

Thatcher's Legacy?

Individualism and the Neurological Condition in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*

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Abstract: According to Susan Green (2010), Ian McEwan's 2005 novel *Saturday* represents a new kind of science fiction. It is, on the one hand, a reflection on the political undercurrents of Britain in the age of New Labour the War on Terror. On the other, it also represents McEwan's interest in neuroscience and an exploration of how degenerative mental conditions, such as dementia and Huntington's disease, impact memory and, consequently lead to a loss of identity.

This essay explores the interaction between the political and the neuroscientific in *Saturday*, viewing the relationship between the two through the prism of the concept of "aspirational individualism." In doing so, it argues that *Saturday* detects—at a time when the nature of 'New Labour' was up for debate—the continuity of a Thatcherite conceptualisation of the individual.

The novel, I suggest, offers a critique of this way of thinking about individualism by drawing attention to how degenerative conditions, especially those which are inherited, undermine a person's liberty and their ability to forge their own identity. The deployment of neuroscience in the novel is, in that sense, used to engage with (and ultimately express criticism of) a Thatcherite notion of the free individual.

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Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) is set in London in 2003 and, though it is not "science fiction" in a typical sense, the novel follows a day in the life of neuroscientist Henry Perowne. Moreover, *Saturday* is explicitly grounded in the era of New Labour and has as its backdrop a protest march against the 2003 war in Iraq. It was at the time of the Iraq war and the novel's publication (c.2003-05) that some commentators on the left—as well as on the right—started to view Tony Blair as a Prime Minister with neoconservative tendencies.¹ Laura Colombino (2017) argues, unconvincingly, that the novel should be understood in a specifically post-9/11 context, seeing the novel as one in which individual bodies represent or symbolise spaces of terror. This reading, though, is short-sighted and fails to recognise the importance of how the individual (beyond just the corporeal self) is genetically and socially constructed. While she appears to correctly identify the novel's exploration of how genetics can threaten the sense of an individual "self," she fails to place this into wider debates about the narrative self, as I will do in this article. The novel also comments upon the place of the arts and the

sciences in contemporary society, on professionalised medicine and the ethics of care, and, to a lesser extent, upon ideas of lifestyle and consumerism. But fundamentally, at the heart of *Saturday* is an exploration of the interaction between narrative, the construction of the individual self, and the limits of individualism—limits which are, in particular, imposed by a disability which takes the form of a neurological condition. In *Saturday*, McEwan's focus on the incurable neurological condition suffered by Baxter highlights those aspects of the self (and the cognitive abilities required to constitute the self (such as a functional memory), which are beyond the control of the individual.

1979 marked the beginning of almost two decades of Conservative Party governance, first under Margaret Thatcher and subsequently under John Major. It was not until 1997 that Labour returned to government, having had a series of leaders during its time in Opposition: James Callaghan (1976-1980), Michael Foot (1980-1983), Neil Kinnock (1983-1992), John Smith (1992-1994), Margaret Beckett (1994) and Tony Blair (1994-1997).² But when the party won

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in 1997, now under the guise of New Labour, it was significantly transformed. Overall, this article is not concerned with the exact reasons why, or the moment at which, Labour changed but, clearly, the Labour Party led by Michael Foot was markedly different to the New Labour manifestation led by Tony Blair. Instead, it is concerned with how McEwan's *Saturday* can be read as a reflection of the continuities of Thatcherism into the 21st century. As a public intellectual, McEwan has talked of his own ambivalence towards Blair and the Iraq War; he was aligned with others like Christopher Hitchens, primarily through the New Atheist movement, who were more openly pro-Iraq. Throughout the novel, there are clear indications that McEwan is aware of the various (and enduring) claims that Blair was a neoliberal and/or a neoconservative. *Saturday*, therefore, is a consideration of this ambivalence, not just about Blair and the Iraq war, but about the extent to which New Labour represented a continuation of Thatcherism (of which McEwan had been openly critical throughout the 1980s). One of the most significant ways that the political condition of Britain is explored in the novel is through its exploration of disability and the limits it poses to notions of "individualism."

