

INTERTEXTUAL ECHOES: VIOLENCE, TERROR, AND NARRATIVE IN THE
NOVELS OF IAN MCEWAN AND GRAHAM SWIFT

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2006

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The College of Graduate Studies

(Interdisciplinary Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Okanagan

July 2008

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Abstract

Numerous studies have pointed to the historiographic and metafictional aspects of Ian McEwan's and Graham Swift's fiction, although few have examined the connections between McEwan and Swift. This study develops from that work by proposing that McEwan's and Swift's fictions explore similar themes, beyond those of just history and metafiction. By situating McEwan and Swift as postmodern writers who are strikingly intertextual, in the sense initially coined by Julia Kristeva, this study will show that both authors are deeply concerned with the violence of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and the role that violence has played in the failure of metanarratives, as well as the resulting terror subjects face as they seek replacements for the personal authenticity, legitimacy, and meaning once provided by totalizing metanarratives. This study also illustrates that McEwan and Swift recognize the persistence of the metanarrative of science, as well as the psychic violence inherent in trying to replace metanarratives with received literary traditions. By developing on these ideas, this thesis argues that McEwan and Swift are actively engaged not only in exploring the anxiety subjects face as they realize there is nothing left upon which they can base their personal legitimacy, but also that the authors are suggesting there is no easy replacement for the lost, albeit fictitious, authenticity once situated in metanarratives and received genres. Finally, this paper will demonstrate that while these two contemporary novelists significantly problematize narrative and narrative frameworks, McEwan and Swift ultimately convey only one sure method to cope with the mourning and terror of the postmodern condition: continue writing.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Gustar for all her guidance and advice on this project, as well as her unending patience and encouragement as I worked through “the gnarly bits.” Also, I would like to thank Dr. Paul Milton for letting me stand in his office doorway and bounce my ideas off him.

In addition, I would like to say thank-you to the University of British Columbia Okanagan College of Graduate Studies for the generous entrance scholarship in support of my research.

On a personal note, my heartfelt gratitude goes to Ian, for his everlasting support, for listening as I worked through my ideas over and over again, and for always being there when I needed another word for something. Also, thanks to Sandra, who encouraged me to begin this journey in the first place.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Sections:	
I. Introduction.....	1
II. The Fictiveness of Fiction: McEwan and Swift Critiqued.....	9
III. Intertextuality: Beyond the Hunt for Sources.....	14
IV. “Stumbling and Backtracking”: Science as Intertext.....	23
V. Twentieth-Century Legacy: Violence as Intertext.....	32
VI. Perceptible Machinations: Genre as Intertext.....	42
VII. Interrupted Continuity: Genealogy as Intertext.....	56
VIII. “The Attempt Was All”: Narrativizing the Postmodern Condition.....	63
Works Cited.....	74

I. Introduction

Ian McEwan¹ and Graham Swift² are both contemporary British writers whose bodies of work have engaged with the complex, sometimes confusing and always unstable, position of the human subject in postmodernity. Publishing during an age which is framed by, and intersects with, violence, McEwan and Swift create fictions which reflect the impacts of this violence on the human subject. McEwan's monikers from his early novels, "Ian Macabre" and the "Clapham Shocker," along with his later work, suggest that he, perhaps more so than

¹ Ian McEwan was born on June 21, 1948 in Aldershot, England. He received his BA in 1970 from the University of Sussex, and completed his Masters Degree at the University of East Anglia. His first collection of short stories, *First Love, Last Rites*, published in 1975, won the 1976 Somerset Maugham Award. He went on to publish *In Between the Sheets* in 1978, for which he also won the Somerset Maugham Award, and in the same year also published *The Cement Garden*. In 1981 McEwan again put out two publications, *The Comfort of Strangers* and *The Imitation Game*. By this time, McEwan had earned himself the monikers "Ian Macabre" and "The Clapham Shocker" (Finney 68) due to the graphic nature of his early novels. In 1983, McEwan was contracted to write an oratorio, which he named "Or Shall We Die?" which addressed some of the social and political issues McEwan was concerned with in the early 1980s. In 1987 McEwan published what is arguably his first major novel, *The Child in Time*. The novel was a departure from McEwan's earlier, more morbid novels, and won him critical acclaim, including the Whitebread Novel Award in 1987, and the Prix Fémina Etranger in 1993. In 1988 McEwan published *Sour Sweet*, and in 1990 he published *The Innocent*, followed by *Black Dogs* in 1992. He then went on to publish *The Daydreamer* in 1994, *Enduring Love* in 1997, and *Amsterdam* in 1998, for which he won the Booker Prize for Fiction. His next, and perhaps most critically acclaimed, novel, *Atonement*, was published in 2001, and won the WH Smith Literary Award in 2002, the National Book Critics' Circle Fiction Award in 2003, the Los Angeles Times Prize for Fiction, also in 2003, and the Santiago Prize for the European Novel in 2004. In 2005 McEwan published the novel *Saturday*, for which he won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 2006. McEwan's most recent novel, *On Chesil Beach*, was published in 2007, and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

² Graham Swift was born on May 4, 1949 in Catford, South London, England. He graduated from Queen's College, Cambridge in 1970 and completed his MA in nineteenth-century literature in 1973 at York University. He published his first novel, *The Sweet Shop Owner* in 1980. His second novel, *Shuttlecock*, was published in 1981 and won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. Swift then published a collection of short stories, *Learning to Swim and Other Stories* in 1982. In 1983 Swift went on to publish what is arguably his most popular novel, *Waterland*, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction, and won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize, the Guardian Fiction Prize, the Premio Grinzane Cavour (Italy), and the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Swift's next novel, *Out of this World* was published in 1988, followed by *Ever After* in 1992, for which he won the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger (France). In 1996 Swift published *Last Orders*, which won the Booker Prize for Fiction and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. Swift's most recent novels, *The Light of Day* and *Tomorrow*, were published in 2003 and 2007, respectively.

Swift, is fascinated with all aspects of violence, including the perpetration of violence, such as when he describes the gruesome dismemberment of the antagonist in *The Innocent*, and the impact of violence on the psyche of those who experience it. The impact of violence on the human subject is also a concern of Swift's, and it is no surprise considering the century in which the two authors were born and raised. At the start of the twentieth century, Britain was engaged in the Boer Wars, then, in the next fifty years, participated in the First and Second World Wars. At the start of the twenty-first century, England was shocked and saddened when news spread of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, then began actively to engage in the resulting "war on terror." Then, in 2005, something closer to home: citizens of the UK experienced seemingly unexpected violence perpetrated by anonymous others on its own territory in the London tube station bombings. As my thesis will show, all of this violence has played a role in a larger questioning of those narratives which allowed subjects to know their place in the world. These narratives, metanarratives, explain to subjects how they came to be where they are in the world, and, ultimately, how the world will end, whether it is through the eventual 'civilization' of all cultures to a form of Western homogeneity, through an apocalyptic end such as that set out by the Bible, or through complete enlightenment as promised by the predominant narratives of modernity: Science and History. As these metanarratives of Western culture were undermined and could no longer be supported or authenticated as a source for the human subject to find meaning in the world, incidents of violence and terror became more than just literal. That is, without metanarratives to ground and authenticate subjectivity, the subjects themselves began to feel terror not only from the outside violence, but also from within themselves, as they realized that "extinction" and "oblivion" are the only two things awaiting them after life (McEwan

Atonement 236, 372). Moreover, without metanarratives to justify violence, such as wars fought in the name of religion and brutal colonial missions which would ostensibly ‘civilize’ the Other, twentieth and early twenty-first century violence is experienced differently than it has been in the past. Further, the media has brought this violence into the living rooms of the world, and images such as the planes hitting the World Trade Center, the brutality of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the murder and mayhem in any given area, are repeated nightly. For any and all subjects who choose to turn on the television, use the internet, or listen to the radio, representations of violence and the effects of violence are driven home time and again.

McEwan’s and Swift’s characters not only deal with literal acts of violence and the terror that results, but the novels also explore psychic violence and terror. For the purposes of this discussion, I will address McEwan’s and Swift’s most popular novels, *Atonement* and *Waterland*, which have received the majority of the attention from critics, but I will also focus on a selection of their other works, specifically those which highlight this concern, sometimes in greater depth than do the more popular novels. For example, McEwan’s *Enduring Love* has received relatively little consideration by literary critics, yet illustrates the way real violence serves as a form of psychic violence. In addition, the act of retroactive narration in McEwan’s *Enduring Love* and *Saturday*, as well as in Swift’s *Ever After*, *Last Orders*, and *The Light of Day* serves as a kind of autobiographic search for personal authenticity or origins. Further, all of the novels foreground the way subjects in postmodernity are grasping to construct legitimacy for their own stories. At some point in each novel the protagonists and narrators apply a received generic convention to the narratives they are telling, and in each novel this application of received genres fails to give

the narrator the legitimacy he or she seeks. The application of received genre also fails to provide the narrator with any kind of consolation for the deauthorization of the metanarratives of Western culture. As such, the application of received and traditional genres becomes equally as problematic as the application of metanarratives, something else protagonists such as Tom Crick in Swift's *Waterland* and Henry Perowne in McEwan's *Saturday*, come to realize. In the end, each narrator recognizes his or her position on the brink of the "oblivion" of "extinction," yet each also seems to find something to hold the terror of this positioning at bay.

Many critics of McEwan's and Swift's works situate the novelists as postmodern because of the issues they deal with in their fiction (Lea, Malcolm, Finney, Phelan). Specifically, both authors' works have been critiqued in terms of their application of postmodern theory in their working through of the modernist concept of a linear and finite history which is ever moving forward towards an apocalyptic end; yet the novelists are concerned not only with the metanarrative of history, but also postmodernity's "incredulity towards metanarratives" in general (Lyotard xxiv). That is, both authors incorporate this skepticism towards the *grand récits*, or totalizing stories that portend to sum up the world in one account; both authors use history as an example of the "obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation" (Lyotard xxiv). This example, as well as several other examples of postmodernity's "incredulity towards metanarratives," illustrates the way that interpretation and representation—of the past and of received narratives—are deeply implicated in one another.

To date, a number of studies have examined how historians negotiate their access to the events of the past and how they narrativize, or represent, that past (LaCapra, Yeo, Joyce,

White, Zagorin). Metahistorians such as Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra have questioned historiography—strictly speaking the writing, or representation, of history—and the biases inherent in any one historian’s interpretation and representation of the meaning of historical “facts” or events. Hayden White proposes that historiography must be examined not only in light of what constitutes historical consciousness and explanation, that is, practice, but also in terms of the actual forms of representation. Postmodern literary theorist Linda Hutcheon moves this discussion from history as written to the representation of history in fiction and equates postmodernity with “historiographic metafiction.” McEwan and Swift are identified as part of this archive, and are known for their practice of writing historiographic metafiction. However, this connection has already been well-documented, and I will return to a discussion of this documentation later to contextualize my argument. At this point, I will discuss the implications of their engagement with postmodern theory.

