Britain by literary critics (Wells 2010: 11-12). It has been argued that both readers and critics appreciate McEwan's work for his „quest for ‘the contemporary’” and his ability to capture the spirit of his time (Groes 2009: 2). It could be the case that it is exactly McEwan's ability to capture the fears and anxieties of his time that makes him so popular among readers and critics (Kerridge 2010). His career began in the 1970s, when his subject matter was considered to be grotesque, but with his third novel *The Child In Time*, published in 1987, his fiction turned to themes concerned with history, society and politics (Wells 2010: 11-12). Although since the 1980s, his texts have touched upon a variety of subject matter, the common trait of these works is their political and social dimension (Wells 2010: 12).

McEwan's fiction could be described in terms of realism: although there are elements of fantasy also present in his novels, he is considered as a realist author. In the framework of this thesis realist texts are defined as those that persuade the reader that the text they are reading is “verifiable in terms of its closeness to a believable world” (Bentley 2008: 34). In addition, a realist work could be described as a work of fiction that “creates and judges the way of living” (Williams 1958: 22). Thus, a realist novel is a text which creates a believable and recognisable reality for the reader and at the same time offers a critical perspective to it. The element of recognisability makes it possible to consider a novel as a realist text even if such reality has not existed and contains some elements of fantasy. Realist novels address the private and public issues and find connections between these spaces; such elements are also found in the works of McEwan (Seaboyer 2005: 23-24). Moreover, the three characteristic themes of realist writing are: “the construction of gendered subjectivities; individual and communal ethics and moral responsibility; and the

intersection of contemporary scientific knowledge with everyday life and thought” and these issues are also present in McEwan’s novels (Seaboyer 2005: 24).

In addition, in a realist work, society and the individual are equally important: the personal lives of the characters are affected by society and at the same time the general way of living is seen in personal terms (Williams 1958: 22). Therefore, it could be claimed that a realist work depicts society through the eyes of individuals who exist in it. The most acute examinations of ethics in the fiction of McEwan are concerned with individual face-to-face encounters of characters. These are the moments when his characters meet at a crucial point in the plot and need to make a decision between “self-gratification, or even self-preservation, and genuine benevolent action” (Wells 2010: 15). It could be claimed that McEwan uses such dramatic encounters of characters in order to demonstrate that choosing self-interest over caring for another person has negative consequences (Wells 2010: 15). Such dilemmas of ethics could also serve as an example for the representation of the political context of the novel, an indication how the character reacts to the influences of society.

The literary critic Lynn Wells (2010: 12) holds the position that McEwan’s growth in sophistication as an author has created a change in his moral vision of the world and therefore the moral and social problems depicted in his novels have become more complex and problematic. The social and political changes that have taken place in British society are also believed to have influenced McEwan’s writing; some of these changes are the disappearance of colonialism, restructuring of the class structure, changes in the educational system, feminism and the transformation of the family as well as “the fall of British neo-Conservative politics and nationalism, the divisive effects of late capitalism, the threat of terrorism and the creation of new models of masculinity” (Wells 2010: 22).

These are also the themes that are present in his novels since his fiction turned to topics concerned with society and politics.

As mentioned above, ever since the end of the 1980s, McEwan's fiction has been concerned with social and political topics. The novel *The Child In Time* (1987), set in future about a decade from its writing time, is concerned with the topic of nurture and childhood and its connections to society (Childs 2006: 4). His next novels *The Innocent* (1990) and *The Black Dogs* (1992) touch upon social and historical effects of the Second World War and its aftermaths in Europe (Wells 2010: 56). Thus, these novels take into account the concerns in a larger context than the British society. The Booker Prize winner, *Amsterdam* (1998) returns to some of the themes that were already depicted in *The Child In Time* – the characters of the former are “products of their social context: urban Britain under a waning neo-Conservative government, with all the attributes of unchecked greed and ambition, rampant commercialism, social decay and environmental degradation” (Wells 2010: 84-85). This is already an indication that there are certain socio-political issues that run through McEwan's works, namely the consequences of neo-Conservative policies and the influences these have had on society.

McEwan's next novel *Atonement* (2001) returns in its topics to history and to the Second World War and it is argued to have a political dimension to it as it offers a commentary on the influences that the events and decisions made in the mid-20th century had upon a wider society (Childs 2006: 136). *Saturday* (2005) depicts the author's contemporary era and represents the post-9/11 world with its anxieties and uncertainties (Groes 2009: 3). The novel consciously addresses the political and cultural discussions that circulate in society after the terrorists attacked the Twin Towers in New York (Anthony 2010). *On Chesil Beach* (2007) depicts a post-war society in Britain and the cultural and social changes as well as the shifts in morality that were happening in the 1960s (Wells

2010: 91-92). The novel *Solar* (2010) is concerned with issues related to global warming and the attitudes towards it through satire. McEwan's latest novel, *Sweet Tooth* (2012) is a spy novel that looks back at the 1970s in England and has as the backdrop of the story the Cold War and is concerned with the manipulation of writers to convey a message that would be directed against communism and be friendly about the West (Lasdun 2012). The social and political themes, such as the changes that have taken place in Britain and Europe and their influence on the individual members of society, occur in most of the novels by McEwan and allow one to assume that his fiction represents the political context in which these novels have been written.

One of the reasons why McEwan's work could be discussed in terms of its political context and social criticism is that as an author he also expresses his views publicly in newspaper articles. According to Wells (2010: 30), in his activism as a "public intellectual", he has turned attention to issues regarding gender equality, nuclear disarmament and environmentalism; the ideas in support of these views are expressed both in McEwan's non-fiction as well as in his novels. Wells (2010: 30) says in connection with McEwan's ideas that the role of an artist in society is to draw attention to moral issues and create "a more morally attuned society". In an article in which he comments on the importance of Margaret Thatcher's influence on Britain McEwan (2013) also admits that the political and social changes that took place in society in the 1980s encouraged writers to be morally and politically engaged also in their fiction. Due to the fact that McEwan publicly introduces his views on social and political topics, it might be worth to observe if and how these themes are reflected in his fiction.

The reasons for choosing the novels *The Child In Time* and *Saturday* as the texts to be discussed in this thesis is their relevance in McEwan's career as well as the critical discussion that these novels have evoked. Although McEwan has addressed social and

political issues previously in his screenplay *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1985) and in his oratorio *Or Shall We Die?* (1983), *The Child In Time* is regarded as the first novel by McEwan that actively touches upon the social and political concerns of his time, and some critics have considered this novel to herald McEwan as one of the most important novelists of his time (Childs 2006: 3). In addition, the novel is written in the era of the New Right government led by Margaret Thatcher, which brought about changes in society to which McEwan's fiction could be claimed to react.

*The Child In Time*, was a kind of "ethical turn" for McEwan because the novel engaged critically with its social and political context (Wells 2010: 11): the novel is set in the future, probably in the year 1996, but its political context is the neo-Conservative government. The novel's protagonist is Stephen Lewis, a children's author and father of a kidnapped daughter. Stephen is a close friend of the businessman and politician Charles Darke and his wife Thelma. The novel is a third-person narrative which seems to follow the actions and thoughts of Stephen. Stephen is trying to cope with the disappearance of his daughter and through his reported thoughts he also offers a kind of commentary on society in which he resides. The novel explores the relationship between the private and the public through consolidation of the theme of childhood with the political and social context of the era.

*Saturday* is concerned with the present of the author and depicts a day in the life of Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon in London on February 15, 2003. The setting of the novel is the threat of terrorism and the impending war in Iraq. *Saturday* evokes a political reading because of the depiction of protest against the war in Iraq, a major political event at the backdrop of the novel (Ryle (2010: 25). The novel follows Henry and his thoughts throughout one day. At the beginning of the novel Henry witnesses a burning plane flying across the London skyline towards Heathrow airport and this together with the anti-war



protest creates the atmosphere of the post-9/11 world. At the centre of the plot is Henry's conflict with Baxter, a working class character suffering from Huntington's disease, which starts with a minor car accident and escalates into Baxter and his companions attacking Henry's family in their home. At the end of this invasion, Henry pushes Baxter down the stairs and later operates on his injuries in the hospital, saving Baxter's life.

Although the novels have been published nearly two decades apart and have different issues at the heart of them, there are similarities which allow for the comparison of these novels. It is possible to claim that both novels adhere to the definition of a realist novel as mentioned above. McEwan's novels *The Child In Time* and *Saturday* are both concerned with the issues in society at the time of the writing and they both depict characters who are affected by the social and political context in which they exist. Although *The Child In Time* is not set in the time in which it has been written, it is possible to claim that the topics depicted in the novel are the author's way of addressing the problems in his contemporary society. The comparison of the novels would allow drawing conclusions about the change in the author's representation of the political context.

The aim of the thesis is to compare the ways of representation of the political contexts in the two novels, which have been published nearly two decades apart. The hypothesis of the thesis is that the critical dimension that the representation of political context grants the work is stronger in the case of *The Child In Time* than it is in *Saturday*.

The first part of the thesis introduces the theoretical framework for the analysis of the novels through Marxist cultural and literary criticism. The second part of the thesis is concerned with applying the methodology introduced in the first part to the discussion of the novels. The differences and similarities between the ways of representation of the political contexts of the novels are discussed in the final part of the thesis.

## **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

It could be argued that one of the roles of literature is to react to the social and political changes which take place in society and to offer new visions (Stevenson 2005: 5). At the same time, literature also reflects the time and place in which it has been created and through that a literary work represents its social and political context.

It has been claimed that the „practitioners of the social novel” tend to believe that the social and economic processes in society are inseparable from “both the form and content” of a work of fiction and the idealists assume that literature can exist freely from what is happening in society, whereas the truth lies somewhere in between (Hutchinson 2008: 4). It is not possible for writers of fiction to fully detach themselves from “the effects of government policies or the strategies of multinational corporations” (ibid). Thus, it is inevitable that literature reacts to the changes that happen in society and through reacting to these changes, literature also represents the social context of its time in one way or another.

### **1.1. Political Interpretation**

Jameson (2002: x) defines interpretation as an “allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular master code.” Therefore, it could be said that the act of interpretation does not only explain the phenomena existing in the text but that interpretation also adds extra dimensions to the text; for example, a critical viewpoint. Political interpretation assumes that all texts invite a political reading in connection to society within which the texts have been written, and in the framework of this paper, political interpretation of a text will be seen as establishing a relationship between the social and political context of the novel and its representation in the text. The political interpretation focuses on the relationship between the text and its socio-political reality as well as on the underlying ideology of the text.

In case of works of fiction, there is the question of representation of certain moments of history which have distinct socio-political reality. It could be argued that the representation of history is mainly a narrative problem and the problem lies in the adequacy of storytelling (Jameson 2002: 34). A work of fiction does not necessarily need to depict the reality adequately; therefore, it could be asked how adequately a work of literature represents the socio-political situation within which it has been created. In addition, there is the problem of the characters and their social class. The question which remains problematic is whether a character from a particular social class ought to be taken as a representative of that class in general or not (Jameson 2002: 34). Both of these issues are commented on in the following sections of the thesis. Firstly, the relationship between ideology within which the text emerges and the text itself is discussed.