In 2011, in one of his last contributions to the study of Thatcherism, Stuart Hall opined that Tony Blair was part of a "neoliberal revolution" that began under Thatcher. Hall took the view that "New Labour repositioned itself from centre-left to centre-right" (2011, p.19) and, like Thatcherism, he saw in it a tension between two fundamentally contradictory forces.³ Hall stated that, in New Labour, there "was a continuous tension between a strident, Fabian, Benthamite tendency to regulate and manage the ideology of the market, with its pressure for market access to areas of public life from which it had hitherto been excluded" (2011, p.20). The meta-narrative about several decades of unhindered neoliberalism, however, is a tired one which finds little appreciation among political scientists and historians today. There is some accuracy in what Hall suggests, but simply to say that Thatcher and Blair were part of the same neoliberal

lineage is as crude as it is incorrect. There is clear evidence, at the level of policymaking, that Thatcherism influenced New Labour, but there is also evidence (at this same level) that Blair fits much more comfortably in the Labour tradition than Hall's thesis acknowledged. As Ben Jackson (2017) has noted, for example, this is true of New Labour's childcare policy. The neoliberals on the right in the 1980s had supported a childcare voucher model, but New Labour's policy in the 1990s and beyond represented a shift towards state provision. This, however, was not universal: it did not return the state to the role that Labour manifestoes of previous decades had proposed. The policy, in the end, represented a patchwork of public and private providers. Despite the presence of the state in New Labour's policy, Jackson argues that the fact Blair did not introduce a universal childcare policy represents a success of neoliberal thinking—but not a direct continuity. Much in the same way, Richard Heffernan also sees New Labour not as a direct continuity, but as an "accommodation to and adaption of Thatcherism" (2000, p.178). So, while New Labour did not simply represent the continuation of the same "revolution" as Thatcherism, as Hall suggested, Thatcherism's influence upon it was evident and discernible. This article analyses how *Saturday* deals with ideas of aspirational individualism—and engages with contemporary philosophical debates about the aspirational self—to examine the extent to which the new 'Blairite' Labour Party had followed in the footsteps of Thatcherism.

As well as speaking to the specific political moment of the New Labour era, the novel also follows contemporary philosophical debates about the notion of the narrative self which began in the 1980s and continued into the 21st century. The concept of the narrative self—the constitution, representation and articulation of an individual identity through narrative(s)—was central to works by Charles Taylor, Jerome Bruner, Marya Schechtman, Daniel Dennett and Anthony Giddens.⁴ In 2003, Samantha Vice wrote that although individual lives are constituted through narrative, each person does not constitute

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their identity through narrative in the same way: some may actively think about their lives as a narrative while others may do it only in moments of reflection. Much more significant to both Thatcherism and the novel discussed here, though, is Vice's justification for why individual lives are understood in narrative terms. She states that "we experience ourselves and the world in a way [sic] that is meaningful and coherent, with a trajectory of development, in a way that promises, or actively seeks closure and significance" (2003, p.97). Although it is not explicitly identified, Vice's explanation of how the self operates through narrative has, at its heart, aspiration and hope. The aspirational individual is imagined to be the archetypal Thatcherite voter: hardworking entrepreneurs growing their business and working-class families buying their council houses under Right to Buy. But the role of aspiration in *Saturday* should not be overlooked, as it is through aspiration (and the myths surrounding what Vice calls the "trajectory of development" that McEwan explores the continuities of Thatcherite ideas of individualism.

Saturday takes place on 15th February 2003 and, like James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), the events of the novel occur within the space of a day. The novel opens with Henry Perowne, who has woken up in the early hours of the morning, bearing witness to a burning aeroplane gliding through the night sky. Henry follows developments about the plane crash via the television news throughout the course of the day; while it is of interest to him, though, the protest against the invasion of Iraq takes precedence and leads the news bulletins. The significance of narrative in the novel is established from the outset. Moreover, McEwan's protagonist—who often sees the world of the novel from a materialist perspective, reducing people to their genetic makeup and dismissing different aspects of self-identification—introduces the theme in his contrasting of the arts and sciences. Henry's daughter, Daisy, is a poet. The divide between the arts and the sciences in the novel is most prominently articulated through the tensions in their father-daughter relationship, with