Both Ian McEwan and Graham Swift began to publish on a large-scale in the last two decades of the twentieth century, a century which saw two World Wars change the fundamental nature of society and introduce very real violence and terror for UK citizens, such as the London Blitz, as well as nightly representations of violence in the form of news of the brutality occurring around the world, such as the Holocaust, the bombing of Dresden, the Pearl Harbor bombing, and Hiroshima. As Holocaust survivor and author Elie Wiesel states, when writing about his experiences “language became an obstacle” (ix) and he could not find the words that could accurately depict the horror that he survived. As such, he had to rely on words such as “hunger” that “seemed meager, pale, [and] lifeless” compared to what he actually went through (ix); essentially, survivor narratives were limited by words that could not come close to describing the reality the Jewish prisoners experienced. Through

fiction, Wiesel goes on to foreground the inability of language to accurately represent the Jewish experience, even amongst Jewish people themselves. Wiesel states that the Jewish people still in ghettos in their own towns were hearing reports of the violence and terror of the concentration camps, but they could not and did not believe it because they could not fathom the kind of violence being spoken of; they had no experience that would lend understanding, and there was no language to accurately describe what it was like (7). Even after the war when death tolls were calculated and revealed to the world and survivor accounts began to surface, the inability of language to accurately depict the horror of the concentration camps has affected the stories people and cultures tell themselves in order to situate their own experiences of the world. The legacy of this violence and terror, and the inability to contextualize or make sense of it with language, has had a great impact in postmodernity. As Lyotard writes, “the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (37).

This failure of language to represent experience is suggestive of the ways in which language, insofar as it is deployed in narrative, has failed to account for human experience. Thus, in the historical present in the West, a problematization of the metanarratives of modernity prevailed as subjects realized that “language is inescapably figurative, the meaning of a text cannot be separated from its expression” (Bennett and Royle 79). Postmodern writing practices, such as self-reflexive artistic practices which engage with the instability of knowledge and the figurative nature of language, have come to represent the larger historical moment of postmodernity, which is facing an epistemic crisis of the Western metanarratives which have given subjects authenticity, legitimacy and a sense of their

origins, or meaning, for hundreds of years. As Linda Hutcheon points out, postmodernity “challenge[s] the empiricist, rationalist, humanist assumptions of our cultural systems, including those of science” (Hutcheon 6). Through critical theory, modernist metanarratives³ have become problematized. Prior to this postmodern problematization of metanarratives, “people believed the truth of the world either lay there naked to behold” or was mapped out by the stories that summed up the world (Tennenhouse 139). The repetition of these truths, in the form of metanarratives, reaffirms to human subjects how and why they came to be as they are in the world, and often offer consolation as to the finite and apocalyptic end. Some common metanarratives are those of science, history, religion, and colonialism, insofar as they offer a narrative of the meaning, value, and coherence of, the human subject and her actions in the world. However, the violence and terror of the Second World War, as we have seen, have contributed to the “decline of the unifying and legitimating power of the grand narratives” (Lyotard 38). In particular, totalizing and linear metanarratives such as those deployed in Colonialism, missionizing Christianity, and history as enlightenment, were undermined by the violence of the Holocaust, and other twentieth century violence. Essentially, the carnage of the Jewish genocide, as well as the massacre of the Japanese by any means necessary, destabilized the notion of Enlightenment as *the* project of modernity because atomic bombs, genocide, racial privilege, and the promise of a God who could not save the Jewish people were genuinely unable to sustain credulity (Lyotard 72). Instead, the barbarism towards humans during the Holocaust has led to “the decline of narrative... which has shifted emphasis from the end of action to its means” (Lyotard 37), thus undermining any kind of predetermined conclusion to ontological narratives.

³ Generally, a metanarrative is viewed as a recurring narrative that sums up the world in one coherent, totalizing account, usually used to explain ontological reality, as well as the teleological trajectory of human existence.

It is this instability that McEwan and Swift are dealing with in their novels as they foreground the legacy of violence and terror and the loss of metanarratives as a way of ensuring authenticity, through intertexts in their fictional narratives. Although their novels have been repeatedly classified as historiographic metafiction which “mark the representational crossover between a theory of history as centered and teleological and a counter theory of history as decentered and random” (Cooper 389)⁴, I will expand on this classification to discuss their novels not only as historiographic metafiction, but also as foregrounding our mourning for the loss of metanarratives. Their fiction tends to examine the means by which we make sense of our cultural and historical moment, rather than the end in view. In this study, I will show that McEwan and Swift are profoundly concerned with the possibilities and importance of telling personal stories in the face of failing metanarratives. I will do this by examining their use of intertextuality—including the intertextuality of metanarratives, of narratives of violence, and the intertexts of genre. As well, I will address the potential violence genre can do to a narrative, leaving a legacy of terror with which the Western human subject must cope.

⁴ Specifically, McEwan’s *Atonement* and Swift’s *Waterland*.

II. The Fictiveness of Fiction: McEwan and Swift Critiqued

McEwan's *Atonement* and Swift's *Waterland* are these authors' most popular novels. As such, they are the novels which have received the majority of the literary acclaim dedicated to each McEwan and Swift. Despite the fact that both of these novels present similar themes addressing the problematization of narrative and history, they have only been linked in passing, most often when discussing postmodern novelists as a whole (Bényei, Brannigan, Gąsiorek), and there have been no studies to date which compare the two authors extensively. Because the body of knowledge on their works is primarily dedicated to *Atonement* and *Waterland*, any review of the literature will primarily focus on those two novels, although I do wish to pick up on some of the critiques of their lesser known novels.

Graham Swift's *Waterland* has been critiqued more extensively than any of his other novels and many critics such as Pamela Cooper, Robert K. Irish, Ronald H. McKinney, Ernst van Alphen and others, have focused on the interaction between narrative and history, and the ways in which *Waterland* explores the "fictiveness of our fictions" of history (McKinney 825). These critiques have also explored the implications this has for the protagonist and narrator, Tom Crick, as he attempts to find meaning and order in history to combat the chaos of his present reality. However, what he actually comes to realize is that "history is a matter of reflection, the attempt to retrieve or find or impose logic and order on what is neither logical nor orderly; it is the creation of a public reality" (Janik 85).

Critics such as Brian Finney and Pilar Hidalgo have noted similar themes in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, which, like Swift's *Waterland*, has been reviewed far more extensively than any other of McEwan's novels. Finney points out the ways that *Atonement* explores not only history, but the fictiveness of the fiction of history. Finney also emphasizes

the fictiveness of the fiction that McEwan has created in and through this novel. That is, Finney uses theory from Derrida and Kristeva to suggest that this novel is embedded with meaning not just from the fiction McEwan is writing, but also from the past it deploys, both the fact of the Second World War and the fiction of previous works such as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Similarly, Hidalgo's critique of *Atonement* stresses the historiographic elements by pointing out how much British fiction in the late 1990s and early 2000s has engaged with notions of history and historical representations. He notes that contemporary British authors engage with non-traditional literary methods of representing history, and he provides many examples of novels which address the distant European past, incorporate both fact and fiction, and express this integration in a variety of forms. Hidalgo suggests that McEwan's transition from stories about the present—such as *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers*—to novels that both create and engage with European history culminates with *Atonement*, which serves as McEwan's most compelling example of historiographic metafiction.⁵

While numerous critiques focus on the historiographic metafictional nature of McEwan's and Swift's novels (Hidalgo, Wheeler, van Alphen, Gaşiorek), few move beyond simply establishing their fiction as employing intertextuality to question the metanarrative of history and other historically inherited metanarratives. However, Daniel Lea's book on Graham Swift is one exception in that it moves beyond the narrow approach of detailing the historiographic metafictional nature of the texts to address the problems of the loss of metanarratives for Swift's narrators. In the case of *Waterland*, Lea notes that the novel is

⁵ McEwan's *Atonement* was adapted into a screenplay by Christopher Hampton and was released as a movie in 2007 by Working Title Productions. It quickly gained critical acclaim, winning a Golden Globe and a BAFTA for Best Film, as well as being nominated for seven Academy Awards, including Best Film.

concerned with “the shaky premise that the past contains the epistemological structures for interpreting the present,” and that without history, Tom is unable to find an authentic presence in the “Here and Now” (Lea 79). One example Lea notes of Tom’s continuous apprehension of the loss of authenticity and presence is the recurrent imagery of “mother’s milk” (Swift *Waterland* 1). He likens Tom’s anxiety surrounding this imagery to the Lacanian theory of the recognition of self in the early stages of childhood and argues that the repetition of the image of “mother’s milk” throughout the novel represents Tom’s symbolic desire to return to the imagined maternal body and wholeness (Lea 85-6). What Lea does not suggest is that Tom’s tone when he mentions “mother’s milk” is almost wistful, just as it is when, on the very first page of the novel, Tom refers to mother’s milk as “fairy-tale words” (*Waterland* 1). By the time he is narrating this novel, Tom seems consciously to recognize that the wholeness he longs for is imaginary and thus unattainable, as evidenced by the moment Mary collapses in his arms after she returns the baby. Though he notes it is “unaccustomed,” he no longer sees her as a mother—imaginary or otherwise—and instead becomes her “pillar of support” (*Waterland* 314), just as he realizes there is no history that can provide him with a place to secure an authentic identity as, “there are different versions.... There always are” (*Waterland* 314). In contrast, Mary’s attempt to steal a baby and her subsequent collapse and retreat from language illustrates that she cannot cope with her infertility. Her lack of ability to procreate means that Mary cannot access motherhood as a means of attaining legitimacy as a subject, and, unlike Tom, she does not find a way of working through the insecurity of an uncertain world. Thus Swift foregrounds the convoluted process of securing identity in a world where there is no longer one unifying metanarrative to ground subjectivity in the “here and now.” Lea also devotes chapters of his book to Swift’s

Ever After and *The Light of Day*, in his pursuit of the same thesis and notes the way in which the protagonists of these novels, Bill Unwin and George Webb, respectively, are similarly struggling to secure authentic identities when the promises of the metanarratives of historical progress as well as the more mundane narratives of romantic love prove to be an illusion that cannot support their pursuit of an authentic identity.