### **1.1.1. Ideology**

Terry Eagleton (2002: 15) characterises ideology as follows: “Ideology is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole.” In addition, ideology can be seen as some clearly defined forms of “social consciousness” and these forms contain within themselves the political, religious, ethical and aesthetic consciousness. The function of ideology is to legitimate the power of the ruling class in society and to retain the standing social order through the prevention of experiencing society as a whole (Eagleton 2002: 4). In addition, it could be argued that literary works also reflect the ideology of the time, because texts which are produced in certain period can be seen as “forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world” (Eagleton 2002: 5-6). This suggests that the perception that literary works offer is also related to ideology of the age, which could be taken as the dominant way of seeing the world.

If ideology is reflected in a literary work then in order to comprehend the role that ideology plays in a work of fiction or poetry, it is first and foremost important to understand the role of ideology in society in which the work was produced. However, this could be a rather complicated task to fulfil because ideology is hardly ever merely the “reflection of the ruling class’s ideas”; ideology can be seen as a “complex phenomenon” due to the fact that the dominant way of seeing the world incorporates also conflicting and contradictory ideas, which would give a complete and complex picture of society (Eagleton 2002: 5). It can be argued that when one is concerned with some period of history, then it is usually the case that one employs a kind of “master code” which is used in order to explain everything in a coherent way (Jameson 2002: 12). The “master code” could be defined as a kind of thought habit, characteristic belief or a form of political structure, which helps to reduce the complexities in the context of a work of art (Jameson 2002: 12). This “master code” is used on the metalevel in order to analyse the era which is depicted in the text. The idea of a “master code” suggests that one detail or one element of a historical totality is isolated from other elements and prioritised and used to tie everything together into a “seamless web” (Jameson 2002: 12). Jameson’s idea of the “master code” can be related to the term “ideology” in order not to complicate the discussion of the latter. If ideology of a society in question is a phenomenon that incorporates contradicting ideas, the notion of a “master code” manages to isolate some dominant ways of perception. In addition, this master code could be seen as the tool through which to interpret a work of art.

It could be argued that no work of literature is completely detached from its ideological influences and is inevitably ideologically charged. Nevertheless, it is difficult to precisely determine the relationship between works of art and their ideological contexts. A work of art does not just reflect the prevailing ideology of its time nor does it simply

challenge it (Eagleton 2002: 16). Instead, it is possible to find support for Althusser's and Macherey's perspectives on the issue. The former believes that a work of art cannot be reduced to ideology. Instead, "[i]deology signifies the imaginary ways in which men experience the real world, which is of course, the kind of experience literature gives us too" (Eagleton 2002: 16). This suggests that the role of art and literature within society is to reflect the experience within ideology in a way that would allow the readers to distance themselves from the ideology and perceive its influences. Literary texts allow for an understanding of ideology by giving the readers an experience of the situation as well as allowing the readers to observe the ideology in work from aside. At the same time, for Macherey, moulding the ideological experience into a literary reality reveals the limitations of that ideology (Eagleton 2002: 17, 33-32). Thus, it could be said that writers either consciously or unwittingly leave gaps in their works because it is not possible to write about certain issues within the framework of the ideology that surrounds the author and their work. Nevertheless, Eagleton explains that such incompleteness is an integral part of the work of art and these gaps ought not to be filled by critics. Instead, these gaps should be considered as conflicts of meaning and an interpretation of the text should focus on how such conflicts are created and their relationship to the ideology.

Jameson (2002: 14-15) defines ideology in Althusser's sense, which means that it is a kind of representational structure, a medium of representation which allows to make comparisons between the individual lives of the characters and the "transpersonal realities" such as society as a whole with its structure and collective history. This means that ideology is something that makes it possible to generalise how the individual's life is a part of, or indeed differs from, the collective thinking of society as a whole. Thus, it could be said that ideology is a kind of tool for representing the social and political context; it could

be reduced to specific master codes which would help to unify different levels, the individual lives and society, within the text.

In addition, it is important not to consider any period in history with the idea of totalisation – the idea that each of the elements in the period would express one and the same “unified inner truth”, that the ideology of a period is unified and without contradictions (Jameson 2001: 12). At the same time, it is possible to claim that the dominant ideology already incorporates these contradicting ways of seeing (Eagleton 2002: 5). It could be concluded from these ideas, that in order to analyse a representation of ideology in a work of art, it is necessary to employ a “master code”, which would connect the different ideas within society. It is possible to claim that such an approach helps to establish a way of representation of the dominant ideology of an era in question and it would also help to overcome contradicting ideas which might exist in the era.

Moreover, the discussion of the political context of a text could be considered important because the “[c]ontext helps to make prominent what the text barely acknowledges that it knows: its anosognosia, its ideology, its political unconscious” (Ryle 2010: 36). A realist text does not just create a likeness to a reality but rather produces the ideas and the concepts that prevail in the context within which the text was composed (Jameson 2002: xii). These ideas suggest that by contextualising a narrative, it is possible to find representations of prevailing ideologies and the political undercurrents that may have influenced the creation of the text. That is to claim that the text and its author may not be aware of the ideology that they are representing.

### **1.1.2. Characters as representations**

Eagleton (2002: 26) reports on the ideas of George Lukács on realist writing which for him draw together both social and individual aspects of a text. This means that, according to Lukács, a great realist piece of writing makes connections between the individual issues

and personal worries of a character and turns them into more general social issues. Therefore, “[a] ‘realist’ work is a complex comprehensive set of relations between man, nature and history” and these relations could be considered as a representation of a particular phase of history of a society (Eagleton 2002: 26). This is in accordance with the definition of a realist piece of writing as discussed in the introduction of the thesis. According to these ideas, the task of an author of a realist work is to identify, for example the political trends and forces that are characteristic of the era and realise these in the actions and thoughts of individual characters in the work. This way the individual lives of the characters are connected to the social whole and it is possible to claim that the experiences of the characters represent the social and political context of that moment of history (Eagleton 2002: 26-27).

Realist texts could be regarded as allegorical models for society and literary characters can be seen as “typifications” of certain elements in that society. The main generalisations about the typifications can be made on the level of social classes. The characters in a book, thus, can be considered as the representatives of their social class or class fraction (Jameson 2002: 18). The literary scholar David Lodge (1988: 73-75, 80) makes a distinction between metaphor and metonymy in literary texts. It could be argued that realist texts are metonymic because they apply for contiguity and movement within a certain world of discourse. Realist writing digresses “from the plot to atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in time and place” (Jakobson 1956: 76, cited in Lodge 188: 80). This suggests that in the case of realist novels, characters could be read as representatives of the context within which they exist as well as the context within which the text was written. The most immediate context for the characters would be their social class and this way it is possible to regard the characters are representatives of their social class.

The notion of social class could be defined in the framework of this thesis as a group of people who are distinct from another by certain socio-economic and cultural markers. This could be supported by the consideration that in the case of the British context, the difference in wealth does not necessarily differentiate one social class or class fraction from another but there also exists a difference in cultural background (Bentley 2008: 8-9). On the level of practical literary analysis, the literary critic Martin Ryle (2010: 28) is concerned with the representation of the political context of the novel *Saturday* from the view point of a limited vision on society. He mentions in his article the construction of characters by using certain sociocultural markers and therefore establishing the characters as typical members of their social class. For example, these sociocultural markers could be physical descriptions and reported actions of characters as well as the artefacts that a character owns (such as the type of car that the character drives). These markers help one to analyse a character as belonging to a particular social class and consider him or her as a representative of that class.

For Jameson, characters as typifications in texts, and especially in realist texts, provide a link between superstructural categories, such as culture, ideology and the political situation, as well as the base in reality, i.e. the relations of productions (social classes). Although base-superstructure relationships are no longer considered clear-cut, such reading of the characters allows making generalisations about social classes and society based on individual characters.

In addition, reducing society to an individual, such as the protagonist of a story, could be considered as a powerful device for discussion of the text because readers are more likely to insert themselves into the context depicted in a piece of writing (Jameson 2002:15). The life of the protagonist of a book could be seen as the “valorized individual biography” which could be the representative of the collective history of a concrete society



(Jameson 2002: 15). The processes of interpretation which combine and connect the analyses of an individual character (e.g. the protagonist) of a work of fiction and society as a whole or a social class, combine the moral and analogical interpretations. The latter could be regarded as a political reading of the text, which takes into account the collective meaning of the text; its ideology and its underlying master code (Jameson 2002: 15). These ideas suggest that regarding the thoughts and actions of characters in a work of fiction as representative of society is a device for discussing the representation of a social and political context in the text.

Combining these two ideas suggests that not only could the protagonist of a work of fiction be seen from the viewpoint of their own class, but the character's actions may also be interpreted as representing society as a whole. In the practical analysis of the text the protagonist can be regarded as a representative of his or her time; for example, the protagonist of *Saturday* could be considered as "an embodiment of the historical moment" and the anxieties that the character is reported to express characterise those of the era (Ryle 2010: 26). This is in accordance with Jameson's ideas of reducing society or a part of society to an individual character through the "valorized individual biography". In addition, Ryle claims that the protagonist represents the same social (and socially favoured) class to which the majority of the readers belong. Therefore, the readers would be more likely to identify themselves with the protagonist and through that they can easily place themselves in the context of the novel.

### **1.1.3 Text and Reality**

There is an important question to be posed for the discussion of a literary text in terms of historic and socio-political context: "is the text a free-floating object in its own right, or does it "reflect" some context or ground, and in that case does it simply replicate the latter ideologically, or does it possess some autonomous force in which it could be seen as

negating that context” (Jameson 2002: 23). What Jameson questions is whether a literary description of an era should be taken as a replication of that context or whether it exists independently from the prevailing ideologies. However, if it is the case that the text is to be taken as a product of its context, then it is important to investigate whether it is simply a reproduction of society and its norms or does the text add a critical dimension to the representation.

One of the ways of analysis that might help to overcome the dilemma mentioned above is the introduction of the term “mediation”. The term “mediation” could be defined as a relationship between different levels or instances that pose a possibility of adapting and connecting analyses and findings from one level to another. “Mediation” makes it possible to establish a relationship, for example, between a work of art and its social ground, namely its socio-political background (Jameson 2002: 24). It could be even claimed that by taking into account mediation, it is possible to access the “underlying reality” of things that may not be explicit in the text (ibid). The idea of mediation does not only work for analysis, the works of art are highly mediated anyway because they do not consciously regard themselves to be as the products of a certain ideology or an ideological crisis. Instead, a work of art such as a literary text combines in itself various sides of the base-superstructure relations and it is not wise to analyse it as simply corresponding to the political and economic conditions which produced it (Eagleton 2002: 14-15). Therefore, due to the fact that works of fiction are already mediated, using the notion of mediation for analysis allows one to explain the differences that might exist between the text and the reality which it depicts.

The discrepancies between the social reality and a literary text are to be expected – a work of fiction needs not recreate the context in every detail. These differences are exactly these points which help to unify the context and the text through comparison. At

the same time, in order to compare the differences between the text and the reality, it is first necessary to create some more general identity against which these differences can be compared. Jameson claims that one of the forms of mediation is already the acknowledgement that two phenomena are structurally different from each other (Jameson 2002: 26-27). Therefore, it can be concluded from Jameson that he does not support the idea that the representation of a social or political context in a literary text is to be taken as an exact reproduction of the context; rather, the existing social reality and its representation in the text are separate from each other, and the representation of reality adds some extra value, such as critical perspective to the text and extends its interpretations.