Henry representative of the sciences and Daisy of the arts. Throughout the novel, Henry reads literary works at Daisy's recommendation but fails to understand the importance she places upon them and upon storytelling more broadly. Henry claims to be "living proof" (p.68) that people can live without stories, contrary to Daisy's belief. This, however, is not true. Although it appears true to him, McEwan undermines his narrator's claim by returning to Henry's worldview—which is itself informed through a particular narrative which Henry has constructed—throughout the novel. Henry is not a Thatcherite. His dislike for Thatcher is revealed in his political disagreements with his father-in-law, a poet nicknamed Grammaticus, who is described as "an early fan of Mrs Thatcher" (p.195). Henry also displays a degree of ambivalence towards Tony Blair, who is identified as the Prime Minister in the novel and who Henry has met. When Perowne sees Blair on TV, he describes how he feels forced to ask himself if Blair is trustworthy and looks for clues that he is lying—but all he ever sees, "at worst", is "a straining earnestness" (p.145). Aside from the personalities of the political era, however, Henry's ideological positions are much more complex and often put him at odds with his left-wing daughter. More significantly, though, these views are not simply stated at random. Instead, Henry constructs a narrative through which he justifies his politics: far from living without stories, *Saturday* has at its heart Henry Perowne's defence of liberal capitalist democracy and globalisation.⁵ This defence manifests as a story of global improvement over recent decades. He states that "At every level, material, medical, intellectual, sensual, for most people it [the world] has improved" (p.77). Upon passing the Chinese embassy in London, Henry's reflects upon how technology has made it unsustainable for Communist authoritarianism to persist in China. The country's economy has, in his view, "grown too fast" and "the modern world's too connected" for the Communist Party to "keep control" (p.123). The reason behind this, he proposes, is consumerism. He cites, as evidence for his claim about China, the growing presence of mainland Chinese consumers in Harrods "soaking

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up the luxury goods" (p.123). Yet, in his overall political thesis, it is not the products themselves but the very idea of consumerism—and the associated connotations of aspiration and the freedom to choose—which Henry says will be transformative. This notion is reinforced by his observation of how London has been transformed, for the better, by globalisation's introduction of different cultures through commercial enterprise. He remarks that:

This commercial wellbeing is robust and will defend itself to the last. It isn't rationalism that will overcome 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. Rather shop than pray. (p.126)

Again, despite not being a Thatcherite, Henry celebrates the virtue of liberal capitalist democracy as one in which consumerism, choice, and economic prosperity are the antidote to ideological extremism and authoritarianism.

Aside from explaining his worldview, Henry's narrative also establishes a sense of order and cohesion out of the modern-day crisis that appears to challenge it: radical Islamic terror. For Henry, despite the threat of Islamism the "world has not fundamentally changed" (p.77). Rather, "Islamic terror will settle into place" alongside other "crises" such as climate change and other recent wars. Henry actively uses this narrative of stability and progress as a counter-narrative to another. He imagines left-wing academics offering their students accounts of modern history which are designed for entertainment value and miss important examples of human progress which are deemed to be boring. Henry says of a local university:

The young lecturers there like to dramatize modern life as a sequence of calamities. It's their style, their way of being clever. It wouldn't be cool or professional to count

the eradication of smallpox as part of the modern condition. Or the spread of recent democracies. (p.77)

This, he goes on to suggest, is a systematic problem "for the humanities" in general, as "misery is more amenable to analysis: happiness is a harder nut to crack" (p.78).⁶ McEwan's framing of the humanities in *Saturday* contrasts their role in other British novels of the same year which dealt with similar themes, such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Henry Perowne sees the humanities as a means of reinforcing a narrative about human misery and decline, whereas in Ishiguro's novel, the humanities function as a way of making the lives of Hailsham's students meaningful. However, the humanities are presented, in both cases, as the antithesis of science and a force for deception.