Critiques of McEwan's fiction have taken a different trajectory. Finney notes that McEwan's *Atonement* foregrounds the inherent problem in narration itself, which is its potential for misinterpretation. According to Finney, McEwan produces several sites throughout the novel where misinterpretations take place because of outside influences. Whether Finney's observation stands is something I will take up in a later chapter on the intertextuality of genre. Nevertheless, Finney points to the reader's own responsibility for interpretation, which is foregrounded by the first "ending." It is the initial "ending," the romantic "ending," the one that precedes Briony's initials, that is in fact a narrative work of fiction based on her own devastating misinterpretations of events, people, history, genre, and narratives, and her attempts to atone for her misinterpretations. James Phelan also notes that McEwan's intricate play with narrative structure undermines the reader's assumptions by focusing on Briony's misjudgment of what she witnessed at the fountain, as well as her misjudgment of Robbie. He suggests that her attempt at atoning for her mistake, what amounts to the majority of the novel, culminates in foregrounding the reader's own misjudgments about what they have read when they come to the end of Briony's story. Phelan then goes on to present various theses regarding the nature of judgment in his "rhetorical approach to narrative" (322) and suggests that these judgments are what constitute narrative form in three ways: judgments of interpretation, of ethics, and of

aesthetics. Phelan focuses his discussion on the judgments readers make and how narratives themselves often shape, create, or even demand these judgments. This is a point I will return to and expand upon, as it is not just the readers making judgments constrained by narrative and generic presuppositions, but also the narrators themselves. Phelan then turns directly to *Atonement* and continues his discussion of the role of judgment in Briony's transgression, as well as in her narrative as a whole, and in the judgment of McEwan by his readers. Phelan points out Briony's judgment, not only in her mistake, but also in her decision to alter history and attempt to atone for what she has done. He states that she has power in this judgment, but that her power is limited: even though she decides how she will represent the past and the fates of her characters, Phelan notes, ultimately, she cannot affect the outcome of the lives upon which she purportedly bases those characters. Contrary to Phelan, I will argue that the ontological status of those lives can never be definitively determined. Thus, McEwan leaves his readers in a state of uncertainty regarding the credulity of all narrative. In fact, as Phelan points out, Briony's judgments only exist "within the frame of McEwan's" (331). As such, what the reader is judging is not just Briony, but McEwan as an author, and his attempt to atone for undercutting not only his readers' expectations of this novel, but also our expectations of the romance narrative itself. Of course, this kind of intertextuality is a common practice among writers who wish to noticeably engage in the fiction making process and engage the reader in greater reflexivity—McEwan and Swift are no exceptions. It is this intertextuality I would next like to address.

III. Intertextuality: Beyond the Hunt for Sources

First coined by Julia Kristeva, the term “intertextuality” refers to literary texts as “an intersection of other texts” (*Intimate Revolt* 446). As previously mentioned, both Ian McEwan and Graham Swift have been critiqued in terms of their expansive use of intertexts; however, what these critiques do not point out is that the theme of intertextuality goes beyond just pointing out which novels each author is either subtly or more directly deploying (Kaczvinsky, Gąsiorek, Finney, Lea). In fact, the number of literary texts that each author refers to, such as those explicitly mentioned in their epigraphs, *Northanger Abbey* in *Atonement*, and Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* in *Waterland*, suggests that intertextuality is a major thread in both of their collections of works. However, intertextuality as described by Kristeva moves beyond the simple allusion to other literary artifacts. While many postmodern theorists and critics use the term only to describe “[literary] works made possible by prior works which they take up, repeat, challenge, [and] transform” (Culler 33), Kristeva’s explanation of the concept comes from working through Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic in all uses of language, as well as Roland Barthes contention that “any text [literary or otherwise] is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text. Intertextuality...cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences” (Barthes qtd. in Hawthorn 183). I would like to stress Barthes’ understanding of intertextuality as moving beyond the hunt for sources. For both Kristeva and Barthes, in other words, intertextuality is far more than just references to literary texts that have come before; rather, intertextuality is “indissoluble” and is a part of the “intrinsic link” in any story, which is the link between the culture the storyteller belongs

to and the story being told (Kristeva *Intimate Revolt* 446). The “bits of code, formulae, [and] rhythmic models” suggest that interwoven into texts are historically received models and formulas such as genre and cultural events which are woven into “new tissue[s]” and become both part of the fabric of a new text, and, as Kristeva suggests, a part of the culture which is also interwoven into this fabric. Thus, while McEwan and Swift make obvious references to prior texts, they also consciously and unconsciously cite other major cultural events, such as the violence and terror of World War Two in McEwan’s *Atonement*, as well as in Swift’s *Waterland* and *Last Orders*. In addition, they cite various narrative genres made popular by famous novels: the history, the detective story, and the love story. Though their fiction has not been discussed in this way before, an analysis of their novels shows that through these intertextual echoes, McEwan and Swift are pointing to the ways in which individuals form their own stories through received narratives, thus foregrounding the way traditional genres, made popular by the novel, are employed to give form to the stories their narrators tell. Moreover, each narrator employs genre quite consciously and obviously at some point in the stories, and includes narrative frames made popular by cultural events. For example, in McEwan’s *Saturday*, Henry Perowne invokes the urban drama in an attempt to explain seemingly irrational violence and the resulting terror when he is accosted after a minor car accident. Similarly, in *Enduring Love*, when the metanarrative of science cannot lend his story the credibility he desires, Joe uses the framework of a soap opera in order to try to make sense of the way his life changed after watching John Logan plunge to a horrific death from a hot air balloon. Likewise, in Swift’s *The Light of Day*, George Webb has been denied the authority of institutionalized answers, as evidenced by his dismissal from the police force, so he frames his story as a detective fiction—however successful—in order to give

legitimacy to his story of his experiences with what he sees as the inexplicable violence done to a man he barely knew. This suggests that the narrators are framing and forming their stories in these molds in order to give their narratives the credibility and legitimacy denied by the postmodern problematization of metanarratives. However, by the end of these novels, each author points to the ways in which the traditional genres cannot finally account for the private experiences of their narrators, leaving them once again with an unstable sense of ontology, and also revealing the limitations of received forms—received genres. Both McEwan and Swift are pointing to the ways that narrative structures and genres help subjects tell their stories, but the authors also foreground the notion that narrative structures cannot provide a sufficient framework to embody all narratives, nor can narrative forms provide the story.

Though critics such as Finney and Lea have noted McEwan's and Swift's use of intertextuality in their fiction, the critics focus on intertextuality at the level of the fiction; that is, the critics discuss the ways in which the authors incorporate past works of both famous and not-so-famous fiction into their novels and note that this kind of intertextuality underscores that the reader is consuming a work of fiction based on, or echoing, previous works of fiction; however, this echoing goes beyond the references to specific works and includes a critique of the role of the received narrative traditions. What these two critics do not say is that the integration of past works of fiction not only points out the fictionality of the text, but also illustrates how the narratives of the past are 're-played' or 're-written' in the present in an attempt to 'borrow' the legitimacy of the past texts and to replace the authenticity once provided by metanarratives. For example, in Swift's *Waterland* and *Ever After*, as well as in McEwan's *Atonement* and *Enduring Love*, the protagonists narrate their

stories retroactively, as autobiography. In doing so, each narrator also tries to frame his or her story in the form of a received genre, but eventually they must confront the constrictions and contradictions inherent in the retroactive application of genre which manipulates the details of their narratives due to the expectations set forth by the generic category, such as suspense in the detective fiction. The result of this realization is that they come to recognize that their stories will never be the great works of fiction they try to emulate in the telling; the great works of fiction are “an old story” (Swift *Ever After* 227), and the narrators eventually realize they must “start again” but that “there will always be what remains” of the great works which are part of the cultural fabric by means of which they are telling their stories (*Ever After* 236). Through these novels, then, Swift and McEwan point to intertextuality and the re-writing of books that have already been written; this focus draws our attention to the presuppositions and precariousness of the process of narrativizing in the uncertainty of the postmodern moment, as evidenced by Bill Unwin’s suicide attempt in Swift’s *Ever After* when he realizes that metanarratives cannot provide him with authenticity, nor can substitutes such as literary intertextuality in the form of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Intertextuality in this context also points to the reader’s expectations of genre, and of fiction. Both authors ‘re-write’ traditional stories, such as McEwan’s revision of *Northanger Abbey* as *Atonement*. In the opening epigraph, McEwan invokes Jane Austen’s gothic parody, and critics such as Finney have noted the similarities between Catherine Morland, the heroine of Austen’s novel, and Briony, as well as the many similarities in plot, especially in Part One of *Atonement*. This comparison illustrates both the intertextuality of previously written works of fiction, and how genre is historically received; *Northanger Abbey* was written by Austen over two hundred years ago and follows the life of a young girl, much like

Briony, as she misinterprets events and gets herself into trouble. In the end, though, the truth comes out, the situation is resolved, she gets married, and all is forgiven. Many of Austen's novels—and those of other novelists—follow this same heterosexual romance pattern: a man and a woman meet—or realize their attraction to one another after years of not “seeing” each other clearly—and discover their passion, a misinterpretation occurs, the truth comes out, and all is restored to happiness. Most popular romances today still use a variation of this formula. It is interesting to note that McEwan uses this romance formula intertextually and does not undermine the expectations of genre created by actual works from the past, but, at the same time, undermines the reader's expectations; it is the cliché version of the romance genre that Briony undermines with her initials at the end of Part Three, and the “London, 1999” section. Nevertheless, the intertext of genre serves McEwan's narrators as a way of telling their stories, thus underscoring not only that these are works of fiction, but that any telling of any story is equally open to multiple interpretive strategies. That is, both McEwan and Swift employ narrators who are ostensibly telling the story the reader is reading. This has a dual effect. The first is that it foregrounds that this story is a work of fiction; the narrator is allegedly the author of what the reader is reading, and the authorial voice is somewhat removed from the telling—even in Swift's novels, where the narrator often tells the story in the first person, there are numerous scenes where the narrators are referred to by name, which confirms to the reader that the perspective is mediated by Tom Crick, Bill Unwin, George Webb, or one of the others. The second effect is to illustrate to the reader the way that subjects, fictional or otherwise, order and narrate the events that they feel have contributed to how they got to where they are in the present and that they often turn to the

familiar frameworks of culture (metanarratives) and genre (received tradition) to support their narrative constructions.