The literary scholar Raymond Williams (1991: 4) claims that writers and readers share a socially specific situation. Over the course of history, readers and writers have had different social backgrounds and there are differences in readers' and writers' access to knowledge. It might be wise to take into account the social differences between readers and writers because this also influences how the texts have been composed and how they are read. It could be suggested that the shared contexts that influence reading and writing are very specific and do not account for comprehensive picture of reality (Williams 1991: 4). Therefore, it could be said that a representation of a social and political context in the novel cannot reflect society as a whole. A writer is most likely to depict these aspects of the social and political context of the text which the reader is able to recognise. The idea of shared context is also connected to the definition of realist writing: a text is considered to be realist, if the reality that it depicts is recognisable for the reader; i.e. there exist similarities between the world depicted in the text and the world within which it was produced.

At the same time, an analysis that merely finds similarities between the literary world depicted in the text and the existing reality is incomplete from the viewpoint of

political interpretations. The analysis that only deals with identifying the class motifs and the values associated with certain ideologies and mind sets and making conclusions based on such findings is too limited. The political interpretation of a text needs to take into account the contradictions that exist between the text and reality, deciding whether these discrepancies add a critical meaning to the text or whether they are the result of contradicting ways of seeing within the ideology (Jameson 2002: 66). Thus, a complete analysis of the text would take into account both the similarities as well as the differences that are represented in the text.

Following from that thought, it could be suggested that instead of focusing on the social reality, the context that exists outside the text, one should focus on the text itself and see it as a rewriting of the historical or political subtext. This way it is possible to say that due to the fact that the text itself was produced in certain social and political context, it is inevitably a rewriting of this very context from which the text comes. This would also help to explain the contradictions between the text and the reality because the rewriting cannot be exact and coherent representation of the original. Instead, it reconstructs and restructures the context, which would account for the discrepancies between the text and the social reality (Jameson 2002: 66).

Also the literary scholar Linda Hutcheon (2003: 3) supports the idea that all cultural representations have a political resonance and that they cannot be separated from their ideological context. Current theories acknowledge the claims that representations “do not *reflect* society so much as *grant* meaning and value within a particular society” (Hutcheon *ibid*: 8, italics in original). It could be argued that in a text that can be considered both historical and self-reflective, the representations of the context within the text become inevitably ideological and therefore also politicised (Hutcheon 2003: 6). Since the turn of the 21st century, there seems to be a new focus on the criticism that a literary text might

offer. This new emphasis is on the “investigation of the social and ideological production of meaning” (Hutcheon 2003: 6). This suggests representations of the political and social context in works of art in fact create meaning in society and help to take a critical stance. Such claims also support the idea that the social and political context and its representations are not one and the same, but rather that the latter grants meaning to the former.

It is also possible to find arguments against homology or structural parallelism, i.e. the simplistic static statement that by abstraction the three different realities (class situations, world views and artistic forms) of social situation or ideological position are productive of one another (Jameson 2002: 28-29). This is a critique of the simplistic analysis which would assume that a certain class situation would produce certain world views which then again would be translated into certain artistic forms. Such interpretation would be incomplete and it could not explain the discrepancies between the context of a literary text and its representation inside the text. One suggestion in order to avoid such analysis would be to find mutual relationships between social reification, stylistic invention and narration of the text and its social subtext (Jameson 2002: 29). This suggests that, for example, the structure of the narration in the text may serve symbolically to resolve some of the contradictions which exist in social reality.

At the same time, a literary text or narrative could be regarded in terms of production – an idea of Jameson (2002: 29-30) that a text is constructed of different elements, which discourages the view of the text being an object, unified whole or a static structure. Jameson, nevertheless, makes it very clear that a literary text cannot be viewed as a production in the sense of manufactured goods; the writer is not an alienated worker who cannot determine their own actions which suggests that the text itself possesses some autonomy and is not simply a product of its context (Jameson 2002: 30). The idea of

looking at the text as a production lies in the importance of interpreting text as a consisting of different elements: production of language, the author's intentions and its context as well as abstractions of different realities that exist that context. Considering a text as a production could be a way of avoiding homology as mentioned above.

Therefore, conjoining the ideas expressed by theorists and literary critics, it is possible to claim that a literary text, even a piece of realist writing does not merely reproduce reality within which it was composed but adds a critical dimension to it; it could be claimed that this new dimension is a kind of literary commentary on the era that is represented in the context. The relationship between text and reality is bound to have some discrepancies, some of which may be caused by the contradictions that exist in social and ideological reality itself. In addition, a literary text could be seen as a product or a discourse which has been produced in certain social, political and ideological conditions and the similarities and differences which the text offers in comparison to the reality it represents are ways of granting meaning to that context.

## **1.2. Representation of political context**

The literary critic Linda Hutcheon (2003: 4) claims that authors and critics tend to talk about the "discourses" in works of art; these discourses refer to social and political contexts that are represented in the works. The use of the term "discourse" means that there exists a kind of "expectation of shared meaning" which is most likely manifested in the social and political context of the text (Hutcheon 2003: 4). This refers back to Williams' idea that the writer and the reader of a text share a specific context. In addition, the idea of discourse also points to themes in a text which have political resonance and which acknowledge the political ideologies that exist in a dynamic social context (Hutcheon 2003: 4). Moreover, works of art are self-consciously products or producers of ideology and the representations mediate the ideological reality (Hutcheon 2003: 29). This allows

one to assume that an interpretation of literary texts should also incorporate the discussion of the political context represented in the text.

As mentioned in the introduction, a realist text creates a reality which is believable to the reader (Bentley 2008: 34). This suggests that realist fiction does not necessarily represent the context exactly as it is; rather, a realist text represents the social and political reality to the reader because it expresses the same ideas and values in same hierarchical structures as they are expressed in society. Therefore, it could be said that a realist text represents the context within which it was produced not only by its content (i.e. using (quasi)real characters, events etc.) but also by the ways in which discourses in the text are organised. In practical analysis of a text, then, it could be possible to analyse the ways in which writers engage themselves with the social and political context in which they are writing in (Ryle 2010: 36). Therefore, although a literary text is an autonomous aesthetic object, it nevertheless depends on its context.

### **1.2.1. Context represented in form and structure**

There seems to exist a relationship between the literary form and literary content; the primacy is often given to the content but it is important to keep in mind that form does not passively react to that content. There is also a possibility that form and ideology have a dialectical relationship (Eagleton 2002: 21-22). This could be supported by the idea that “[s]ignificant developments in literary form /.../ result from significant changes in ideology” (Eagleton 2002: 23). For example, the rise of the novel in literature coincided with social changes in which the middle classes gained the leading role in society and the rise of literacy. Nevertheless, this does not mean that ideological changes and the changes in literary form need to coincide because the changes in literary forms are partly autonomous and result from internal pressures need not adapt to every ideological reconstruction. Literary form ought to be seen as a “complex unity” of the following

components: literary history of forms and its autonomy, crystallisation of certain dominant ideological structures, and the embodiment of a kind of relationship between the author and the audience (Eagleton 2002: 24-25). Therefore, literary form has its own worth for discussion of a text. In addition, the literary form may also suggest the influence of ideology on the text.

The notion of form includes in itself in the framework of this thesis also the genre and the way the plot of the novel is structured. It is possible to argue that “[i]n selecting a form /.../ the writer finds his choice already ideologically circumscribed” (Eagleton 2002: 25). This should not be taken as vulgar Marxist analysis but rather that some ideological issues have been crystallised in form (Eagleton 2002: 24-25). Similarly, the language and the literary devices that writers use in their works are saturated with “certain codified ways of interpreting reality” (Eagleton 2002: 24-25). Thus, it could be argued that the choices that a writer makes, may it be consciously or unconsciously, already reflect some ideological background of the author and the context of a literary work.

One of the approaches to analysing the relationship between ideology in which the text was written and the text itself is to focus on the organisation of discourses in the novel. For example Ryle’s (2010: 27) methodology, based on the Marxist culture and literary critics, such as Jameson and Lukács, to discuss the representation of the political context in the novel *Saturday* is not to focus overly on the content of the discourses of the protagonist; rather, he suggest that the primary structural elements such as the plot of the novel and the characterisations can be regarded in terms of the prejudices and anxieties about the class situation of the protagonist. As mentioned above, one of the methodological approaches could be reducing the protagonist of a story to a representation of a social class or a part of society (Jameson 2002: 15). This is also connected to Lukács’s idea of reducing the general social issues to individual storylines of the characters. Therefore, by



focusing on the organisation of discourses, which report the protagonist ideas and the general plot of the novel, it is possible to comment on the representation of the society in the novel as well. Ryle (2010: 36) argues in his article that the plot of *Saturday*, which uncovers the confrontation between the protagonist and the “lower class” character, opens up the interpretation of class anxiety in the novel. Such unease is said to form the basic structure of the novel.

Ryle argues that it is the sequence of events that starts from the protagonist’s, Henry Perowne’s reported inner monologue about the progressivism in society and the inevitable feeling of unease at seeing a street cleaner, the confrontation with the aggressive working class character Baxter and his attack upon Henry’s family ends with the latter saving the attacker’s life that suggests the reader it is the professional class who is victorious and that such social layering in society is inevitable. Ryle (2010: 36) reasons that the link between the street cleaner and Baxter is not acknowledged by the protagonist nor are there any other clues in the content of Henry’s reported thoughts that these developments of plot are somehow meaningful for the understanding of the social context of the novel. The link merely becomes apparent when looking at the narrative sequence.

In addition to the form and organisation of discourses, it is also possible for the analysis to touch upon the genre and a novel’s participation in it. In the case of *Saturday*, it could be claimed that the upward-mobility story of the novel is in many ways appropriate for the context in which the novel has been written (Ryle 2010: 30-31). If the dominant ideology in society awards the upward mobility, it is likely to be represented in the novel as well, even if such representation serves the point of challenging the prevailing ideology. In the case of *Saturday*, the novel offers an individual upward-mobility story of the protagonist, who could be seen as a representative of society in Jameson’s sense. Such story of an individual’s distinction earned in society is not seen as problematic or

questioned by other characters or the narrator (Ryle 2010: 34). Therefore, it could be claimed that the genre of the novel reflects the ideological context of the work.

It could be the case that relying solely on the content of a work of fiction does not give the full account of the ideologies that are represented in the text. Instead, the relationship between the content, the genre and the structure of the plot offers a more complete representation of the political context of the novel. The organisation of the discourses and the behaviour of the characters within the plot could also reveal some dominant ideological issues of the era depicted in the work of fiction.

The theoretical concepts concerning how ideology and through that the political context can be discussed in the practical discussion of the novels are illustrated in the following chapter, which looks at the ways of representation of social and political contexts in the novels *The Child In Time* and *Saturday*.

## **2. DISCUSSION OF *THE CHILD IN TIME AND SATURDAY***

### **2.1 *The Child In Time***

The novel *The Child In Time (TCIT)* draws its inspiration from the political context of Britain in the 1980s and projects that context into an imaginary future (Wells 2010: 40). The action of the novel takes place most probably in the year 1996 but the political context represented in the novel is an exaggerated version of the Conservative government in power in the 1980s. The era of 1980s in the United Kingdom is characterised by the policies and values which can be described as Thatcherism after Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. One of the areas in which her views were clear was the idea of social benefits. Thatcher emphasised the Victorian values, especially those of self-help and self-sufficiency. (Lee 1996: 236) The era of Thatcherism brought along a new doctrine at the centre of which stood social market economy – a kind of economic strategy that guarantees the minimum standards of welfare but the main emphasis is on private initiative and individual responsibility (Gamble 1985: 114-115). This meant that individuals themselves were expected to make their provisions for sickness, old age; government welfare would only apply to those unable to look after themselves (Lowe 1998: 569). Thus, the dominants for the era are self-sufficiency, individualism and individual responsibility.