Beyond this, though, the most significant exploration of narrative—and the narrative self—in *Saturday* is revealed in Henry's perception and medical analysis of a series of individuals with debilitating neurological conditions: his mother, patients at his hospital and, above all, Baxter⁷. McEwan's exploration of individualism in the novel is articulated most powerfully through his juxtaposed representations of Henry and Baxter, the violent gang leader whose car collides with Henry's. The confrontation leads to the novel's climax, in which Baxter breaks into Henry's home during a family dinner. Baxter is pushed down the stairs by Henry's son and sustains head injuries; later that evening, Henry is called by his hospital to operate on Baxter. It is during their initial heated exchange that Henry, aware that he cannot take on Baxter's gang physically, uses his knowledge as a neuroscientist to expose Baxter's condition. Baxter suffers from Huntington's disease, an inherited disorder which manifests as mental dysfunction, like memory loss, and physical symptoms including unsteadiness. His self-described reductionist perspective leads him to say of Baxter that "There is much in human affairs that can be accounted for at the level of the complex molecule" (p.91). His "reading" of the signs of Baxter's illness also enables him to separate other personality traits

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which he considers to be a performance: Henry is bemused by Baxter's gang as their threats seem to be like quotations from films that they have seen (p.90). In distinguishing between the ostensibly false, performed aspect of Baxter's behaviour and the (even if unknown to Baxter and his friends) serious reality of his condition, Henry begins to challenge the idea of a narrative, self-determined self. Rather, he says that Baxter's condition—the signs of which are clear to him—represent “biological determinism in its purest form” (p.93): Baxter's future is something over which he has no control because of a single, inherited gene. That Henry specifies that the gene is not simply the cause of the illness but that it is inherited further undermines the concept of the individual being an isolated, self-determined construction. In Baxter's case, his fate was determined at birth because of his parents' own genetic makeup. Nonetheless, the single inherited gene makes impossible any attempt by Baxter to live a life of his choosing as both his psychology and physical form are affected. This is made clear when Henry delves into specific details of how Baxter's condition will worsen over time. Vice's account indicates that individual narrative trajectories are of great significance to how the narrative self operates. Baxter's condition, however, means that he is unable to conceive of a future. Not only does his knowledge of what will happen to him limit his aspiration, but Henry points out that the cognitive means by which he can forge a narrative of his life—his memory and his consciousness—will deteriorate (p.96). Henry claims, upon reflection, to have seen in Baxter an acknowledgment of his limited future juxtaposed with his hidden aspiration. He says that Baxter displayed “real intelligence” as well as “dismay that he was living the wrong life” (p.111). The sentiment contained within the notion of “living the wrong life” furthers Henry's case: the “correct” alternative, imagined as part of a narrative project of self-betterment, cannot counter or overcome the way that the individual is determined, fundamentally, by the genetic.⁸

This initial encounter with Baxter is one of

numerous instances in the novel where Henry's reductionist viewpoint challenges the notion of the socially-constructed self. His view of how individual lives are a combination of biological determinism and social construction is articulated in his blurring of another patient's condition with the plane crash witnessed that morning. The patient is presented as a stropy and difficult person who will nonetheless “pull through” following her recent surgery (p.105). Beyond that, Henry says that it is her “own decision to crash” after a colleague suggests that she will “go down in flames” (p.105). The implication of this exchange is that human agency is secondary to biology: only after her condition has been treated is she free to be the cause of her own downfall. The language used to convey this mirrors the description of the plane crash, thereby suggesting that individual agency operates in a similar way: that the overall trajectory (that the plane will crash) cannot be altered but some limited control (such as how the plane crashes) can be exerted. Henry also sees the place of narrative and an aspirational trajectory as secondary to biology in the case of a second patient, Andrea Chapman. Andrea, a child whose operation has been a success, is contrasted with Baxter: she will make a full recovery and, Henry accepts, her life will be her own. He says of her future ambition, inspired by his own medical practice:

No one will ever quite know how many real or imagined medical careers are launched in childhood during post-operative daze. Over the years, a few kids have divulged such an ambition to Henry Perowne on his rounds, but no one has quite burned with it the way Andrea Chapman does now. (p.260)