The novels also both assert and undermine other traditional genres such as the detective story, the drama, and the gothic/horror story, and both authors end up foregrounding readers' assumptions and undermining their expectations, most notably in the way characters such as Joe Rose and Henry Perowne, the protagonists of McEwan's *Enduring Love* and *Saturday*, and Bill and George, the protagonists in Swift's *Ever After* and *The Light of Day*, retroactively impose well-known genres onto their narratives. The authors' use of these well-known, and received genres, put into play by seemingly quintessentially "ordinary" narrators, also illustrates how we in the Western world tell our own stories, and how we incorporate genre as a framework for both interpreting and telling our stories in the face of the hole of "oblivion" left by the failure of metanarratives. In *Saturday*, when Henry cannot understand seemingly random violence directed against him and others, he imposes his belief in the transcendence of the scientific method to establish fact: he constructs an entirely scientific explanation, in the form of a medical diagnosis, to explain Baxter's attack, and to rationalize his own terror. However, he eventually realizes that this imposed metanarrative of science as entire explanation has also let him down. What ends up saving him and his family from violence is, ironically, the poem that captivates and neutralizes Baxter's threat to the Perowne family. This may suggest that McEwan is valuing literature over metanarratives, though Henry later realizes that literature, like science, cannot fully account for his private experiences. I would suggest, then, that McEwan does not valorize one form of knowing over the other, but suggests that both bring insights, though neither can independently be relied upon to reveal the entire truth. The same practice of employing

received narratives occurs with Briony in *Atonement*. She writes a romance as a “stand against [the] oblivion” (McEwan *Atonement* 372) she feels is synonymous with death, which clearly illustrates her incredulity towards religious metanarratives promising salvation. In *Enduring Love*, Joe goes through a similar process to Henry, using science, once again, which he sees as the “one system of logic” which can account for what he sees as irrational behavior (McEwan *Enduring Love* 214)⁶. When the scientific explanation does not convince, he turns to received genre, in the form of the drama of a soap opera, to explain the seemingly irrational events that take place after the balloon accident. In Swift’s *Ever After*, Bill Unwin realizes that the metanarrative of history in the form of the Matthew Pearce journals cannot give him the legitimacy he seeks, so he turns to drama to try to “borrow” the authenticity given to this traditional narrative form. Similarly, in *The Light of Day*, George Webb attempts to ‘borrow’ legitimacy from the traditional detective fiction after he has been dismissed from a place of power and authority in the police force. On the surface, the authors are illustrating the ways that metanarratives cannot account for or explain violence and human frailty, nor can they provide authentic subjectivity, but that this does not mean that subjects can simply turn to other well-known narrative structures to give legitimacy to their stories.

Kristeva, it should be noted, has lamented the fact that the majority of literary theorists and critics do not use the term “intertextuality” accurately (*Intimate Revolt* 446)—they use it too narrowly in her view. That is, Kristeva’s original explanation of the term she coined, “intertextuality,” defined it as the way “the inside of the text is indebted to its outside” (*Intimate Revolt* 446). In other words, “intertextuality” refers not only to the literary

⁶ When citing McEwan’s *Enduring Love*, from this point on, I will shorten the title to *Enduring*.

text as an intersection of other literary texts, but also to the literary text as an intersection of literature, history, and the culture in which it is written. In terms of McEwan's and Swift's novels, this explanation of intertextuality has gone relatively unexplored by their critics, and it is here that I wish to enter into the discussion surrounding intertextuality in their work.

McEwan's and Swift's concern with the culture in which they are writing and the historical context of writing is evident in many of their novels. Both authors base their novels in the present, insofar as the moment of narration is always conceived as in the narrator's present; however, the narrators also engage with the past through flashbacks, referring to real world events of the last century that precede the moment of their articulation in the narrative. Specifically, these narrators are haunted by the past, by the violence the world has experienced in the last century, and the effects of this violence on both public and private narratives. This haunting is reflected as terror and insecurity because of the inability of metanarratives or received narrative forms to account for the violence of the world and to console the victims of violence. Because this violence repeatedly draws attention to the failure of metanarratives, as well as the precariousness of the narrators' sense of security and ontology in the world, the narrators search for something that will hold at bay the terror of uncertainty. As they turn to, then eventually reject, conventions of established genres, they realize that they cannot find the elusive legitimacy or authenticity they seek for their personal stories in the inherited frameworks of the past. Instead, what McEwan and Swift are signaling, both throughout their work and with their work, is that "the story is the heart of the matter. However you talk about it, however you analyze it, it is this ultimately magical, marvelous, mysterious, wonderful thing. It's got to be there....Whatever else you're attempting, whatever else you're doing, it's the story that remains" (Swift qtd. in Bernard

230). In this way, these authors foreground their conviction that, to use Fredric Jameson's words, "narrative is...a central instance of the human mind and a mode of thinking fully as legitimate as that of abstract logic" (Jameson xi). Further, McEwan and Swift highlight the role that narrativizing plays in an individual's experience of the world; regardless of how much or how little happens in the individual's life, narrative is a means of ensuring the individual's story is heard. Ultimately, they also emphasize the fact that writing is a way of coping with the mourning for the loss of metanarratives and the inability of received genres to provide a sensibility, or a meaning, that will secure personal authenticity, meaning, or legitimacy.

IV. “Stumbling and Backtracking”: Science as Intertext

One of the most persistent metanarratives is that science will eventually lead to human enlightenment. It is the promise of this enlightenment that McEwan’s and Swift’s narrators try unsuccessfully to deploy to deal with their terror. For example, *Saturday* not only foregrounds the historical context of 9/11, it also demonstrates how Henry uses the metanarrative of science as a means to contextualize his terror. As Bertens suggests, science as a salvation narrative has a particular persistence: although “practically all metanarratives have been unmasked as fictions” in the postmodern (Bertens 124), “scientific knowledge sees itself as standing outside and above...narration” (Bertens 125). Both McEwan and Swift demonstrate that science is not outside narration by challenging science’s omniscient and explanatory position in popular culture. Moreover, both foreground the ways in which the pretense of objectivity is untenable, as we will see, by having scientific knowledge and explanations fail their narrators as a means of both contextualizing violence and explaining terror. Essentially, both authors could be seen to support Lyotard’s contention that “scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative” (29). It is this problem that Henry struggles with in McEwan’s *Saturday*. In the novel, Henry’s profession situates him firmly in the scientific realm, much like Joe in McEwan’s *Enduring Love*, and Mike in Swift’s *Tomorrow*. As a neurosurgeon, Henry is entrenched in the field of science, and often resorts to his scientific reasoning to explain what he sees, such as the couple he observes from his window the second time he wakes up on Saturday, February 15, 2003. When he opens the shutters, looks out his window towards the square below, and sees the couple standing in the square, he begins to apply his own interpretation to what he sees, because “Perowne thinks he sees in her face a reminder of his

daughter's" (McEwan *Saturday* 60). When he notices the female scratching her back, he immediately applies his scientific discourse to explain what he is seeing, describing her behaviour as "amphetamine-driven formication...or an exogenous opioid-induced histamine reaction" and eventually decides "these are addicts, surely" (*Saturday* 60), even though he has no way of knowing what they are actually talking about or why the girl is scratching her back. Perowne's imposition of meaning on what he observes emphasizes the way the discourse he is embedded in has already influenced his way of seeing and his subsequent telling of his narrative. Rather than allow for another kind of reading, or an explanation for the girl's behaviour that lies outside the scientific discourse, he decides that she is an addict. Furthermore, just after deciding that the couple are addicts, Henry muses "people often drift into the square to act out their dramas. Clearly, a street won't do. Passions need room, the attentive spaciousness of a theater" (*Saturday* 60), which again draws attention to the fact that Henry is constructing a narrative and is basing the story he tells about the couple both on his medical background and on his understanding of human emotions, which demand, he assumes, an element of theatre. He believes that he can know and articulate through science the phenomena he observes, and he applies his own meaning to a situation which he could very well be misinterpreting.

Henry further emphasizes his dependence on science moments after looking out at the square. After he leaves his room, he stands observing the library and notes that "it interests him less to have the world reinvented; he wants it explained" (*Saturday* 66); this serves as his explanation for why "he's too impatient" to bother with literature (*Saturday* 66). His explanation is that "a man who attempts to ease the miseries of failing minds by repairing brains is bound to respect the material world, its limits, and what it can sustain –

consciousness no less....he knows it for a quotidian fact, the mind is what the brain, mere matter, performs” (*Saturday* 67). This is emphasized when Henry proclaims that “[t]his notion of Daisy’s, that people can’t ‘live’ without stories, is simply not true. He is living proof” (*Saturday* 68). There is an explicit irony, here, of course, as Henry presumes that he is not deploying ‘stories,’ but rather he is using truthful and non-narrative frameworks to read the world. His dependence on science, as a way of ordering potential chaos and alleviating his terror comes to a climax when he encounters Baxter for the first time. He has just been in a car accident where his car collides with Baxter’s—McEwan suggests both characters are partially at fault—and Henry refuses to pay for the damages to Baxter’s car, so Baxter physically threatens Henry. In response to the terror evoked by the physical threat, Henry turns to science as a way out—an explanation. Just as Baxter is about to punch him, Henry blurts out, “‘your father had it. Now you’ve got it too’” (*Saturday* 94). Henry admits his statement is “shameless blackmail” to get Baxter to stop (*Saturday* 95), but, as he points out, “it works” (*Saturday* 95). In essence, the authority given to him by his knowledge of medicine and his belief in the metanarrative of science has saved him from violence by explaining the seemingly irrational threat Baxter posed towards him, which has allowed him to negotiate through his fear of being beaten by causing Baxter to question his own health. Thus Henry invokes a standard narrative—like father, like son—without recognizing it is narrative that enables his diagnosis.

Moreover, Henry’s scientific reasoning actually fails him: at the end of the novel, when Baxter and his men have invaded Henry’s home and threatened his wife and children, it is literature, in particular its narration, represented by the poem Daisy reads aloud, that defuses Baxter’s anger and saves the Perowne family from the irrational and illogical

violence that eventually cannot be fully or satisfactorily explained by Henry's modernist scientific world view. The very fact that Baxter and his men invade Henry's home after he was so sure he had provided a diagnosis that undermined the potential violence after the car accident highlights the fact that science cannot explain all behavior, even when there is a scientifically verifiable condition associated with it. Moreover, throughout the novel, Henry is critical of Daisy's reading selections for him, preferring books that "had the virtue, at least, of representing a recognizable physical reality...the actual, not the magical, should be the challenge" (*Saturday* 67), rather than books that challenge a scientific metanarrative by questioning realist constructs. Henry's attitude towards this literature underscores the flawed position of science as independent of narrative in postmodernity and reduces literature to "fables, myths, and legends, fit only for women and children" (Lyotard 27). In fact, he passes these books off as "the recourse of an insufficient imagination...a childish evasion of the difficulties and wonders of the real" (*Saturday* 67-8). His dismissal of literature again underscores his belief, and emphasizes the postmodern scientist's assumption, that science, or any discourse for that matter, has the ability to represent the "real" rather than creating it. There is potent irony here—one that is expressed via the author, McEwan, and perhaps unwittingly via his protagonist: works of the imagination can be found in science as well as literature. Though Daisy diffuses the situation with Baxter through her understanding, so different from her father's, that not all aspects of life can be explained, it is questionable as to whether or not Henry actually comes to accept the failure of modernist metanarratives such as science to provide his desired enlightenment. When he is talking to his wife, Rosalind, at the end of his day, she explains to him how modernist conceptions such as time ceased to exist for her when faced with Baxter's illogical violence. Henry listens and, in fact, states he

experienced his own moments where, in his “terrified state,” he “misse[d] and misconstrue[d] much” (*Saturday* 220), but still he constantly tries to “arrange the details to prompt her in another direction” because he cannot, at least consciously, comprehend the experience she is describing (*Saturday* 268).