One of the central themes of the novel is the issue of childhood and the way this topic is addressed in the novel could be regarded as a kind of representation of the political and social context in which the book was published. The fictional childcare manual cited at the beginning of each chapter of the book reflects the dominants in the era.

#### **2.1.1 Treatment of childhood as an indication of the context**

The topic of children and childhood runs throughout the novel and most characters in the book are somehow touched by this theme. The protagonist of the story, Stephen Lewis is a children's author, a father of an abducted daughter and a member of the Child-Care

Commission. Every chapter of the novel begins with an excerpt from a fictional childcare manual that, as the reader learns at the end of the story, has been compiled by one of the characters, Charles Darke and was supposed to replace the decision of the commission in which Stephen participates. It is possible to claim that the childcare handbooks which are produced in a certain era tend to rather accurately represent the spirit of the era in which they have been written (Childs 2006: 60). Since *The Child In Time* was written in the 1980s, and the action of the novel takes place in an imagined future, which is the extension of the political and social context of its time, the excerpts from the 'The Authorised Childcare Handbook' also reflect some of the ideas that were floating around in society at the time (Childs 2006: 60). The publication of such handbook projects an authoritarian government which seeks to exercise even more control over the life choices of the citizens from the moment of their birth (Head 2002: 37). Although the handbook is a representative of a more authoritarian version of the political context, it could be considered as a reflection of the ideology of the era and does not merely represent the issues connected to childcare but also represents the dominants of the era.

The central theme of childhood and the use of childcare manual at the beginning of the chapters takes a rather personal issue of raising a child and makes it a public affair, a concern of government policy (Bradbury 2001: 481). The childcare manual cited in the novel suggests a rather strict and authoritarian view on bringing up the new generation. It seems that the idea of the handbook is to raise the kind of people who are loyal to the current government: "We could do worse than conclude /.../ that from love and respect for home we derive our deepest loyalties to nation." (*TCIT* 72) This reveals that the true agenda behind the book is to make sure that there are more people who would unquestionably accept the ideology offered by the government and through that be loyal to

their nation. Therefore, the handbook carries an ideological purpose in society depicted in the novel, it helps to legitimise and spread the perspective of the dominant class.

Another idea that comes through from these excerpts is that children should not be treated as such but rather they ought to be seen as small adults. “Childhood is an invention, a social construct, made possible by society as it increased in sophistication and resources. Above all, childhood is a privilege” (*TCIT* 99). The same passage from the handbook refers to children as “the weakest members of society” and claims that children are granted the privilege of being children by their parents, the “embodiments of society” who do it “at their own expense”. This seems to put forward the idea that parents are encouraged to make sure that their children become self-sufficient as soon as possible, so that the parents, as “embodiments of society” could return to their own lives. Such ideas of the manual reflect the master code of self-sufficiency and the minimum support from the government. This dominant is also shown to be implemented in society, where instead of helping the beggars through social care, they are given a licence and therefore they have been made responsible for their own well-being: they are forced to become self-sufficient.

At the same time, the handbook also compares childhood not to a privilege but to a disease, “a physically and mentally incapacitating condition, distorting emotions, perceptions and reason, from which growing up is the slow and difficult recovery” (*TCIT* 197). This way of looking at children seems to support the idea that people who are unable to take care of themselves are as if children and the only cure for them is to grow up and take responsibility for their actions. In addition, it also gives the impression that individuals, either children or adults, who are unable to support themselves are carriers of a certain social disease. Such perspective on childhood seems to be in accordance with the “master code” of self-sufficiency and individual responsibility; the handbook, therefore, represents the dominant ideology of the Conservative government.

In addition, the handbook compares the upbringing of a child with maintaining the economic growth of the state. Such comparison is made when the system of rewards and threats is introduced in the handbook: “Incentives, after all, form the basis of our economic structure and necessarily shape our morality” (*TCIT* 133). This suggests that parents ought to use the same methods in raising their children as the government does in encouraging the economy. It claims that “there is no reason why a well-behaved child should not have an ulterior motive” (*TCIT* 133). Therefore, children should learn from their childhood that only those who are successful and “well-behaved”, based on the standards of their parents and government, receive benefits and support. Those who for some reason or other do not match the criteria set by the people on the position of power, receive a punishment instead of a reward. Moreover, the handbook seems to be proud to announce that children are perfect citizens, despite being “the weakest members of society” due to their inbuilt desire to stay alive: “Childcare writers of post-war era sentimentally ignored the fact that children are at heart selfish, and reasonably so, for they are programmed for survival” (*TCIT* 170). The injection “and reasonably so” seems to justify the selfishness of the children. This is in accordance with values of individualism which describe the dominant perspective of the era. Moreover, it suggests that it is the kind of trait that needs to be cultivated in children. This again seems to be the assertion of the dominant ideology of the time: individualism and the individual struggle for a better life instead of the communal good.

In the novel, the Prime Minister defends the childcare manual by mentioning the “concern among parents and educators about falling standards of behaviour and lack of civic responsibility among many elements of society, especially the young” and that there was “a call for a return to common sense, and the Government was being asked to take the lead” (*TCIT* 199-200). Therefore, such guidelines for parents are advertised as “a return for common sense”, which could be an assertion of the dominant ideology – the claim that

such view on childhood is what society should consider normal and something that everyone is expected to accept without further thought. In addition, the Prime Minister is characterised by Stephen at their first encounter as “the nation’s parent” (*TCIT* 88), which suggests that the Prime Minister is also tasked with bringing up the nation and the childcare manual reflects her ideas on how society in general should work.

### **2.1.2. Licenced begging as a sign of social injustice**

One of the ways in which McEwan envisages the future of his society could be seen through the notion of licenced begging. The protagonist of the book has several encounters with these beggars throughout the novel and it is possible to observe Stephen’s attitude towards them and the changes in that attitude depending on a situation in which Stephen is. Although Stephen’s own attitude towards the beggars is reported, the characters in the novel make no comments on the idea of licenced begging itself. It is only Charles Darke, who steps up in defence of such government action. This suggests that in such futuristic and imagined society as depicted in the novel, the idea of state-licenced begging has become so entrenched in the minds of the people that no one seems to question it (Wells 2010: 40). Licenced begging could also be seen as “mediation”. The social reality has normalised licenced begging so that it could be regarded as an expression of the ideology; the extension of social market economy. The ideology and social reality of the era within which the novel was written is mediated through the notion of such form of social welfare. By depicting such reality in the novel, McEwan warns against the ideas that are in one way or another floating around in the context in which the novel is written and that are in danger of becoming an integral part of how people perceive the world around them; such mediation of the social reality offers a critical commentary on society.

The novel begins with a scene of Stephen walking towards Whitehall to a meeting and encountering a group of licenced beggars just near the Parliament Square. It seems as

if the two worlds that exist separately in society meet at that point: right at the heart of the city, where there are the people who run the country and enjoy the benefits of the political system, there are also those who need to rely on others' help in order to survive. The meeting of two different social realities, the office workers in Westminster and the licenced beggars provokes some uncomfortable feelings in the protagonist. Stephen notices a young girl, who is holding the bowl for money. The girl is described to walk slowly and against the stream of workers: "The office workers parted and converged about her" (*TCIT* 3). This suggests that for this stream of office workers, she does not mean much else but just a minor distraction on their pursuit. Stephen notices the girl and that sparks in him the dilemma on how he should react: "He felt the usual ambivalence. To give money ensured the success of Government programme. Not to give involved some determined facing away from private distress. /.../ The art of bad government was to sever the line between public policy and intimate feeling, the instinct for what was right" (*TCIT* 3). Thus, Stephen seems to be in two minds about the beggars: he seems to think that by doing "the right thing", giving the money to the beggars, he would be supporting the government programme with which he does not necessarily agree. On the other hand, by not giving the money, he would be able to express his protest against the government but he would then feel bad about not helping out. In order to escape such arguments, Stephen has decided to depend on the fact whether he has spare change or not. This suggests that Stephen does not wish to dwell on such dilemma and opts for an easier solution to the problem.

It is also possible to say that at that moment, Stephen is in the middle of his own life routine and the sight of beggars, although they are not supposed to be in the vicinity of the Parliament Square, does not surprise him. It is what he has grown used to and that is why he does not need to dwell on the inner dilemma that he claims to be facing. In another situation, where Stephen is taken out of his daily context, the issue of licenced beggars and



their behaviour seems to bother him a lot more. In that instance, Stephen meets the beggars in a small town after he has been through a car accident. He has just been through a shock and is “heavy-limbed” (*TCIT* 109) as he is walking towards a hotel in order to shape his thoughts over a glass of Scotch. On his way, he unexpectedly meets a group of licenced beggars. The way his thoughts are reported, his opinion of these people is not favourable:

They looked less beaten-down than the usual London types, healthier, more confident. There was laughter as he approached and a muscular old man in a string vest spat on the pavement and rubbed his hands. None of the usual regulations seemed to apply here. By law, beggars were not even permitted to work in pairs. They were supposed to be on the move all the time, down certain authorised thoroughfares. They were certainly not supposed to be crowding round entrances like this, waiting to pester the public. Here, even the badges were not correctly worn. They were strapped round tanned, sinewy forearms, or on a couple of girls, sewn into colourful headbands. There was a giant wearing one as an eye patch. A young man with a shaved, tattooed head had attached his to an earring (*TCIT* 109).

Such description of the beggars by Stephen suggests a certain resentment of the people in the streets. Here, Stephen is bothered by the beggars, they are disturbing his wish to celebrate him surviving the car accident. The description of the rules that these beggars do not adhere to seems to be as if a justification for Stephen to be angry at them and not to like them. Moreover, the fact that these beggars are gathered in a group and use their badges creatively seems to threaten Stephen.

The beggars seem to enrage Stephen because they represent freedom from norms and obligations in society. As the central theme of the novel seems to be childhood and its innocence and lack of responsibilities, these beggars in that small town seem to bring that into mind for Stephen. Stephen’s feelings of anger and resentment might reflect the idea that he does not support such idle way of earning money and relying on government support. Through such feelings, it could be claimed that Stephen’s attitude reflects the general political context which awards self-sufficiency and individual responsibility. These beggars allow Stephen to sense the limitations that the dominant ideology has imposed on him: the obligation to adhere to the values of society. The beggars might also remind Stephen of his own youth, during which he travelled the world, experimented with drugs

and had a lifestyle when he “could get all his stuff into two suitcases” (*TCIT* 29). Thus, Stephen feels uncomfortable about his own being and looks for justification. He concludes: “For years he had convinced himself that he belonged at the heart with the rootless, that having money was a merry accident, that he could be back at the road any day with all his stuff in one bag. But time had fixed him in his place. He had become the sort who casts about for a policeman at the sight of scruffy poor” (*TCIT* 110). His own rather privileged position had changed the way he regarded these people and came to consider himself better than them. This suggests that by adjusting to his comfortable lifestyle, Stephen seems to also show signs of a kind of anosognosia, the lack of awareness of his own privileged position (Ryle 2010: 33). He seems to be unable to regard his own coming into success and money as something he has earned, but not by work but by some kind of reward for adhering to the rules of society and to the values of dominant ideology.