At the heart of Henry's reflection, though, is the suggestion that aspirational narratives are imagined futures with no guaranteed reality. Finally, Henry's own mother, who suffers from dementia, is cited as a fourth instance of biologically-determined deterioration overwhelming the socially-constructed, narrativized self. Following a visit to his mother's care home, he talks about her memory loss which has

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already been established, in his analysis of Baxter, as a function of the brain upon which the narrative self is reliant. He refers to “the woman she once was” and describes how his visit “merges in memory with all the rest” (p.153). Vice’s narrative trajectory is further contradicted by Henry’s mother’s dementia. As well as losing her ability to remember who she is, her condition also removes her ability to be grounded in the present: she believes, Henry says, that her own mother is coming to collect her from the care home (p.160). However, of the four cases, it is here that he begins to concede that literary narratives can change human relations. Henry states that he once saw his mother as less intelligent than himself, and looked down upon her for being without curiosity. By reading a Victorian novel, though, he becomes more able to understand his mother’s achievements. He discovers, through the novel, “themes,” which explain his mother’s life story and is able, for the first time, to empathise with her (pp.155-156). This acknowledgment of literature’s affective potential is derived from Daisy’s insistence that he reads the novels she recommends. Her opinion of her father is summarised thus: “she thinks he’s a coarse, unredeemable materialist. She thinks he lacks an imagination. Perhaps it’s so, but she hasn’t quite given up on him yet” (p.134). However, it is not his newfound empathy for his mother through which he realises literature’s affective power, but in the final confrontation with Baxter at his home.

The close of the novel sees the return of Baxter. This time Baxter, accompanied by his gang, has broken into the Perowne family home during a family dinner party, at which Henry’s wife, children, and father-in-law are present. This moment also sees the return of Henry’s analysis of Baxter, in which the notion of a narrative self is more explicitly criticised. Henry continues to articulate a definition of the individual which is not based on aspiration or a social identity, but based upon biology and genetic makeup. To explain the irrational steps that Baxter has taken, Henry reflects upon “the truth” of Baxter’s knowledge of his own condition (p.210). Henry’s comments suggest that Huntington’s makes it impossible for

Baxter to see himself as part of a broader narrative trajectory, in the way that Andrea Chapman does, because he “believes he has no future and is therefore free of consequences” (p.210).⁹ During the time in which Baxter is in his home, Henry observes:

the unique disturbances, the individual expression of his condition—impulsiveness, poor self-control, paranoia, mood swings, depression balanced by outbursts of temper, some of this, or all of it and more, would have helped him, stirred him, as he reflected his quarrel with Henry this morning. (p.210)

To an extent, then, Baxter’s irrational actions (which might otherwise be framed as an individualistic expression of anger or rejection of the situation in which he finds himself) are not entirely his own. Henry’s summary of his condition here removes Baxter’s agency and deflects his behaviour, at least in part, onto his condition. What is more, not only is Baxter’s future compromised by his condition, but it also begins to change his identity in the present. Henry notes that soon Baxter’s illness will render his physical form “too absurd” to continue to perform his established social identity.¹⁰ Henry says:

Over the coming months and years the athetosis, those involuntary, uncontrolled movements, and the chorea—the helpless jitters, the grimacing, the jerky raising of the shoulders and flexing fingers and toes—will overwhelm him, render him too absurd for the street. His kind of criminality is for the physically sound. At some point he’ll find himself writing and hallucinating on a bed he’ll never leave, in a long-term psychiatric ward, probably friendless, certainly unlovable, and there his slow deterioration will be managed, with efficiency if he’s in luck. Now, while he can still hold a knife, he has come to assert his dignity, and perhaps even shape the way he’ll be remembered. (p.211)