Henry’s scientific worldview is also evident when he and Rosalind begin to talk about Daisy’s pregnancy and he begins to picture the growth process of the baby in scientific terms. When Henry is finally alone at the end of his day, he once again walks to the window where he began this momentous day. There he finally begins to see a different way of acting within the world, and finally begins to recognize modernist ways of ordering culture as constructs. He

feels himself turning on a giant wheel, like the Eye on the south banks of the Thames, just about to arrive at the highest point – he’s poised on a hinge of perception, before the drop, and he can see ahead calmly...if he counts on sleep rather than the clock, then this is still his Saturday...from where he stands up here there are things he can see that he knows must happen.

(*Saturday* 273)

It is at this point that Henry rejects or at least consciously acknowledges modernist metanarratives such as linear time and the modernist scientific discourse that failed him when he was faced with the illogic of violence and terror. And it is through Henry’s epiphany that McEwan foregrounds the ways in which metanarratives, while providing a framework for interpretation, yet fail to account for all experiences, such as those of irrational violence.

McEwan continues to explore the failures of metanarratives and the dream of modernity in *Enduring Love*. From the very beginning of the story, McEwan establishes that this novel is concerned with the construction of a narrative intended to deal with trauma, as well as the death of the dream of modernist metanarratives. The opening line “the beginning is simple to mark” (McEwan *Enduring* 1), suggests that every narrative has an obvious and coherent beginning. However, the narrator, Joe, qualifies this in the second chapter, calling the moment he chose to begin a “pinprick” (*Enduring* 17). The use of the word pinprick implies that the moment of actual beginning of any narrative is arbitrary, and that there are hundreds of potential beginnings; Joe just started with the one that made the most sense to him. Joe goes on to explore this further, stating that “a beginning is an artifice” (*Enduring* 18), articulating both the problematic nature of linear metanarratives of origins and ends, and, as well, the very personal nature of the narrative he is creating, which is, ultimately, dependent on the beginning he chose. The symbol of the “pinprick” also suggests an easy-to-burst bubble of belief. Considering that this novel opens with a violent death caused by human incapacity to intervene in the ‘natural’ course of a helium balloon, the reference to a “pinprick” is also highly suggestive of human frailty in the face of nature, despite our occasional capacity to bend it to our ends, through experimental science. Like *Saturday*, McEwan addresses the persistence of the metanarrative of science in this narrative, as well as the modernist notion that science can reveal the ‘truth’ of the world. In this novel, Joe engages with, and struggles for acceptance of, a scientific explanation for the threat that Jed poses to him. Initially, he turns to science because it is the “socially legitimized grand-narrative of legality and medicine and [foregrounds] the positioning of the privileged male subject” (Morrison 257). However, he quickly realizes that the metanarrative of science fails

him on a public institutional level when he tries to use it to articulate his experiences with Jed; Joe must compromise, as he states, “my grievance would have to be poured into the available bureaucratic mould. There was no facility refined enough to process every private narrative” (*Enduring* 73). Joe’s realization conveys a sense that the ostensibly omniscient metanarrative of science, the metanarrative that was supposed to explain the world to all people, may well fail at the personal level, when individuals try to use it to articulate their private narratives. This failure suggests that science cannot reveal personal ‘truth’ anymore than it can know and represent all aspects of the world. McEwan emphasizes this in the novel when Joe, a scientist, retreats completely into his scientific background in order to explain the terror Jed is causing him by diagnosing Jed with a rarely heard of obsessive disorder; yet, just as “infertility” as a diagnosis does not begin to explain the terror, shame, and agony experienced by Mary in *Waterland*, Joe finds his scientific theory of the cause for Jed’s behaviour further alienates him both from the public, and from the people close to him, such as Clarissa. Where once he found he could “spin a decent narrative out of the stumbling, back-trackings and random successes that lie behind the most scientific breakthroughs” (*Enduring* 75), he is now caught in the “stumbling and backtrackings.” The climax of the novel where Jed is indeed found to have de Clérambault’s syndrome illustrates the “random success” of Joe’s guess about Jed’s condition. However, the novel points to the ways that the scientific discourse has failed to bring Joe any success because it cannot sufficiently articulate his experience with Jed, nor can it account for the personal losses he sustains on an emotional level; thus, although he suggests “people say I have a talent for clarity” (*Enduring* 75), the intertextual parallel with the discourses of scientific and medical knowledge, when explaining a rare and unheard of condition, suggests, instead, that clarity escapes him. As a

result of his lack of clarity beyond the scientific, he is unable to accurately explain Jed's behaviour to Clarissa; she begins "doubting [Joe's] sanity" (*Enduring* 216) and whether or not it is really Joe who is obsessed with Jed. Clarissa's uncertainty also highlights the way that science, as a discourse, is dependent on the discourse of evidence and persuasion—of narrative. Because Clarissa does not experience any threatening behaviour from Jed prior to the climax, Joe's description of Jed's actions, and his contention that Jed is obsessed with Joe, are not a part of her experience: she cannot verify Joe's claims and begins to doubt his truthfulness and, eventually, his sanity.

It is not until Clarissa personally experiences the threat of Jed that she finally comes to realize that Joe has been honest. While this may seem to cast a negative light on her character for not believing her partner, it also suggests that she serves as a foil for Joe's complete belief in science as a means of explaining the world. Clarissa does not understand the threat facing Joe because the world, to her, is not infinitely knowable through science; rather, her approach to understanding is, not surprisingly, mediated by the literary. Clarissa's subject of research is John Keats, but she has a particular fascination with Keats' romantic attachment to Fanny Brawne. It is possible that her investment in this historical romance influences her growing sense of Joe's inadequacies, especially as he becomes more and more obsessed with Jed, and with himself. Because she does not have experience with de Clerambault's syndrome, she reaches one of the "limitations" inherent in any non-positivist world view. That is, Clarissa becomes caught up in an experience that she cannot comprehend and that modernist metanarratives can neither represent nor explain to her, or to others. Joe's private narrative is not given validation in the public, even though he uses the public discourse to articulate it, because, as Clarissa addresses Joe in her letter: "[you went]

deeper and deeper into yourself and further and further away...you made the logical inferences and you got a lot of things right, but in the process you forgot to take me [Clarissa] along with you, you forgot how to confide” (*Enduring* 217). In essence, Joe retreats completely into a scientific explanation, which Clarissa, because of her lack of training in science, could not understand. While this caused problems for Clarissa, to the extent that she did not believe Joe until she experienced terror herself, it also caused problems for Joe, because his claims about Jed are seen as “too weak” by a symbol of public authority (*Enduring* 157), the police. As such, Joe’s story is given no legitimacy and he has no one to validate it but himself. As a result of his dependence on one version of events, Joe’s relationship with Clarissa is seriously threatened, which suggests the problematic nature of the use of modernist metanarratives in private narratives, and the failure of modernist metanarratives both in communication and articulation of private experiences.

V. Twentieth-Century Legacy: Violence as Intertext

Part of the “intrinsic link[s]” (Kristeva *Intimate Revolt* 446) of the fictions McEwan and Swift have constructed are links to major events that have affected the way the narrators, and the majority of human subjects in general, view the world in which they live. Both McEwan and Swift refer extensively to the Second World War in their novels. In Swift’s *Waterland*, Tom Crick opens the novel by introducing the basics of his family life, then quickly turns to a moment of terror in his life, the day Freddie Parr’s body was discovered caught in the sluice outside the Crick family’s cottage. Though the reason for Freddie’s death is only ever speculated about in the novel, the reason Tom sees the body being lifted out of the lock and experiences a moment where “fear transfix[ed] me” when the boathook dug into Freddie’s temple is because his father suffered a shrapnel wound during the First World War and cannot get down to drag the body out himself (*Waterland* 35). Tom pinpoints the moment where he realizes “evil isn’t something that happens far off – it suddenly touches your arm” (*Waterland* 35) as the moment he saw the boathook dig into Freddie. It is interesting to note that the incident with Freddie’s body and Tom’s realization of the proximity of evil happened during 1943, at the height of World War Two, and just after “the first news about the Nazi annihilation camps began to spread” (Levi 11). Tom’s realization mirrors the realization people were coming to all over the world as news of what was going on in the concentration camps spread and people were becoming conscious of the close proximity of the evil of the Nazi regime, especially in Britain. Tom notes this coincidence, and questions whether or not Freddie’s death has any significance in light of the fact that “all over the globe, at this very hour, a war was being fought” (*Waterland* 28). This suggests both that Tom is questioning people’s individual importance, something he will return to

repeatedly throughout his narrative, and also that he is mirroring his childhood terror with the terror of the war. When talking about the war, Tom says it is happening “over the far horizon” (*Waterland* 33), which suggests that although he is aware of events, it is more likely that the comparison is an effect of the retroactive narration. The speculation about how his father will one day “with a flick of cigarette ash and a shake of his head, [tell] how he fished that poor drowned lad out of the New Atkinson” further reveals that Tom is both describing the past event and adding contemporary insight as an adult narrating the past (*Waterland* 33). Additionally, Tom’s description of the “far horizon” implies that the war is not close in his consciousness and has not really impacted him. Moreover, the nameless “mothers” who are losing their unnamed sons “every day and every night” (*Waterland* 33), as well as details of the war that are added in parentheses while Tom is describing his childhood (*Waterland* 50), suggest that while Tom, as a boy, is aware of the war, it has not directly affected him on a personal level. He claims “the wild world takes priority” (*Waterland* 33), yet, for Tom, the terror of the war is far off while the terror of Freddie’s death is the violent event that takes priority in his young life. Nevertheless, the retroactively added consideration of world events, from his adult narrating perspective, as well as the parenthetical details of the war integrated into Tom’s account of the discovery and removal of the body, imply an obvious and deliberate intertext. This intertext, as well as the shock and terror Tom feels at seeing Freddie’s body floating in the lock, made worse by the abuse done to his corpse, suggests an intrinsic link to the events of the war and what was simultaneously happening to the bodies of Jewish prisoners. Tom’s comments about the proximity of evil to his, and any, life also underscores the changing world view in the postmodern, and the recognition that there are no longer any metanarratives, such as history and religion, which promise eventual

enlightenment, salvation, and the eradication of the evil in the world. Instead, as a young Tom realizes, and the world would realize shortly after, evil, in the form of unthinkable human cruelty, is a part of life. Through his encounter with the close proximity of evil, Tom also comes to realize that the metanarrative of history cannot account for the experience of every individual. Instead, he recognizes that

for each protagonist who once stepped on to the stage of so-called historical events, there were thousands, millions, who never entered the theatre—who never knew the show was running—who got on with the donkey-work of reality....each one of those numberless non-participants was doubtless concerned with raising in the flatness of his own unsung existence his own personal stage...So there's no escaping it: even if we miss the grand repertoire of history, we yet imitate it in miniature and endorse, in miniature, its longing for presence, for feature, for purpose, for content.