The last meeting with the beggars described in the book happens after Stephen’s bizarre meeting with the Prime Minister. Thus, it is a kind of juxtaposition to come from conversing with the head of the government, one of the highest and most powerful positions in the country and meet the beggars right after that. The conditions of this encounter are again very different from the previous ones. The beggars evoke a different kind of attitude in him due to the condition in which he meets them. This time it is a cold winter’s night and the beggars have gathered to the train station for warmth. “There were more than a hundred of them, driven in off the streets by the cold. /.../ They were not on the job” (*TCIT* 212). At the beginning of the story, the beggars had invaded the sphere of office workers and generally upwardly mobile people and they were perceived as kind of intruders, generally ignored. The situation at the Parliament Square is completely different: “This was their weather and they looked cocky with their freedom” (*TCIT* 2). Now they are

in the station and gather together to be safe from the cold and they are less threatening for Stephen. This time it is somehow safer for Stephen to move towards them.

Stephen also voices another concern when he sees the beggars in the train station and that was seeing someone he knows among them: “He had reached the end of the row of bodies and was looking down at a familiar face. /.../ It was an old friend, someone from his student days, Stephen was beginning to think, or someone from a dream. He had always known that sooner or later he would run into someone he knew with a badge.” This fear of Stephen meeting someone he knows among the beggars seems to express his own discomfort about his situation. This suggests that Stephen ought to consider himself lucky to have escaped this fate and it makes him suddenly aware of his own status. For a moment, Stephen is able to see that his privileged position is not something that is to be taken for granted, but that his own fate could have been different as well. Unlike during the previous meeting, he does not envy the beggars for their freedom from responsibilities; he is able, for a moment, to grasp the social injustice. Nevertheless, Stephen does not ponder upon this thought much when he recognises the familiar face as the young girl to whom he gave money a few months ago at Parliament Square. In addition, he realises as he puts his coat over the girl that the lively and mocking beggar he had met is no longer alive.

This is the scene in the novel that most acutely depicts the social injustice in society. The young girl, a licenced beggar has died because of the cold. The idea of licenced beggars reflects government policies and represents the dominant ideology through the master code of self-sufficiency and individual responsibility. The beggars are given a permission to support themselves by asking for money from other members of society, an idea that is against the dominant ideology. This is the only form of social welfare that the government is ready to offer to people who are unable to support themselves and it reflects how the ideology shapes social injustice. Stephen’s friend

Charles Darke, as an MP of the government party, writes an article in support of licenced begging: “Tens of millions have been saved in social security pavements, and a large number of men, women and children have been introduced to the pitfalls and strenuous satisfactions of self-sufficiency long familiar to the business community in this country” (*TCIT* 38). This reflects that the idea is to cultivate the dominant values of the “ruling class”. The death of the girl seems to reflect that such policy does not work in reducing social injustice. As mentioned above, Stephen seems to be ambivalent about this policy: he seems not to be in support of it, but at the same time he does not comment on it critically either.

Stephen giving his coat to the beggar could also be regarded as him breaking out of his habits. Instead of leaving it up to a chance as he usually does with beggars, Stephen suddenly decides to put the coat around the girl. He reasons, “It was cold, and he was about to step into a warm train” (*TCIT* 231). At this instant Stephen’s actions are not in accordance with the dominant ideology of his time; he is able to step out of the mindset of justification of self-responsibility and self-sufficiency and instead he chooses to perform an act of altruism. It was mentioned above that Stephen is throughout the novel unable to decide if he should contribute to the well-being of society, but at this instant he overcomes his individualism and goes against the dominant ideology of his era. Such display of kindness makes him, for a moment, step outside the dominant ideology and act according to his conscience instead of how society expects him to act.

However, even as Stephen realises that the girl, whom he offered his coat, is dead, he does not express any clear emotion: “He touched her face and the eyes continued to stare, their indifference confirmed in absolute terms. He picked up his bag and straightened. To retrieve the coat was now impossible. He could not remember whether he had emptied the pockets” (*TCIT* 213). Stephen does not report the girl’s death to anyone;

instead, he decides to rush to the train and forgets about it; the incident is not mentioned again in the novel. This might indicate a kind of social guilt that Stephen is unable to deal with. He is unable to express his feelings concerning the death of a beggar girl because her death does not really change his world in any way. This seems to suggest that the death of a young girl is as if something usual and normal: it does not cause much distress in society. Stephen's only concern seems to be his own welfare: instead of worrying for the death of the girl, Stephen expresses concern about what he might have left in his coat pockets. On the one hand, it is a natural expression of worry about one's own belongings; on the other hand, it seems to emphasise how quickly Stephen's mind turns away from social injustice.

It is possible to claim that not only is the idea of government-licenced begging something which has become so entrenched in society that as a phenomenon it is left uncommented by the characters of the novel, but also social injustice and the death caused by it remains almost invisible. Although Stephen's attitude towards the beggars shifts throughout the novel, from indifference to resentment to near sympathy, his own attitude towards the idea of licenced begging and the social injustice that it emphasises is not clearly stated. The beggars seem to represent a divide in the nation between the members of society who benefit from the dominant ideology and those who are victims of it; the novel offers also other social markers, which open up its political context and which are discussed later.

### **2.1.3. Characters as representatives of social phenomena**

The main character of the story, whose viewpoint is offered to the readers, is Stephen Lewis. Stephen's background and his current position place him among the people who benefit from the economic and social policies of the era depicted in the book. Therefore, his viewpoint on society is bound to be influenced by his own rather privileged position. Stephen is a successful children's author and has close connections to some of the people

in power: he is a member of the Child-Care Commission and a close friend of the Junior Minister Charles Darke. It is known from Stephen's background that he is the son of an RAF officer and spent his childhood living in different countries. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Stephen's point of view is that of a well-off middle class person, which could explain some of the ideas that he expresses or seems unable to express.

It is possible to claim that Stephen's character is a kind of "typification" of his social class as defined in the theoretical framework. His socio-economic markers are connected to his relative wealth (he can afford to live without a regular salary, he rides in first-class compartments in trains and he owns a house near the centre of London) and his background as a son of an RAF officer, whose childhood was spent living in different countries due to his father's position. His cultural background is emphasised by his own position – he is a successful children's author with a university degree. As a typification, Stephen's views and thoughts could be said to represent his social class or class fraction, namely the well-off middle class.

Stephen is in some ways an irresolute character for he does not express his support to or criticism of the political situation very much. Although Stephen himself is not really among the clique that rules the country, it seems that Stephen enjoys the vicinity of power and therefore he cannot allow himself to be publicly critical. When he first meets the Prime Minister at the committee meeting, he feels chuffed by the meeting: "His impulse was to be civil, to be liked, to protect the Prime Minister from his critical opinions" (*TCIT* 88). This reported thought of Stephen suggests that he does not wish to go against the government and wants to be liked by the people who are in power. At the same time, Stephen does not seem to have any ulterior motive to be sided with those who lead the country. As a writer, he needs not to avoid criticism aimed at the government. His career as a writer does not depend that much on keeping good relations with the people in power.

Instead, his hesitance to articulate his critical opinions might be connected to an “impulse /.../ to be civil” (*TCIT* 88), a trait of national character: not showing too much emotion publicly. Therefore, it cannot be read as though Stephen’s support for the government activities; rather, he is unable to express any criticism due to his own respectable position and the situation in which he is at that moment. As a typification of his class position, Stephen’s unwillingness to publicly state his personal opinion suggests that it is not a norm in society for someone of a privileged position such as Stephen’s to be critical about the political and social situation of society.

Stephen’s inability to make his own opinions on the current state of affairs known comes across also when he meets the Prime Minister for the second time. This time Stephen’s encounter with the Prime Minister takes place not in the corridors of Whitehall, but in his own home and the issue under discussion is a personal matter of the Prime Minister. Therefore, Stephen finds it hard to bring up what he believes to be problems in society. For a moment, there seems to be a window of opportunity for Stephen to express his opinion but he chooses not to use it: “To be alone with the head of the Government was an opportunity to give voice to an interior monologue which had been running for years, to confront the very person responsible, and question, for example, the instinctive siding in all matters with the strong, the exaltation of self-interest, the selling of schools, the beggars and so on, but these seemed secondary to what they had been discussing /.../” (*TCIT* 210). The issues that Stephen would have liked to question the Prime Minister on reflect some of the problem areas in society within which the novel was written: social welfare, privatisation, government incentives for successful businesses and individuals and the encouragement of the values of individuality. This allows one to think that despite Stephen’s class position, he does not fully agree with the social and political situation of the country. In addition, he has no problem expressing these critical opinions of his to the

Assistant Secretary of the PM via phone some time before the meeting: “/.../ I resent what the Prime Minister’s been doing in this country all these years. It’s a mess, a disgrace” (*TCIT* 169). This is the only time that Stephen manages to express his criticism of government policies and how they have shaped the country and have someone to hear these opinions. The two situations are completely different: on the phone he is not speaking directly to anyone in a position of power; it’s just an assistant. Moreover, Stephen’s state of mind at the time of that phone call had been largely shaped by the misguided hunt for a little girl he believed to be his daughter the day before. The actual presence of the Prime Minister in his flat changes the situation and makes it impossible for Stephen to speak out loud his inner monologues. This suggests that Stephen’s social status, which is a socially favoured class position, makes it difficult for him to express criticism on the social and political context.

The Prime Minister is not the only person in power with whom Stephen avoids expressing criticism on the state of the country. There are few conversations between Stephen and Charles on politics; only the cynicism of Stephen on Charles’s career choice shown by him mocking Charles’s opportunism. Charles is not a serious, ideological kind of politician. Instead, he chooses power over ideals: “It doesn’t matter what I think. I have my mandate – a freer City, more weapons, good private schools” (*TCIT* 38). Although Stephen mocks Charles for his venture into politics, he also admires him and it seems to transform the idea of politics for Stephen: “To have an old friend in high office transformed government into an almost human process /.../” (*TCIT* 39). This could be the reason why it is difficult for Stephen to criticise the government and its policies as well. He feels as if he is too much involved and he would attack the people he admires personally. This personal admiration also reflects Stephen’s wish to be among the people who are close to power and his desire to remain in the socially favoured class.



The book makes a mention of a television channel dedicated to game shows and which is supported by the government. During the recess of the Committee, Stephen becomes a devoted viewer of the channel. Stephen expresses his sympathies with the hosts of these show because “[t]hey were professionals, dedicated men, clearly working to order, within a convention whose formal limitations they occasionally pointed up with cynical asides” (*TCIT* 134). These hosts could also be described as condescending because of their attitude towards the audiences of these shows (Wells 2010: 42). It could be claimed that Stephen associates himself with these hosts because similarly to them he likes to think himself as a “dedicated man” who is in many ways accidentally became a children’s writer thanks to which he is now a part of the commission discussing childcare issues. Like these hosts, Stephen only passingly points out his criticism about the current affairs in his country. Thus, it is not surprising that Stephen feels warmed towards the hosts of these shows. By showing his sympathies, Stephen as if places himself in a socially superior position compared to the majority of society.