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However, with this declaration, Henry inadvertently highlights another means by which identities are constructed and maintained through narrative: specifically, how memories are shaped. This is the beginning of a sequence of statements which betray his initial notion, that people can live without stories, was not entirely correct. Although he has already identified that Baxter will suffer memory loss, his comment about shaping “the way he’ll be remembered” emphasises the extent to which narratives of the self, persist in others’ memories. To an extent, Baxter appears able to control how he will be remembered and how the narrative account of his life, even after the eventual decline that Henry describes, will play out. The control he has over this and his own individualism as individual agency, however, remains limited. What Perowne begins to articulate is an understanding of individual identity seen as an interaction between the biological and the social, but in which control over both is limited. Within this definition, biological factors still outweigh social influences in the constitution of the individual: the former can render the latter inoperable, as Baxter’s illness demonstrates. However, where socially-constructed individualism is more significant than biologically-determined individualism is in relation to how individuals are remembered by others, Henry suggests that Baxter remains capable, despite his own inevitable demise, of shaping how others will remember him. In this way, his identity will continue to be narrativised by how others construct him in memory—and his socially-constructed self, rather than his genetic makeup, will determine how he exists in such accounts. The second instance of Henry’s realisation of storytelling’s importance comes when Baxter forces Daisy, now naked, to read one of her poems to him. The affective power of Daisy’s writing causes Baxter to become over-emotional which, subsequently, allows Henry to outwit him and lead him away from his family. In the moment Henry witnesses Baxter’s emotional breakdown, the literary narrative’s affective function is secondary to the observation that narrative appears to be intrinsic to the human mind. Specifically, Henry acknowledges that, in Baxter’s deteriorating mind, there is a loss of

the narrative process through which we understand and articulate a “continuous self” (p.223). Once again, he posits a definition of individualism which is an interaction between genetics and narrative, and in which a genetic defection manifests as the breakdown of that narrative. In Baxter’s case, Henry states that “It’s of the essence of a degenerating mind, periodically to lose all sense of continuous self, and therefore any regard for what others think of your lack of continuity” (pp.223-224). Baxter’s lack of continuity, in this instance, is the sudden shift from his performed street thug identity to somebody who is visibly emotional because of Daisy’s poem. The implication of what Henry concludes, though, is that a functional mind, unaffected by an impairment of any kind, is one which comprehends the world and the individual’s place and relations within it through a narrative structure.

The novel ends with Henry’s more assertive and explicit rejection of the idea of the socially-constructed individual: Perowne reflects upon the nature of individualism, and why people live the lives they do, and concludes that “It can’t just be class or opportunities—the drunks and junkies come from all kinds of backgrounds, as do the office people. Some of the worst wrecks have been privately educated.” (p.272). Here he rejects various processes of socialisation, such as economic advantages and education, as the key factors which shape individual identities. Vice’s definition of the narrative self is one in which a clear trajectory exists and individual lives are coherently structured and narrated through largely self-determined stories. By contrast, for Henry, “The random ordering of the world” presents the individual with “a trillion trillion possible futures” (p.128). In Henry’s view, too many peoples’ lives either exceed the limitations imposed upon them by their background or, by contrast, they lead lives in adulthood which are comparatively worse than during adolescence. Instead, “Perowne, the professional reductionist, can’t help thinking it’s down to invisible folds and kinks of character, written in code, at the level of molecules,” adding that “No amount of social justice will cure or disperse

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this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town" (p.272). To this end, Jane Macnaughton is right to state that the novel "does not make a convincing case for the efficacy of a literary education for doctors. Perowne can live without fiction and is clearly able to be responsive to his patients' stories without first having his sensibilities refined by literature" (2007, p.74). Henry is more understanding of literature's affective power, of its significance in others' lives, and of the importance of storytelling in the construction of identities. None of these discoveries are, however, so fundamental that they alter either his professional practice or his political philosophy, which is reinforced at the end of the novel. The unknown narrator, acknowledging Henry's reductionist perspective, explicitly criticised the so-called political Third Way—with its emphasis on social justice—upon which New Labour was built. What is more, the suggestion that state intervention is capable of alleviating inequality and social disadvantage is rejected. Instead, a more typically Thatcherite alternative is presented, reflecting the sentiment of Thatcher's "no such thing as society" comments: that individuals are ultimately responsible for their own behaviour, not society. Ultimately, then, this appears as something of a contradiction within the novel. Henry has consistently presented the view that there are limitations to individualism, both biological (in terms of genetic defects) and social (in that we cannot control how others construct our identities). Nonetheless, despite this lack of control, the novel concludes with the view that individual identities are pre-determined: while self-narration has a role to play in providing coherence and structure in individuals' lives, the scope of these narratives is limited by that which is already "written in code" (p.272). What Perowne does, then, is to reject the concept of the aspirational individual at the heart of Thatcherism, while simultaneously making the biomedical case for the Thatcherite idea of self-reliance and the argument against the welfare state.