(Waterland 40-1)

What Tom recognizes, here, is that historical metanarratives leave out as much as they include. Moreover, Tom realizes that the “public reality” of history is flawed because there are millions of people who never made it into the historical record (Janik 85). In essence, for Tom, history has become “the fabrication, the diversion, the reality-obscuring drama” (*Waterland* 40). The words “fabrication” and “diversion” suggest that Tom understands that the metanarrative of history does not reveal absolute reality about the past, and instead leads readers of history away from much more complex ‘truths,’ consequently making any kind of legitimacy found in history equally as fabricated. His realization that history is a “fabrication” is what causes Tom to abandon the metanarrative of history “in the middle of

explaining how, with a Parisian blood-letting, our Modern World began” (*Waterland* 5); instead, he “breaks off and starts telling—these stories” about his own past (*Waterland* 5), which may allow him to find the authenticity he seeks and to cope with the violence, anxiety, and death he experiences as a child, as a young man when his brother dove to his death, and as an adult when Mary stole the baby--events which, over time, have become linked in Tom’s sense of his personal history.

As in Swift’s *Waterland*, the Second World War is also prominently featured in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*. Though the novel begins on a hot summer day in 1935, four years before the war broke out, Part Two of the novel chronicles Robbie’s experiences in France as he travels the road on his way to Dunkirk. From the very beginning of Part Two of the novel, survival becomes a key feature of Robbie’s experiences in wartime France: “he intended to survive” (*Atonement* 193), “he thought only of his own survival”(*Atonement* 222), “his business was to survive” (*Atonement* 238), “what did the poets know about survival?” (*Atonement* 264). The reason Robbie focuses so much on survival is to hold at bay “the extinction they knew, individually, to be theirs” (*Atonement* 236). The use of the word “extinction” implies that Robbie does not believe in any kind of salvation narrative. Instead, the word foregrounds the intertext of the death of religious metanarratives and their concept of an afterlife, and emphasizes Robbie’s realization that death truly is the end of existence for a human subject. The imagery in Part Two of the novel emphasizes this realization. In fact, the first time Robbie mentions survival is shortly after he sees a severed leg “wedged in the first forking of the trunk” of a tree (*Atonement* 192). Robbie again focuses on survival right after the Stuka attack that “vaporized” the mother and son he was trying to protect (*Atonement* 239). The proximity of Robbie’s thoughts of survival to the episodes of brutality

that he witnesses suggest that the violence of war has made human subjects more aware of their own inevitable “extinction,” as well as the uncertainty of when this “extinction” will come. It is shortly after this incident that Robbie consciously acknowledges the “repeated episodes of terror” that war exposed him to (*Atonement* 238), as well as the fact that “the fear did not diminish” with time (*Atonement* 239). Both observations emphasize the fact that the postmodern condition “reverberates with the catastrophes that resulted from the militarized agency and unprecedented victimization of racial and ethnic groups,” a condition Paul Gilroy suggests is the legacy of the twentieth century (29).

It is interesting to note that Robbie’s thoughts of survival are very private, even self-centered: he even contemplates whether it would be better to “slip away, leave the corporals to their fate” (*Atonement* 203) because he feels as though they are hampering his progress to Dunkirk, the place Robbie sees as his gateway to home. This focus on survival at the level of the individual comes as “a whole civilization was about to fall” (*Atonement* 202), and emphasizes that the move away from metanarratives in the postmodern leads to a lesser focus on the nation and a greater focus on the individual. Moreover, the use of the word “civilization” has two meanings in this context. The first is that any pretense of “civilization” on the part of the Nazi party fell when they began indiscriminately killing Jewish people for the simple matter of their faith. Secondly, the word “civilization” brings to mind imperialism and serves as an intertext for colonial metanarratives which were ostensibly leading towards the “civilization” of all people. However, as Paul Gilroy points out, the undermining of these types of metanarratives after, and as a result of, the Second World War, opened up a new way to “tell us something fundamental and useful about the potential of ‘individual experience’” particularly when it comes to race (7). As such, Robbie’s observation is

completely correct, “civilization” was about to fall as the Nazis began to corral Jewish people into prison camps, and the concept of the “civilization” of the human race was undone by the violence performed by Hitler’s Nazis. Furthermore, since Robbie’s experiences are being narrated, and, indeed, fabricated by Briony, it is interesting to note that it is actually her terror of meaninglessness and the futility of human actions, that is projected onto Robbie’s story. Moreover, Briony finds no solution for the terror other than that of telling the story. Since in ‘fact,’ while not in her ‘story,’ the violence of World War Two further ends any possible hope of reconciliation for Briony, Cecilia, and Robbie, Briony worries that the war “might compound her crime” (*Atonement* 288). Her only recourse is to write the story with a happy ending of reconciliation; her crime thus shifts from one of self-centered and stubborn naiveté—misidentifying Robbie as the rapist—to one of self-centered and stubborn romanticism—adhering to traditional notions of romance.

While the violence, trauma, and terror of the World Wars significantly impact not only the literature of the second half of the twentieth century, they also left a lasting impression on the way human subjects experience the world. The terrorist attacks of the early twenty-first century reminded generations not touched by war of the magnitude of violence in the world, and introduced a very real example of seemingly unprovoked⁷ violence and terror to the Western world. By the end of the day on September 11, 2001, subjects all over the Western world became suddenly and consciously aware of the fragility of the human condition. Moreover, subjects who watched the seemingly endless replays of the planes

⁷ Depending on one’s perspective, it could be argued the 9/11 terrorist attacks were indeed provoked by the United States government and policies towards foreign affairs. However, to the majority of western subjects the attacks were unexpected and seemed as though they were unprovoked, a view supported and promulgated by both the media and the US government when it labeled the attacks “terrorist,” and repeatedly reiterated the claim that “there is no excuse for September 11” (Butler 3).

hitting the buildings had it driven home over and over again, that their happiness, lives, and loves, too, were dependent upon “anonymous others” and that this condition of existence can never be willed away (Butler xii). Judith Butler contends that this is exactly why the United States responded to the attacks with such aggression towards areas of the Middle East, but that this condition only causes further confusion and instability for the human subject, particularly when the leadership of a country creates a “with us or with the terrorists” binary (2). It is this condition that Henry Perowne struggles with in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*. From the moment Henry wakes up very early Saturday morning, McEwan introduces the intertext of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and this event is repeatedly referenced as Henry goes about his day, until he experiences terror firsthand. The repercussions of the terrorist attacks also serve as a foil of a sort, for Henry debates the pros and cons of Britain’s involvement and support of the United States’ ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan and Iraq. Notably, *Saturday* was the first novel that McEwan published after 9/11, and the novel follows Henry as he struggles to cope with the dawning knowledge that his life is, quite literally, dependent on anonymous others.

Several examples in *Saturday* support the notion that McEwan is foregrounding the way the September 11 terrorist attacks have influenced popular narratives and the genres subjects incorporate and deploy, either consciously or unconsciously to tell their stories. For example, in the opening scene of the novel, Henry has trouble sleeping and gets out of bed to look out his window. What he sees is a plane in distress. He immediately terms it a “nightmare” (McEwan *Saturday* 15). While he has no actual real-life experience of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, except through the recurring representation of those events in the media, the terror of the events that has made

its way into popular culture very much informs his narrative. He acknowledges this, stating that he “often wondered how it might go—the screaming in the cabin” and that his imaginary sequence of events is very much based on the day “half the planet watched, and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association” (*Saturday* 15-6). The use of the word “novel” in this passage both suggests that the view of the jet plane has changed since the attacks on the World Trade Center, and that this novel itself is going to explore how the attacks have influenced history, in terms of the narratives being told afterward. For example, *Saturday* takes place over the course of one day. Like the accounts of the terrorist attacks that circulated afterwards, the novel is very much concerned with all the events Henry participates in on the day his life changes due to a new knowledge of terror. He remembers seemingly innocuous events such as looking out his bedroom window over the square, and “the quality of silence in his house” (*Saturday* 65). The “silence” indicates to Henry that all is well, that his wife has gone to work, and that his son is sleeping peacefully. However, Henry’s attention to “silence” at the beginning of his day is also juxtaposed against the chaos that invades his home towards the end of his day. He remembers these early moments because they are some of the last moments he experiences before he gains a first-hand understanding of terror and the knowledge that his existence is dependent on others.

Henry’s response after the first time he experiences terror, which occurs in the violent moments after the car crash with Baxter, also foregrounds the intertext of September 11th and its aftermath. Right after the accident, Henry goes to play racquetball with Jay. When Jay starts to beat him, Henry gets unreasonably angry, feeling as though he is drowning in a “darkening pool of fury” (*Saturday* 106). Furthermore, when he steps away from the court

for a moment, he recognizes his obsession with beating Jay has reached a new height as he thinks “there’s only one thing in life he wants....he has to beat [Jay] Strauss. He needs to win” (*Saturday* 107). The single-mindedness of his thoughts, as well the use of the words “needs” and “has to,” combined with his encounter with terror at the hands of Baxter and his men, as well as his observation that the two men on television in the locker room are “surely the two pilots” from the plane he saw early in the morning (*Saturday* 107), again suggest an intertext of the terrorist attacks. Henry’s “fury” at Jay is actually his attempt to answer back to the terror he has experienced, much as the United States’ “war on terror” was an attempt to hold at bay “anxiety about the prospect of its durability [because the United States’ government was] tormented by the knowledge of its inevitable decline” (Gilroy 19). Again, like the knowledge Butler contends was highlighted by the terrorist attacks, Baxter’s violence towards Henry makes him face his own mortality as well as the precariousness of his general wellbeing, even within Western culture and despite his highly specialized medical knowledge. The cultural intertext of the United States’ response to the terrorist attacks is further woven into *Saturday* when Henry again returns to thinking about his encounter with Baxter:

Did he, Henry Perowne, act unprofessionally, using his medical knowledge to undermine a man suffering...? Yes. Did the threat of a beating excuse him? Yes, no, not entirely....But this haematoma...-just a taste of what might have come his way – says yes, he’s absolved....So what’s troubling him? Strangely, for all the violence, he almost liked Baxter. That’s to put it too strongly. He was intrigued by him, by his hopeless situation, and his refusal to give up. And there was real intelligence there, and dismay that he was living the wrong life. And he, Henry, was obliged, or forced,

to abuse his own power.

(Saturday 111)

Like the United States response to violence, that is, the ‘war on terror’, Henry’s response to Baxter’s violence may not have been ethical, but it was his intention to undermine Baxter enough to make him cease any further attempts at violence, and he was successful. The use of the word “forced” suggests that Henry is absolving his own “abuse” of power, much as the United States’ has in their various and unfounded reasons for the occupation of Iraq. That is, he ultimately struggles with the conundrum posed by Butler regarding the US response to the terrorist attacks: “to respond to violence with violence may well seem ‘justified,’ but is it finally a responsible solution?” (16) The above passage also illustrates the US official attitude towards a racial and cultural “Other”; the same “with us or with the terrorists” attitude was promoted by the United States government after the September 11th attacks (Butler 2). Similarly, Henry claims Baxter is “living the wrong life,” simply because Baxter does not lead the same kind of life Henry does. The mention of Baxter’s “real intelligence” illustrates that Henry has fixed expectations about what people, such as Baxter, should be doing if they have certain mental capabilities, and also emphasizes his own cultural and privileged position and biases.