This could also be the reason why he admits his strong resentment towards the audience of these shows. Stephen is annoyed by the audience’s eagerness to participate in these game shows without questioning anything. He comments how easily the host can dictate their moods and make them act on commands. Such behaviour of the audience makes Stephen question the mental abilities of the electorate in Britain: “Was it any surprise the world was led by morons with these enfeebled souls at the ballot box, /.../ these infants who longed for nothing more than to be told when to laugh?” (*TCIT* 135) It could be assumed from Stephen’s violent resentment towards the audience that the reason why things are going badly is because of people like those at the game shows are the decision makes at elections. It seems that he does not consider himself to belong among those people, so even as a citizen, a member of the electorate he regards himself to be an

outsider, which allows him to observe society and what happens within it from aside. This also allows Stephen to express his explicit criticism about the people among the audiences.

In these thoughts that go through Stephen's mind when he passively watches these game shows, the complexity of Stephen's attitude towards the political context becomes apparent. On the one hand, he distances himself from the infantile audiences of these shows by claiming to be more aware of the social and political situation than them. He identifies himself more with the hosts of these television shows, who control these audiences; thus, he would like himself to be seen as someone with more authority in society, someone whose vote and voice has more importance than those of the people on these quiz shows. At the same time, he claims that the country is led by "morons", which means that he is in fact critical of the people in power. Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that although he wishes to distance himself from the audience, he is not in any position of power himself and is actually also just passively watching these game shows waiting to be needed by the Child-Care Commission once again.

It could be claimed that Stephen almost seems to regard himself as being exterior to society: he is critical about government policies (on licenced begging, on selling of schools and hospitals) but in this scene while he is watching the television programme he also wishes to distance himself from the people who elect the members of Parliament to make these policies. It could be assumed that it is this view of the outsider that allows him at different moments in time to be critical about the policies and then again not to express these critical opinions. At the same time, it is exactly his critical opinions that place him outside his class position as well as outside mainstream society. The wish to distance himself from what is happening in society could also be seen as a device for a critical viewpoint: the desire for self-sufficiency and individual success means not to regard oneself as belonging to of a collective society. It seems that Stephen is unable to decide for

himself whether he should contribute to communal well-being or not, which makes him a representative of his era.

#### **2.1.4. Representation of political personas**

The behaviours and the reported thoughts of the two political personas that are depicted in the book could also be seen as a representation of the political context, namely criticism of the political culture of the era. They could also be seen as “typifications” of the ruling class of the country and their behaviours, on the one hand, seem to represent another dominant of the context – raw ambition; on the other hand, they seem to serve as a point of criticism by the author.

Firstly, Stephen’s friend Charles Darke, who decides to go into politics after a career in fields of entertainment, struggles to reconcile his inner desires and conventional ambitions. Charles could be read as a kind of representation of the political culture of the era and people connected with politics during that era: “a man with ambition but no conviction of his own” (Wells 2010: 42). Charles does not care much about ideology of the political parties and is more interested in achieving power; the simple matter of the right over the left was decided over dinner: “By the time the Turkish coffees came it was decided that he should make his career on the right. The arguments were straightforward. It was in power and likely to remain so. /.../ On the left the selection procedures were tortuously democratic and unreasonably weighted against those who had never been members of the Party” (*TCIT* 36). Such process of selection seems to emphasise the mentality of individual struggle for success over equal opportunities for everyone. Charles’s reported thoughts mock the democratic selection processes of the left and through that he seems to give voice to the opinion of the opportunistic people in society. Charles seems to be convinced that it is natural that money and connections are a guarantee

for a higher position in society. These opinions seem to represent his social position and it could be assumed that the purpose of it is the author's criticism on such mentality.

At one point, Stephen describes Thelma and Charles as grown-ups next to his youthful adventures in India and Afghanistan experimenting with drugs and living in a bedsit. He describes them: "Charles and Thelma had once seemed the very embodiment of lively maturity. Their house excluded solidarity and excitement. Against the background of an expensive, orderly rush, people talked competitively, extravagant or nonsensical theories were expounded by physicists and politicians who drank and laughed a lot and went home to rise the next day to responsible job." (*TCIT* 201). It is possible to claim that Stephen admires the lifestyle Charles and Thelma were leading before they went to live in Suffolk; he might even be said to be envious of Charles's life. He sees no fault in people, who have "responsible jobs" to come together in joyous celebrations and lavish parties in order to celebrate their high position in society. This could also be indication that such depiction of politicians, people who only have their self-interest and a hedonistic lifestyle in mind, is regarded as normal by the protagonist of the novel. Such representation of the elite of society conveys a certain tone of criticism in the author's own opinion of these people.

Although Charles manages to make a career in politics, rising from a newcomer into a Junior Minister of the government, he is forced to resign his position rather suddenly due to his mental health. What happened to Charles could be seen as a kind of clash between the dominant ideology and his own inner desires. After Charles's suicide, his wife Thelma explains Charles's illness to Stephen: "He wanted to be famous, and have people tell him that one day he would be Prime Minister, and he wanted to be the little boy without a care in the world, with no responsibility, no knowledge of the world outside" (*TCIT* 222). Such characterisation of Charles sums up this clash that he did not manage to

control. On the one hand, Charles wished to be among the privileged and powerful people. This is the reason that he joined the Party and ventured into politics. It could be claimed that he understood that such ambition was something that was awarded in society. On the other hand, Charles wished to become a child once again, which for him meant a kind of security and freedom. As his wife explains, childhood represented “freedom from money, decisions, plans, demands” (*TCIT* 222) for Charles. Thus, it is the inability to make these two worlds, two ideological views work that forces Charles to resign his position and in the end also to take his own life.

The Prime Minister also appears in the novel. Although the name of the Prime Minister is never mentioned and the gender remains ambivalent, the person of the Prime Minister could be associated with Margaret Thatcher. The Prime Minister in the novel is, on the one hand, described to be cold and unfeeling but at the end of the novel, obsession of the Prime Minister with Charles Darke is revealed. While Charles had been in the office, the Prime Minister had managed to organise confidential meetings, the PM even admits having them called “a little more often than was necessary” (*TCIT* 207). The Prime Minister even had the intelligence service, MI5 follow Charles while he was still living in London. This also shows the level of the Prime Minister’s obsession: “/.../ having him followed was a way of being with him all the time” (*TCIT* 208). Stephen points out to the head of the government that the feelings towards Charles Darke are in conflict with ideological views, especially those which concern the family values. The Prime Minister answers, “/.../ one would hardly describe what he has with his wife as a family” (*TCIT* 208). Such depiction of the head of the government ridicules the position: one of the most powerful people in the country is riddled by a love obsession over a Junior Minister. As the Prime Minister and his aides assure Stephen several times, the whole affair must remain completely secret. This suggests that the dominant ideology supports the image of a cold

and unfeeling leader of the country and does not support any display of “weakness”. Unlike Charles, the Prime Minister is shown to manage to reconcile her public ambitions and private desires.

In the case of all the characters discussed above, the theme of needing to reconcile the public persona with the private desires comes across. Stephen’s position forces him to be silent about his critical observations publicly; these are almost only expressed by the third-person narrator and place Stephen in a position which is exterior to society and his social status. Unlike the Prime Minister, Charles does not manage to find ways to match his private desires so that they would be compatible with the dominant ideology. This suggests that the political and social context is manifested in the biographies of these characters and they can be considered as embodiments of their era.

### **2.1.5. Social markers**

At the beginning of the novel when Stephen remembers the abduction of her daughter, he describes a supermarket. He claims, “The people who used the supermarket divided into two groups, as distinct as tribes or nations. The first lived locally in modernised Victorian terraced houses which they owned. The second lived locally in tower blocks and estates” (*TCIT* 10). From this description, it is possible to have an idea about the social divide in society: the haves and have-nots. The supermarket seems in this characterisation as a kind of neutral territory where the two “tribes or nations” meet. Both of these groups are described to live locally, which means that these two nations co-exist in a small area and this could serve as a generalisation for the whole country. The supermarket is as if an example for the nation divided into two distinct groups of people, who meet only occasionally.

Stephen observes the different social and cultural markers of these two groups of people by their shopping habits: “Those in the first group tended to buy fresh fruit and

vegetables, brown bread, coffee beans, fresh fish from a special counter, wine and spirits, while those in the second group bought tinned or frozen vegetables, baked beans, instant soup, white sugar, cupcakes, beer, spirits and cigarettes” (*TCIT* 10). The shopping carts of the people who own the terraced houses are filled with healthier and more nutritious goods, whereas the people from the estates buy less healthy products. This has much to do with the price of these items, because healthier goods tend to be more expensive and the people from the second group are not likely to afford them. It is possible to take this issue even further. The fact that the people who are not well off consume less nutritious food leads to poorer health and increased mortality rate. Thus, a person’s health becomes a kind of class marker as well. Stephen identifies himself with the first group and his shopping cart complies with it: he buys fresh meat (best bacon, a leg of lamb, steak) and fresh vegetables.

It is a telling fact that it is exactly in the supermarket, where the two nations meet, that Stephen’s daughter Kate is kidnapped. The way in which the people from the second group are described (“young mothers, gaunt with fatigue, their mouth set hard round cigarettes, who sometimes cracked at the checkout and gave a child a spanking” (*TCIT* 11)), Stephen sees these people as somehow threatening and violent. Therefore, it seems to be only logical that this is the location where such a terrible crime as kidnapping would take place: where the well-off homeowners meet the poor people from the estates. This gives an impression that the city is a place where the two separate groups that do not co-exist peacefully in society.

McEwan also brings out an interesting distinction between the city and the countryside. The former is depicted as more evil and more susceptible to negative influences. Stephen’s father comments on the city as he returns: “The filth on the streets, the dirty messages on the walls, the poverty, son, it’s all changed in ten years. /.../ It’s a

new country. More like Far East at its worst, I haven't got the strength for it, or the stomach" (*TCIT* 195). Stephen's father emphasises that the city has changed over the years into something horrible. The fact that the father mentions how the city has become a violent place over the last decade which allows one to assume that it is criticism aimed at the Conservative government, who are responsible for such poverty. The cruelty of the city could be seen in licenced beggars, who symbolised a threat to the likes of Stephen and who also are a constant reminder of social injustice in the cityscape. The city also represents violence: Stephen's daughter was kidnapped in London during broad daylight and the search for her by the police was cut short due to inner-city riots. Therefore, the city could be described as blatant and dystopic; a place where the innocence and altruism has given way to ruthlessness and unethical struggle for power (Wells 2010: 42).

The existence of the two distinct nations is emphasised in mostly in the city, where the beggars and the commuters from the city exist side by side almost unaware of each other's existence. The context of London as a social and political context is also the setting of the novel *Saturday*.

## **2.2. *Saturday***

The novel *Saturday* (*S*) depicts a day in the life of a neurosurgeon Henry Perowne. The action takes place in London at the time of the protests against the war in Iraq. It could be claimed that, by placing the action of the novel in the streets of London which are dominated by a political event, the novel evokes a political reading by its readers (Ryle 2010: 25). It is argued that *Saturday* is the first novel by McEwan that fully engages with the present, as the book depicts the actions which take place on February 15, 2003 (Childs 2006: 146). Due to the fact that the book is concerned with the author's contemporary context, it could be said that it touches upon the themes relevant to the political context of



the present. The novel is dominated by a third-person narration of Henry Perowne, whose thoughts seem to reveal some ideological context of the novel.