Fundamentally, what the novel seeks to do, then, is to challenge the emphasis placed upon the as-

pirational individual within Thatcherite discourse. In particular, *Saturday's* aim is to draw attention to the extent to which freedom and individual choice are limited. The main way in which the novel achieves this is by emphasising the differences between socially-constructed and genetically-determined notions of "the individual." Within the novel's exploration of these two expressions of individualism, there are two main common themes. The first is the contrasting of the humanities (associated with socially-constructed identities) with the biological sciences (linked to genetically-determined identities). In the novel, aspiration and self-determination are undermined by the biological factors that influence individuals. *Saturday's* Baxter is seen to perform an identity of his choosing—but the circumstances of his birth undermine any element of choice in deciding his future. Samantha Vice's identification of a narrative trajectory at the heart of the narrative self is especially important to my reading of *Saturday*. It is these characters' lack of future in particular—and the futility of a rhetoric which promotes ambition and self-reliance—which most forcefully challenges the Thatcherite conceptualisation of individualism. The second theme is the introduction of medical tropes—and, particularly, the exploration of power and authority through the professional-patient relationship. This relationship serves as a vehicle through which a patient's identity is changed against their will. The authority attached to the medical professional in both cases affords them the ability to deny the patient's self-expression by drawing upon the genetically-determined aspects of their identity, over which they have a greater understanding. To this end, the novel proposes that individual identities, fates, and opportunities are not solely determined by individuals themselves—and they highlight the extent to which those in positions of authority can re-work and revise the narrativised identities that individuals have articulated.

Yet, despite the challenge the novel poses to Thatcherite ideas of aspiration and individualism, it demonstrates an ambivalence towards them, rather than an explicit rejection of them. Henry Pero-

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wne's celebration of Western capitalist liberal democracy, the end of the Cold War, medical developments in recent decades and his general sense that life has improved for most people appears acceptant of some aspects of Thatcher's legacy. His observation that there is a direct link between consumerism and freedom is not unlike Thatcher's own view. McEwan's exploration of the narrative self also concludes that narratives—even if untrue—can provide necessary frameworks through which individuals can feel more fulfilled. This is articulated clearly in the contrasting of how disability is experienced by Baxter (who has no future) and Andrea Chapman (who does, precisely because she presents an aspirational narrative trajectory). As a result, both portrayals challenge elements of the Thatcherite discourse surrounding individualism, but they also provide justification for why the idea—even if flawed—of the self-determined, aspirational individual in control of their fate can be fulfilling. The novel, fundamentally, also highlights the potential for McEwan's "new" science fiction, and the exploration of disability, to act as a means by which to interrogate political thought.

Notes

¹ Ben Rawlence (2004) wrote in the *Guardian* that Tony Blair's neoconservatism predated that of George W. Bush. Rawlence stated that Blair was a neoconservative, and not simply a liberal interventionist, because of the "scope of his ambition": Blair, apparently, had an "agenda" which was "almost imperial in scope" (n.p.). Writing from the right, Douglas Murray also suggests, in *Neoconservatism: Why We Need It* (2005), that Blair's neoconservative foreign policy preceded Bush's, rather than followed it. Murray also identifies, in the neoconservatism of Blair and Bush, an acknowledgment of the End of History thesis and a celebration of the triumph of liberal democracy (p.163). Mark Mardell (2003) wrote, for the BBC, that Blair was not a neoconservative, but that his agenda was compatible with that of neoconservatives like Dick Cheney.

² James Callaghan and Michael Foot both resigned

the leadership following General Election losses. Neil Kinnock did not resign after Labour's 1987 General Election defeat as the party won 20 seats and increased its share of the vote; Kinnock resigned following Labour's loss at the 1992 General Election. John Smith died in office and Margaret Beckett subsequently held the role on a temporary, acting basis. Tony Blair remained leader until his resignation in 2007, having won three General Elections.

³ There is a degree of truth in this. Analysis by the Comparative Manifesto Data project team demonstrates that in 1997, for the first time, Labour's manifesto was classifiably "centre-right". New Labour's 2001 manifesto returned it (although only marginally) to the centre-left, following which it began to move more to the centre (Afonso, 2015).

⁴ Anthony Giddens was a significant influence on Tony Blair's politics. As Bill Jordan points out, Giddens' "Third Way" "redefined the central terms of the debate between liberalism and socialism" by "fusing individual choice with equality and social justice" (2010, p.47). The continued focus on individualism and individual choice (albeit framed in a different way) is one indicator of Thatcherism's influence on New Labour and social democracy more broadly. Giddens, though, did not accept that New Labour was a continuation of Thatcherism. In his reflection of its time in office, he said that he understood why some felt New Labour did not deliver the "New Dawn" it promised, but he nonetheless distinguished it from the "disastrous legacy" of Thatcherism (Giddens, 2010, n.p.).

⁵ Further to this, he also acknowledges that the news media constructs a narrative in the way in which it sets its agenda and constructs a narrative about what is important and what is less important. He notes that the media's interpretation of which of the day's events is most important is contrary to his own (p.178)

⁶ Curtis D. Carbonell (2010) has read McEwan's *Enduring Love* (1997) as evidence of McEwan's interest in exploring the common ground between the humanities and the sciences—and bringing them

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into conversation. This interest, as I will demonstrate, is also present in *Saturday*. McEwan presents Henry as a self-confessed reductionist, initially sceptical of the humanities. By the end of the novel, though, Henry's worldview is altered when McEwan causes the sciences and humanities to collide during Baxter's invasion of the Perowne family home. This reading is supported by Jane F. Thrailkill's (2011) essay "Ian McEwan's Neurological Novel," in which she argues that McEwan presents a constructivist model of knowledge, in a narrative in which individuals (including the author) contribute to the creation of knowledge. For her, *Saturday* is a meditation upon how to bridge the gap between the humanities and the sciences.

⁷The significance of disability and neurological medical science in the novel, even despite its political themes, leads Susan Green (2010) to conclude that, in *Saturday*, Ian McEwan has created a new form of science fiction. Green justifies this claim by stating that the novel deploys the "language and interests of science as narrative technique" and that McEwan uses the novel as a vehicle to promote a "cultural shift in ideas" about consciousness, as well as capturing ideas about consciousness (2010, p.70). This "new form" of science fiction is one which uses an accessible literary form to communicate ideas about science and "explore what we do not yet understand" (Green, 2010, p.71).

⁸Giving Baxter a severe genetic condition like Huntington's syndrome reinforces Perowne's point in a way that a character with a simpler genetic disorder would not. This is an example of how, as I have mentioned, McEwan prepares to stage an interaction between the sciences and the humanities at the end of the novel: by equipping Perowne with concrete evidence which supports his reductionist worldview (in the form of Baxter's condition, rather than a simpler one), McEwan enables him to articulate his position unchallenged until the final confrontation.

⁹There is an implicit suggestion here that to see oneself as part of a narrative trajectory—in which

one's aspirations and a meaningful future could be put at risk by actions such as Baxter's—is also a form of control. In this sense, the idea of the narrative self encapsulates the tension, inherent in Thatcherism, between liberty and authority.

¹⁰I use the word "perform" consciously here as, in their initial exchange, Henry makes multiple references to the comical and bemusing actions of Baxter and his gang which he sees as a performance rather than a genuine identity. Henry likens their initial threats to lines from films and struggles to see their behaviour as genuine, rather than a mimicry of something they have witnessed elsewhere (pp.86-90).

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