The political context of the novel is the New Labour government led by Tony Blair. The ideological viewpoint of the New Labour was in many ways similar to Thatcherism: it emphasises individual responsibility and self-sufficiency, which could be maintained by hard work by individual members of society (Freedon 1999: 46). It could be claimed that New Labour policies focus on “opportunity and community rather than equality” and “[s]ocial justice is expressed in terms of responsibilities and obligations as well as rights” (Dunleavy et al 2002: 6). The master codes through which the ideology of the era can be discussed are individual responsibility, meritocracy based on hard work and opportunism.

### **2.2.1. Protagonist as a representation of his social class**

In the novel, the protagonist Henry Perowne, introduces the term “anosognosia” as a state of unawareness about one’s socially privileged position. Henry thinks back in time and reaches the conclusion that the knowledge and belief that “an all-knowing supernatural force had allotted people to their stations in life” (S 74) must have made for a restful state of mind. Although Henry seems to suggest that this is no longer the truth, he is quite unaware of his own privileged social position and comments that it must be bad luck that has hindered people’s chances for success: “/.../ having to sweep streets for a living looks like simple bad luck. /.../ The streets need to be clean. Let the unlucky enlist” (S 74). This line of thought by Henry suggests that he still thinks that it is a “supernatural force”, luck, that has something to do with people’s positions in society and seeing the street cleaner does not make him think about social injustice in society. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, this could be an indication of dominant ideology entrenched in society. Eagleton’s (2002: 15) definition of ideology contained the idea that ideology signifies the ways people live out their own social realities and how their social functions prevent them

from experiencing society as a whole. This could be said to be true about Henry's reported thoughts in this passage as well. Henry's own privileged social position prevents him from experiencing society within which he exists as collective history of various members of society. Thus, instead of social injustice, he sees the street cleaner as someone who has not been lucky enough.

The third-person narrator mentions several times how both Henry and his wife Rosalind are busy with their jobs, "For certain days, even for weeks on end, work can shape every hour; it's the tide, the lunar cycle they set their lives by, and without it, it can seem, there's nothing. Henry and Rosalind Perowne are nothing" (S 23). This suggests that not only does Henry take great pride in his work but he also seems to define his life through that. He prides himself as a doctor that he is able to fix people so that they can return to their careers – "work – the ultimate badge of health" (S 24). This could be read as an indication of the dominant ideology of the era, which emphasises the individual's responsibility to work for their prosperity. This contradicts his view on the "supernatural force" that allots people into their position. Instead, this seems to suggest that Henry believes in a society where hard work is rewarded and people themselves ought to be responsible for their welfare. It could be argued that the individual success stories imply that the likes of the street cleaner have themselves to blame for not being able to advance to the same position as Henry. Such line of thinking emphasises Henry's own socially privileged position, he believes that he deserves the merits of his social status because he has worked in order to achieve them. In addition, this emphasises the individual upward-mobility story mentioned in the theoretical framework. Thus, Henry represents the dominant values of the ideology such as meritocracy and opportunism in his social class.

It could be argued that Henry justifies his own privileged position in society in terms of general progress and not through assertion of special merits that his position

grants him, which could be said to be driven from self-delusion (Ryle 2010: 29). This helps Henry not to think about social injustice and justify his own progress through meritocracy. This progressivism is also entrenched in the idea of “thinking small” by Theo, Henry’s son, and Henry is inclined to agree with it. Such thinking focuses on what is good in society – the technological progress, the variety of ethnic restaurants on Cleveland Street (*S* 76, 78) – and does not pay attention to the injustices that co-exist with this general progress. This seems to be in accordance with the dominant ideology, which would encourage members of society to celebrate the general progress of society and would regard the failures of individual members of society as their personal problems and not as a consequence of government policies.

It is argued that the political context that has contributed to Henry’s success – the post-Thatcherite reforms on privatisation of health care are beneficial for his neurosurgical practice (Wells 2010: 113). However, private health care institutions do not come across well in the novel. Henry is described to have a critical view on these clinics. “/.../ he’s passing through the orderly grid of medical streets west of Portland Place – private clinics and chintzy waiting rooms with bow-legged reproduction furniture and *Country Life* magazines. It is faith, as powerful as religion, that brings people to Harley Street. Over the years his hospital has taken in and treated – free of charge, of course – scores of cases botched by some of the elderly overpaid incompetents around here” (*S* 123). These reported thoughts allow one to assume that Henry is not in support of private health care because he does not believe that the surgeons who offer it are good enough. The third-person narrator also expresses that people seem to believe in private health care blindly; it is even compared to a religion. This could indicate that ideologically, privatised health care services are assumed to be better – there seems to be the mentality that if it costs a fortune, it must be good. In addition, the friend and colleague of Henry, Jay Strauss supports the

National Health Service: “Jay is the only American medic Henry knows to have taken a huge cut in salary and amenities to work in England. He says he loves the health system” (S 100). This indicates the general support and respect for “socialised medicine” (S 100) and the state of medical care in Britain. Henry’s limited vision prohibits him from finding any flaws in that system besides the private clinics.

Since the backdrop of the novel is the impending war in Iraq and the threat of terrorism that is connected to it, one of the questions that Henry is seemingly attempting to find an answer to is whether Britain is facing a crisis or if is everything as good as it has ever been. Henry wishes to adopt Theo’s way of “thinking small”, as mentioned above, but at the same time, Henry cannot help the anxieties and fears living in the post-9/11 world. His constant need to be aware of the latest developments of the news item on the burning plane he witnessed landing at Heathrow in the early morning reveals the anxiety and fear of terrorist attacks. It is described as a kind of modern disease of society in the novel, “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” (S 176). This reveals that although Henry would like to adopt the “thinking small” mentality, he cannot escape the fear that there could be a threat from outside to his way of living. He takes the issue of the burning plane to be his personal matter, he is described to prepare to listen to the news item on television “with a confused sense that he’s about to learn something significant about himself” (S 179). However, he does not feel relaxed when the story turns out to be a mere accident. This suggests that the anxieties that Henry is feeling are something of a modern condition and it could represent the political and social climate of the era.

Although Henry is shown to be anxious about the exterior threat to his way of living, he also believes that consumerism and free-market economy would accommodate the different views and help to overcome such threat: “It isn’t rationalism that will

overcome the religious zealots, but ordinary shopping and all that it entails – jobs for a start, and peace, and some commitment to realisable pleasures, the promise of appetites sated in this world, not the next” (*S* 126). Such statement again seems to emphasise Henry’s belief in the social and political order within which he exists. He seems to think that if more people would adopt the lifestyle similar to his, it is possible to reduce the threat to the kind of lifestyle he is used to. As he passes the Chinese embassy, the third-person narrator expresses Henry’s disbelief in the Chinese Communist Party being able to maintain the control over the country: “Now you see mainland Chinese in Harrods, soaking up luxury goods. Soon it will be ideas, and something will have to give” (*S* 123). Although Henry does not claim that the ideological values in his society are superior to those of materialism, he seems convinced that these values have contributed to welfare of people more than other belief systems. Such conviction is to be expected from someone, who owns his own position to the social and political situation of the era.

Henry represents his social standing and seems to believe in the idea that it is work and the status of a professional that allocates importance and influence in society. At the same time, Henry seems not to be unaware of the general threats to society in which he resides, namely the threat of terrorism, which is something that would come outside his society. His personal commitment to the story of the burning plane and its pilots suggests that the lack of control over the issue makes him anxious.

### **2.2.2 Diagnosis on society**

Henry works as a neurosurgeon and it seems that throughout the novel he cannot restrain himself from diagnosing the people he observes with certain illnesses. As mentioned above, he prides himself in his work and in being a successful surgeon, “He’s renowned for his speed, his success rate and his list – he takes over three hundred cases a year” (*S* 24). Such a high number of patients per year does not only emphasise Henry’s belief in

hard work but it also suggests that he is intent on making the world around him a better place by curing his patients. It has been claimed that through his intellectual powers and skills as a surgeon, Henry embodies a kind of imperial authority in society (Wells 2010: 113). He also seems to see a lot of neurological illness around him as he goes about his day in London. His observations as a neurosurgeon are those of an individual, but it could be assumed that by way of attempting to diagnose the people around him, he is taking the view of an outsider – a view of a rational medic.

While he is looking through the window of his bedroom in the early morning, Henry notices a couple arguing in the street. He soon identifies the girl's compulsive scratching as a reaction to drugs. He is quick in his diagnosis based on only observing the couple from the window and labels them as addicts. His outsider's view is emphasised by him looking down at the couple from the window. As a doctor, he also seems to feel a kind of responsibility for society and as he watches the couple move on he "wonders about going after her with a prescription" (S 65). He does not do it, because he realises that it would not be enough to change this girl's life and Henry does not wish to interfere with the lifestyle choices that the girl has made. Instead, he focuses on the grand design of his house and his daughter who is coming in from Paris, forgetting the reality that exists outside of his front door. The diagnosis and the concern for the girl are as quick to leave his mind, as they entered. Such line of thinking emphasises the view of an outsider: Henry observes and puts the diagnosis, but he is not intent on interfering with what is happening around him.

Henry's view of an outsider also manifests itself as he goes through the city of London in his Mercedes and observes the life of the Londoners around him. His tendency to diagnose or assign labels to people around him also comes across as he describes young men of West Indian and Middle Eastern origin going about their business in the square in front of his house. The way the third-person narrator describes them, seems to reveal

Henry's tendency to be aware of everything: "They are entirely self-contained and unthreatening, and Perowne assumed for a long time they were dealers, running a pavement café in cocaine perhaps, or ecstasy and marijuana" (S 145-146). It is possible to see that Henry lists self-containment and unthreatening attitude as symptoms and makes an assumption, who these young men are, based on that. In fact, he is mistaken; his son Theo puts him right and points out that instead these men sell concert tickets, bootleg CDs and are able to "fix up cut rate premises and DJs for parties, limos for weddings and airports and cut-rate health and travel insurance" (S 146). This seems to prove Henry that these men are actually businessmen and he feels certain respect for them. He even believes "that he owes them an apology. One day he'll buy something from them" (S 146). Although Henry's initial "diagnosis" was proven wrong this time, it still points to his need to label everyone he sees around him and find ways to amend the wrongs.

The Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair, also appears in the novel, similarly to *The Child In Time* where the protagonist converses with the head of the government, and although the encounter between Blair and Henry is brief, the latter associates it with a diagnosis. During their encounter at the opening party of the Tate Modern gallery, Blair confuses Henry with an artist. Henry recalls this incident and diagnoses the confusion of the Prime Minister: "And it must have been a moment of deficient face recognition – transient prosopagnosia – that was involved in his one meeting with Tony Blair" (S 142). On the one hand, such compulsion to diagnose the world around him could just be a personal trait of Henry that is caused by his profession. On the other hand, as mentioned before, such way of attributing different diagnosis on people Henry sees around him helps him to distance himself from them and also to make sense of the world around him.

Henry's tendency to diagnose the people he sees around him also saves him from the confrontation with Baxter after the car accident. As the confrontation is impending, he

does not abandon his social position. Instead, it is marked that “[h]e’s standing on professional dignity” (S 89). The same “professional dignity” seems to recognise Baxter’s behaviour as a symptom for a neurological condition, Huntington’s disease, and he is able to use this as a way out of the situation. Henry uses his knowledge and skills as a neurological surgeon to blackmail. The diagnosis and the offer of help, when there is no cure, suggest that Henry’s position could be read in terms of superior knowledge gaining the upper hand over someone who does not possess such faculties. Although Henry is in minority against the three young men in the other car, he considered himself to be in a superior position because of who he is – a middle-class doctor. Henry’s attempt at “blackmail” has purely egoistical motive and the instinct for self-perseverance but the fact that Henry manages to avoid physical contact seems to emphasise his superiority over Baxter.

At the climax of the novel, during the attack of Baxter on Henry’s family, it is again his superior knowledge and the promise of cure for Baxter that helps him save his family. He manages to lure the intruder away with a promise of a new clinical trial for Baxter’s disease and it is then that Theo and Henry are able to overtake Baxter. The violent intruder falls down the stairs and hits his head. Later in the night, Henry is called in from the clinic to operate on Baxter’s head injury. His wife Rosalind questions his decision to do that but Henry answers, “I have to see this through. I’m responsible” (S 239). This suggests that his position as a doctor means that he feels responsible for the weaker members of society and since he possesses the knowledge, he must perform his duty. It is not clear what Henry feels responsible for exactly: the way he handled the situation in the street, the fact that he pushed Baxter down the stairs or even the fact that Baxter has a neurological disease which he is not able to cure.



All in all, the way Henry sees the people around him in medical terms seems to suggest the idea that for him, society in general is not well. He also seems to believe that due to his position – he is able to offer some cure for it. On the one hand, such desire to diagnose everything that he sees around him suggests that Henry wishes to emphasise his own superior position – his able to see the diseases and able to offer the cure for them. On the other hand, it could also indicate guilt and anxiety in Henry and make him feel as if he is responsible for the betterment of society. At the same time, Henry's diagnoses help him to detach himself from the world around him and analyse it with the rational mind of a medic. This distance does not mean that Henry expresses his criticism about what he witnesses. Instead, he does not wish to interfere with the problems that the individual members of society are experiencing, unless they concern his own welfare. This can be read as an indication of the political context – Henry chooses his own well-being over communal good.

## CONCLUSION

Both novels by Ian McEwan, *The Child In Time* and *Saturday* invite a kind of political reading, which takes into account the representation of society and politics of the eras within which these novels were produced: the 1980s and the very beginning of the 21st century in the United Kingdom. The political interpretation takes into account the analysis of the dominant ideologies of the eras through identifying the “master codes” of the eras and looking at characters as the representatives of their particular social groups or as expressing some of the dominant issues of their context. The discussion of the texts focuses on the representation of political and social context of the novels in the texts by looking at the protagonists and their reported thoughts.

The aim of the thesis was to compare the two novels in regard to the ways of representation of the political and social context as manifested in the text. It is possible to find both similarities and differences between the representations of political and social contexts in the novel. Firstly, the protagonists of the novels, Stephen Lewis and Henry Perowne share a similar social background – they represent well-off middle class professionals. The commentary offered by third-person narrators, which report the thoughts of Stephen and Henry, place both characters in some ways to the position of an outsider in society. Stephen regards himself as an outsider because he neither wishes to identify himself with the “ordinary” people nor is supportive of the government policies. Henry’s view as an outsider is manifested in how his perspective on society is that of someone looking at it from a distance and how he is often trying to diagnose various members of society with neurological problems. In addition, his views on the war in Iraq also place him in opposition to the hundreds of thousands of people who went to the protest march, which forms the backdrop of the novel.

Such a position of an outsider who observes the world around him, allows both Stephen and Henry to comment on the political and social context by which they are surrounded. However, the opinions of Stephen and Henry on the state of society differ. Although Stephen is unable to express his critical stance towards the government policies when faced with people in power, the position of an outsider allows him to be critical about what is going around him. It is precisely at these moments that Stephen's reported thoughts take on a critical perspective as to the political and social context.

At the same time, although it seems as if Henry's ultra-rational mind cannot help but diagnose the people he sees around him, he expresses little criticism of the social situation of his society. His anxieties are to do with general fears of terrorism that would characterise the post-9/11 world. At the same time, Henry seems to be rather uncritical about and unaware of social injustice he meets in the streets and what might have caused it. Instead, his view as an outsider allows him to diagnose the individual members of society with various illnesses but he seems to have a limited view when it comes to criticising the flaws in society as a whole. Henry is more concerned with his own individual welfare than with the communal good. He is of the opinion that the threat to the society is external to it and that would be overcome by the more radical forces adapting the consumerist free-market way of life.

Nevertheless, the fact that Henry is not too critical about the dominant political situation in his society need not simply suggest that the author feels the same. Rather, in the analysis of presented in this paper, Henry stands for a social class and his opinions could be said to represent the perspective of that part of society. As mentioned above, the social standing of Stephen and Henry is similar, but the opinions which they express and which seem to represent their social status differ in their degree of criticism. This could be read as an indication of a shift in the minds of the well-off middle class – from noticing

social injustice and being able to criticise the political decisions which caused them, to resolving to think that the individuals themselves are to blame for their failure to succeed in society. This could also indicate that the social and political changes that took place in Britain in the 1980s have brought about the mentality that has become entrenched in society by the beginning of the 21st century, so that criticism targeted at government policies is no longer a pressing issue in the minds of the members of society who have gained from these changes. Therefore, the reduced critical perspective as seen in *Saturday* represents the change in the political contexts of the two novels.

The way of representing the ideology of the era differs in the two novels. *The Child In Time* takes place in a futuristic society compared to the time when it was written but at the same it still considered a realist novel and represents the political and social context of the 1980s in Britain. Depicting a possible futuristic society allows for a more critical perspective on the era within which the novel was written. For example, the idea and policy of licenced begging is depicted as something so habitual that it does not call for much attention from the members of society in the novel. The ideology behind licenced begging is, when analysed through “master codes”, comparable to the dominant ideology of the era of Thatcherism. The theoretical framework of the thesis suggests that the representation of ideology in a work of fiction allows the readers to distance themselves from it and this is achieved by placing the actions of the novels into the future.

*Saturday* is one of McEwan’s novels the most engaged with the present. The novel takes place on the day of a real historical event: the protest march against the war in Iraq held in London on February 15, 2003. This emphasises the realist aspect of the novel and the engagement with the social and political context of the era within which the book was written. On the one hand, depicting actual events means that the context shared by the original reader and the author is more explicit in the text; on the other hand, depiction of a

real historical occasion does not allow the readers to distance themselves from this context in order to perceive the critical perspective that might be offered by the author in the novel. Thus, by choosing the present context over near future, it is possible to conclude that the author has become less clear-cut in the critical perspective on the representation of the political context in the novel.

The discussion of the two novels has implied that the political context of the novel is mainly manifested through the characters and their expressions of ideology in reported thoughts or actions. The texts represent the ideological background of the novels through everyday experiences of the characters. In addition, the reported thoughts and actions of the characters in the novels also allude to the implied author and his views on the political and social issues of the era which the novel represents. Although the views of the real author and the views of the characters cannot be likened, the ways in which these are represented allow one to draw some conclusions concerning the shift in the author's perspective. The analysis of the two novels suggests that although the ideological dominants that define the eras have not changed much, the way the political context of the novel is addressed has become less critical in *Saturday* than it is in *The Child In Time*. The former offers the implied readers less opportunities to experience the ideology of the era from a distance. This suggests that the implied author's critical perspective and the distance the writer offers the reader from the ideological context of the novel have become less clear. This could also be supported by the fact that Ian McEwan has argued that Thatcherism had evoked an opposition from writers in the 1980s but that he also acknowledges Thatcher's importance to British society.

Contextualising these novels has brought out the dominant ideological and political undercurrents that have influenced the creation of the text. As mentioned in the theoretical framework of the thesis, texts which are written in a certain era restructure and reconstruct

this context in order to add meaning to it. In the case of comparing the ways of representation of the political context in *The Child In Time* and in *Saturday*, it is possible to claim that the literary commentary these novels offer on the eras they depict, indeed adds a critical dimension to the rewriting of the context. The comparison of the ways of representation of the political context in the text allows one to see how the implied author's perspective has shifted from social criticism by a middle-class protagonist to depicting the discomforts and anxieties of a similar character. Since fictional characters have been treated as representations of their social class and their thoughts and actions are considered to reflect society as a whole, it is possible to make comparisons between the individual lives of the characters and the collective history. This suggests that the discussion of such representations in fiction could serve as an indication of the changes which have taken place in society over time.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

**Eeva Sadam**

**The Representation of the Political Context in Ian McEwan's novels *The Child In Time* and *Saturday* (Poliitilise konteksti kujutamine Ian McEwani romaanides "Laps ajas" ja "Laupäev")**

Magistritöö

2013

Lehekülgede arv: 66

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärgiks on võrrelda poliitilise konteksti kujutamist Ian McEwani romaanides "Laps ajas" ning "Laupäev" võttes aluseks antud teoste peategelaste mõtted ja teod ning analüüsides nende tähendust kõrvutatuna antud ajastutel valitsenud poliitiliste ideoloogiate tunnustega.

Töö sissejuhatus keskendub Ian McEwanile kui poliitilisele autorile ning annab ülevaate tema romaane läbivatest poliitilisetest ning sotsiaalsetest teemadest. Ian McEwan on avaldanud oma seisukohti ühiskonnas oluliste teemade üle ka ajakirjanduses ning see on kooskõlas sellega, et ka tema romaanides on esindatud poliitilised ning ühiskonnakriitilised teemad.

Töö esimene peatükk visandab teoreetilise tausta toetudes peamiselt marksistlikule kultuuri- ja kirjandusteooriale. Peatükk keskendub ideoloogiale ning selle kujutamisele kirjandusteostes, tegelastele kui ühiskonna ja oma sotsiaalse klassi esindajatele ning teksti ja poliitilise reaalsuse vahelisele suhtele.

Teises peatükis on esitatud teoste analüüs, mis vaatleb, kuidas väljenduvad antud romaanides kujutatud ajastute ideoloogiad läbi tegelaste mõtete ning tegude. Empiirlikes osas vaadeldakse teoseid "Laps ajas" ja "Laupäev" eraldi, tuues esile, kuidas autor on kujutanud sotsiaalset ja poliitilist konteksti antud romaanides.

Töö kokkuvõttes võrreldakse, kuidas on poliitilist konteksti antud romaanides kujutatud. Selle tulemusena võib väita, et romaan "Laps ajas" väljendab rohkem poliitilise ja sotsiaalse ühiskonnakorraluse kriitikat kui "Laupäev". Muutused ühiskonnas, mis mõjutasid varasemas romaanis kujutatud poliitilist konteksti, on hiljem muutunud ühiskonnas normiks, mistõttu poliitilise konteksti kujutamises on vähem ühiskonnakriitikat.

Märksõnad: briti nüüdskirjandus, Ian McEwan, ideoloogia, poliitiline kontekst, ühiskonnakriitika kirjanduses

**Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks**

Mina \_\_\_\_\_ Eeva Sadam \_\_\_\_\_  
 (autori nimi)  
 (sünnikuupäev: \_\_\_\_\_ 30.11.1988 \_\_\_\_\_)

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