VI. Perceptible Machinations: Genre as Intertext

Until this point, I have argued that McEwan's and Swift's use of cultural intertextuality of the violence experienced by Western world in the last 70 years is implicated in the failure of metanarratives. None of this is particularly surprising given the insecurity we all now face: homeland insecurity. However, this intertextuality also suggests a kind of psychic violence, which is, to my mind, a more startling and novel insight. For example, Graham Swift's *The Light of Day*, like McEwan's *Saturday*, was the first novel the writer published after the September 11th terrorist attacks. Unlike McEwan, Swift does not directly reference the attacks on the twin towers. Instead, he focuses more on the effects of the knowledge of violence and terror on the individual, as well as the violence that received genres can do to the human subject. The expectations set out by the genres and the metanarratives McEwan and Swift evoke, which, though undermined and accepted as fiction in the academic world are still used as frameworks for narrative both on a personal and public level, are sometimes brutally undermined by the narrators, as in the case of *Atonement*. McEwan sets up Briony's narrative to lead her readers to believe that what she is presenting is fact, and that though there is strife, notions of romantic love win out for Cecilia and Robbie. However, as previously discussed, Briony's initials at the end of Part Three, along with her revelations in the "London, 1999" section of the novel, make the reader realize that Briony has fabricated the romance of the story (and perhaps even the whole story itself). Through this revelation, McEwan underscores the problematic use of genre to replace metanarratives. That is, for the narrators, genre serves as a kind of replacement for the undermined metanarratives that previously ordered their world. However, the application of genre itself is complicit in a kind of violence towards both the narrator and reader. At times,

as illustrated in *Atonement*, genre sets up expectations that cannot be sustained by the text, causing trauma for the narrators. At other times, such as in McEwan's *Enduring Love* and Swift's *The Light of Day*, the application of genre is retroactive and this causes the reader to see the narrator as unreliable, such as when Joe, the protagonist in *Enduring Love*, suggests in the beginning of the novel that he feels as though he is in a soap opera and the rest of the tale that follows is highly overdramatic. Similarly, in Swift's *The Light of Day*, George Webb sets up his story to be a mystery, yet, as critics have noted, the novel "gestures towards the thriller and the murder mystery, though it is too slow-paced to be a convincing example of the former and insufficiently mysterious to count as the latter" (Lea 192). For George, the application of genre cannot sustain him: his story is about a simple man who was peripherally affected by an act of violence and he must cope with it. There are no heroes, no whodunits, and no binding conclusion that will allow him to have closure. Instead, he and the other narrators such as Briony, Henry, and Joe, try to use genre to replace metanarratives when they are confronted with violence and the resulting terror, but end up doing more violence to their own psyches. Essentially, McEwan and Swift are highlighting the flaws in replacing one kind of legitimacy based on false premises with another. Through their novels, both McEwan and Swift have foregrounded the failure of metanarratives, and the death of the dream of modernity. Again, as metanarratives are problematized, "closure became problematic" (Richardson 294). As each authors' narrators explore the results of the collapse of metanarratives, many of the narrators also turn to another kind of framework to tell their story in an effort to gain the closure they have been denied. In McEwan's *Atonement*, *Saturday*, and *Enduring Love*, and Swift's *Waterland*, *Ever After*, and *The Light of Day*, the narrators invoke different historical genres, as well as obvious literary intertexts, in an effort

to try to answer the question posed by the postmodern condition: “where, after metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?” (Lyotard xxv). The narrators try to ‘borrow’ the legitimacy given over time to other literary works such as *The Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, as well as narrative frameworks (or what I am calling genre as intertext), such as the romance novel, the detective fiction, the soap opera, and the drama. Ultimately, they come to realize that these frameworks, and their potential for securing legitimacy, are similarly flawed and closure is still elusive. That is, the intertextuality of literature and genre in these novels points to the fact that there are no easy replacements for metanarratives; instead, each narrator must narrativize his or her personal truth of existence and must come to terms with his or her own eventual “extinction” without the consolation of the metanarratives of enlightenment, or even the disclosure offered by genre.

This lack of consolation contributes to Tom Crick’s present state in *Waterland*. Tom originally bases his legitimacy on history as a means to gain enlightenment and earn a place in the historical record, and he is devastated when he realizes history is a “fabrication” (*Waterland* 40), and religion is a “yarn” (*Waterland* 312). He says the rest of his narrative is “the complete and final version...” (*Waterland* 8), but now, rather than history, any “complete and final version” is only “a fairy-tale” (*Waterland* 8). The function of Tom using the genre of the “fairy-tale” is to provide him with a narrative framework to work through the trauma of the present where he is faced with the knowledge that the metanarrative of history is “to the point where it’s probably about to end” (*Waterland* 7), regardless of the fact that “all the stories were once real. And all the events of history, the battles and the costume-pieces, once really happened” (*Waterland* 297). This framework allows Tom to tell his story and to attempt to explain to both himself and his reader how he came to be where he is in the

“here and now” (*Waterland* 6). Instead of adhering to the one version of history his class was discussing when his student Price interrupted, throughout Tom’s “fairy-tale” he picks and chooses the moments that he feels have contributed to his present condition. However, Tom’s application of the genre of “fairy-tale” also does violence to his narratives. With the classification “fairy-tale” comes an abundance of historically received conventions and ideas, including the expected ‘happily ever after,’ and the understanding that fairytales are completely fictional. While Tom Crick is indeed a fictional character, his likening of his narrative to a fiction undermines the seriousness of what he reveals and challenges his narrative as a whole. In this way, his invocation of genre does violence to his narrative in the form of creating disbelief and denying his story credibility from his audience.

Other than Swift’s *Waterland* where Tom Crick repeatedly states he is telling a fairytale, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* is the most obvious example of the intertext of genre and other cultural events. I have previously laid out the ways in which the novel invokes both the Second World War and the resulting impact the war had on the Western cultural world view, but the novel also explores the way that conventions of genre have shaped the Western world view. In the letter she received after submitting her first draft of “Two Figures by a Fountain,” the editor notes ways in which Briony should change her story: “If this girl has so fully misunderstood...how might it affect the lives of the two adults? Might she come between them in some disastrous fashion?...Might the young couple come to use her as a messenger?” (*Atonement* 313), all of which Briony incorporates into her final edition of the story. This suggests that Briony has adhered to traditions of genre, so much so that they have affected the story she has lead the reader to believe is the ‘truth’ about what happened by the fountain and the subsequent results of her misunderstanding. In fact, the editor’s suggestion

that “the young couple come to use her as a messenger” suggests that perhaps Robbie did not give Briony the note to pass to Cecilia, that it was not a part of her first attempt at the story, and that she never read the carnal message he sent. In addition, the editor’s suggestion that the girl “come between” the two adults “in some disastrous fashion” implies that this was not the case in Briony’s first draft, and that her accusation, as well as Robbie’s resulting imprisonment, the personalized events of the war, and even Briony’s statement that “it is only in this last version that my lovers end well” (*Atonement* 370), has been added after the fact. Briony admits that the characters “only exist as my inventions” (*Atonement* 371), and that she has made many “offences against veracity” (*Atonement* 356), and this underscores the way she has incorporated the conventions of the romance genre to explain a moment she did not understand as a child. Furthermore, the editor’s note that Briony “apologise[s], in passing, for not writing about the war” (*Atonement* 314) casts doubt on whether Robbie was even at Dunkirk, let alone whether or not he “died of septicaemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940” (*Atonement* 370). Viewed in this light, Briony’s entire narrative, and whether or not she ‘tricks’ the reader into believing that Robbie and Cecilia “survive and flourish” (*Atonement* 371), or that they “never met again, never fulfilled their love” (*Atonement* 371), becomes irrelevant. Not because, as she states, “as long as there is a single copy, a solitary transcript of my final draft, then my spontaneous, fortuitous sister and her medical prince survive to love” (*Atonement* 371), but because it becomes obvious that Briony is trying out different ways of accomplishing “those little tasks of housekeeping that come at the end, and are a part of the reluctant process of letting go” (*Atonement* 353), because she “always like a tidy finish” (*Atonement* 353). This once again emphasizes that she is playing with genre, as the couple ending up together suggests a conclusion to a romance, much like her juvenile

romance of Arabella. As well, her subsequent revelation that they may have died is her attempt to write the “psychological realism which she had discovered for herself” (*Atonement* 41). Furthermore, Briony’s two potential endings to her story of Robbie and Cecelia are undermined by her contention that “truth had become as ghostly as invention” (*Atonement* 41), which foregrounds the uncertainty of any kind of truth or legitimacy in the postmodern, and simultaneously highlights how notions of ‘truth’ have haunted postmodernity. This statement further indicates the way that these internalized notions of ‘truth’ haunt the process of narrativization, to the extent that Briony borrows on other frameworks, such as genre, in an attempt to give her story legitimacy, just as McEwan’s and Swift’s other narrators do. However, Briony’s perceptible machinations with genre, instead of providing legitimacy and authenticity to her status as a subject and her story, underscore the incompleteness of knowledge in postmodernity. At the end of McEwan’s novel, the reader will never know “what *really* happened” (*Atonement* 371, emphasis in original), because Briony has admittedly made “convenient distortion[s]” (*Atonement* 356), is a self-described “unreliable witness” (*Atonement* 358), and states that if she “really cared so much about facts, [she] should have written a different kind of book” (*Atonement* 360). Instead, what she has done is created a fiction, perhaps based on something that happened in her past, but it is also equally as likely that “whatever actually happened drew its significance from her published work” (*Atonement* 41), the work the reader has just finished.

In Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, the moment Henry first encounters terror, the car crash on his way to play racquet ball, he consciously notes the intertext of a pop culture genre. As he gets out of his car, he feels as though “he is cast in a role...and there is no way out [of this]...urban drama” (*Saturday* 86). He then goes on to note the intertext of urban drama as it

he knows it. He states it has been “worn smooth with reiteration” in popular culture (*Saturday* 86), which foregrounds that he is aware he is invoking a well-known genre of story and is preparing his expectations of the outcome of the three men approaching him, as well as readying himself for what he sees as the inevitable: “someone is going to have to impose his will and win, and the other is going to give way” (*Saturday* 86). Henry’s immediate assumption that his interactions with Baxter and his men will follow a “worn smooth” dialogue or script, as well as his awareness of what is likely to follow, highlights the way genres made popular by “a century of movies and half a century of television” have been incorporated into personal narratives (*Saturday* 86). Even through his sense of uneasiness, Henry goes on to note that the altercation is “play-acting” (*Saturday* 86), “ill-rehearsed” (*Saturday* 90), and “make-believe” (*Saturday* 90), all of which suggest that Henry has become so used to genre as cultural intertext that even in moments of fear and terror, he turns to genre to make sense of the potentially impending chaos of violence. When the urban drama genre fails to account for Baxter’s actions, when it seems as though the ‘actors’ have abandoned the ‘script,’ Henry then turns to science to neutralize the situation. His application of a medical diagnosis for Baxter’s behaviour suggests that genre, for Henry, sets up expectations which may or may not be fulfilled, but, for the majority of his narrative, he feels that it is science that gives him answers. Nevertheless, an example from *Saturday* further illustrates that the telling of a story involves the ordering of narration and the inclusion of details of genre, even when the person telling the story is not entirely sure of motivation. When setting up the climax of the story, the third person narrator comments that “perhaps Henry’s too preoccupied, or too impatient, to make a decent job of this reunion” (*Saturday* 201). The third person narrator then goes on to speculate “Does it matter?” (*Saturday* 201),

which, as it turns out, does matter because the thing that is distracting Henry is waiting for Rosalind to come home, and when Rosalind eventually returns, the intruders who shape the climax follow her in the door. The fact that the narrator even asks “does it matter?” suggests that s/he knows it matters, thus foregrounding that s/he knows the climax is coming. This foreshadowing in turn points to the forethought of inclusion of detail when telling a story. The narrator knows the climax is coming, and therefore includes details that build up the climax, such as emphasizing Henry’s distractedness, because it is the form of the thriller genre to have the main character caught off guard by violence. As in *Atonement* and *Waterland*, this application of received genres, and the inclusion of details to create suspense, casts doubt on the ‘truth’ of Henry’s narrative and suggests the possibility that the narrator has altered the events to fit the genre, rather than telling the story as it happened.

Nowhere is the violence that genre can do to a narrative more obvious than in McEwan’s *Enduring Love*. Like Tom, Briony, and Henry, Joe also directly refers to the intertext of genre in his construction of his narrative. After John Logan falls, Joe states “I was both first and third persons” (*Enduring* 19), “I was in a soap opera” (*Enduring* 21), noting that the way he was speaking was “artful” (*Enduring* 21), and even referring to himself in the third person: “*now he’s talking to his woman*” (*Enduring* 21). Even though these events happened in the past, Joe is recollecting them from the future of the balloon accident, which suggests that he is applying popular genre to his actions, actions which he admits are characterized by “mania” (*Enduring* 21). That is, in the act of re-examining his own “mania” after John falls, Joe is applying a clearly recognizable genre to make sense of his inappropriate reaction to watching John die. He notes that Clarissa “told me later that it crossed her mind to slap my face” (*Enduring* 21). He is clearly in shock and unable to deal

with the terror. There was a “tremor in my legs...I did not trust my balance” (*Enduring* 21), yet he his initial reaction is a “euphoric calm” in the face of the trauma and violence to person he has just witnessed. From the future, he realizes his calm was a “flagrant untruth” (*Enduring* 20), but in the moment he uses words like “euphoric,” “happy,” and “pleasantness” (*Enduring* 20), all of which suggest that Joe has disconnected from the brutal death he has just witnessed and feels as though he has a role to play and a script to follow. His euphoria and “pleasantness” result from him feeling as though he is finally able to fulfill the role of a hero in a significant narrative of trauma and potential rescue, regardless of the fact that his momentary heroism only occurs within his own “soap opera.” John Logan fell from three hundred feet above the ground. While watching him fall, Joe admits there is “no forgiveness, no special dispensation for flesh, or bravery, or kindness. Only ruthless gravity” (*Enduring* 16). The use of “no forgiveness” and the word “ruthless” emphasize that Joe is well aware he is watching a man plunging to his death, yet in the immediate moments after John hits the ground, Joe decides it is “best to slow down” his narrative so that he has a chance to fill in some information (*Enduring* 17). Part of this information is a recurring nightmare he has about watching a group of people “certain to die” and he cannot help them, all he can feel is “terror, guilt and helplessness” (*Enduring* 18). The fact that he brings up the dream after John falls, but just moments before admitting to feeling the “euphoric calm” of being “in a soap opera” suggests that he is using genre as a means to remove himself from the terror of seeing a man violently die. However, Joe’s retroactive application of genre does a disservice to the story he tells. His invocation of the genre of a “soap opera” early on in the text causes the reader to question Joe’s sanity. Like Clarissa and the policemen, the reader is only ever given information about Jed’s supposed obsession through the lens of Joe’s

storytelling. Even the sections apparently narrated by Clarissa and by Jed, in the form of letters, are included in what is clearly Joe's story and because Joe feels they have relevance to his narrative. As a result of the received conventions of soap operas, which are characterized as over-dramatized and unrealistic, the reader, like Clarissa, comes to wonder who it is that has de Clérambault's syndrome. The drama of the shoot-out in the restaurant which Joe is convinced results from Jed hiring a killer to come after him, results in Joe's declaration that "no one could agree on anything" (*Enduring* 180), and that "we live in a mist of a half-shared, unreliable perception, and our sense of data [comes] warped by a prism of desire and belief, which tilt[s] our memories too" (*Enduring* 180). This admission, coupled with Joe's application of the soap opera genre suggests that he is over-dramatizing and that perhaps his narrative is just as much a figment of his imagination as Briony's may be. That is, he wants to believe that Jed is stalking him, and by his own admission he has "tilted" his memories to fit this "desire and belief." Again, until the very end of this novel, this does violence to Joe's narrative because it opens up a window of considerable doubt, not only in the narrator, but in the methods he employs to interpret his reality. For that matter, the climax and subsequent appendices could very well be figments of Joe's "desire and belief," that he—being a science writer—may well have written himself. Thus, the entire narrative is shadowed by doubt in his reliability.

Graham Swift's *Ever After* also uses the intertext of genre as the narrator, Bill Unwin, attempts to find legitimacy for his personal narrative. As both Malcolm and Lea point out, the novel contains many overt references to literary intertextuality, specifically, Bill's likening of himself to Shakespeare's Hamlet, which they argue is Bill's attempt to come to terms with the "decay, chaos and death" in his present that is mirrored in *Hamlet* (Malcolm

146), as well as “move his own brand of failure centre-stage and elevate it to the status of tragic universality” (Lea 138). What neither of these critics suggest is that Bill’s identification with the character of Hamlet foregrounds the ways in which he is ‘borrowing’ a kind of legitimacy from the Shakespearean tragedy. *Hamlet* was one of Shakespeare’s most popular plays and is still widely known, read, and acted out today, thus suggesting that the story not only has legitimacy because of the popularity of its author, but also that there is some universal quality about the story that has lasted almost four centuries, and it is this enduring ‘something’ that Bill is seeking out for himself. However, Bill realizes that he is not “not the moody Prince all along, but prating Polonius” (*Ever After* 188), a rather insignificant character in Shakespeare’s play, which suggests, like Tom Crick’s realization about history, that Bill has not found the legitimacy for his own narrative that he seeks in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Instead, Bill’s likening of himself to Polonius invokes another intertext, T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” which is much more germane to this novel. Like Bill, Eliot’s narrator notes, “I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;/ Am an attendant lord, one that will do/ To swell a progress, start a scene or two” (Eliot 2610). In essence, Bill ceases to identify with Hamlet, and, like Eliot’s narrator, realizes he is “a nobody, an heirless nonentity” (*Ever After* 246). He cannot find the personal legitimacy he seeks through genre any more than he can through history, as represented by his frustrated attempt to understand and write the history of his ancestor, Matthew Pearce. It is at this point that the failure of the conventions of a received genre, to provide Bill with legitimacy, causes psychic violence. Bill realizes that no matter how hard he tries to create them, there are “no simulations, fabrications, biographical conjurations” (*Ever After* 270). He has abandoned “the wilder delusions, the ruses subterfuges, superstitions” that there is anything beyond death (*Ever*

After 270), and thus tries to kill himself. However, it is his failed attempt at suicide that ultimately leads to his narrative, a point I will pick up on in more detail later.

Swift's *The Light of Day* is primarily situated on November 20, 1999, two years from the day that Sarah Nash killed her husband Bob as he returned from dropping his illicit lover off at the airport. The novel is narrated by George Webb, a private investigator hired by Sarah, who followed Bob and Kristina, Bob's lover, in 1997 in order to confirm for Sarah that Kristina indeed left the country. The novel also occasionally incorporates reminiscences from George's past. Like *Atonement*, *Waterland*, *Ever After*, and *Enduring Love*, *The Light of Day* is retroactively narrated, and it is the inclusion of details from his past that signpost the psychic violence done to George by the romance genre. When George was young he learned firsthand that the tradition of romantic love was not the reality experienced by all couples when he found out that his father was cheating on his mother, a woman his father claimed was "the one" (Swift *The Light of Day* 106)⁸. George struggles with this, as obviously his father's declaration was challenged by the other love interest in his life, but ultimately he decides that he cannot tell his mother about the affair so that "her memories wouldn't have any scars" (*Light* 162). While he may be protecting his mother, the fact that he does not want to openly acknowledge his father's affair suggests that, even years later, George is reluctant to acknowledge the "pretence" of the received genre of romantic love (*Light* 163). In fact, while recounting his memories about how his mother learned of the other woman on his father's deathbed, George states he will "have to pretend" that his father was delirious and that the name meant nothing "for her [his mother's] sake" (*Light* 163), but only moments later he questions "was it such a pretence?" (*Light* 163). George's questioning

⁸ From this point forward I will cite Swift's *The Light of Day*, as *Light*.

of whether or not pretending his father did not cheat on his mother was a “pretence,” suggests that he still harbours a desire to believe in the romance his parents claimed, and thus still believes in a traditionally created notion of romance. Years later Sarah’s situation closely mirrors his mother’s, yet the repetition of this aspect of his history allows George to do what he could never do for his mother. He tells Sarah the truth about her husband, even though he cannot understand why Bob cheats, just as he could never understand why his father cheated on his mother. In both situations, interestingly, George continues to demonstrate an unwavering belief in the romance narrative. Even when faced with evidence to the contrary, evidence he gives women on a daily basis in his role as a private detective, George continually believes in the received tradition of romantic love and fidelity, which is why Sarah’s act of violence towards Bob, the man for whom George believes she was “holding out a net” (*Light* 182) to catch him when he came home, causes George to admit “[s]omething’s come over [him]” and that “it wasn’t just a thing of the moment” (*Light* 3). In addition, the constant motif of frost and cold present from the very beginning of the novel (*Light* 3, 4, 7) suggests that George is experiencing a frozen moment in time, a moment that he cannot get past because he cannot fathom that received notions of romantic love are just that, received notions, rather than absolute expressions of love. Moreover, early on George remarks, it is “two years from *that* day” (*Light* 6, emphasis in original), which again illustrates that Sarah’s act of violence—towards the man she said she loved so much she prepared herself “as if for a celebration” when she learned he left his lover at the airport (*Light* 283)—has caused George to undergo a parallel stasis to that of the dead and buried Bob. Furthermore, George’s visit to Bob’s grave, and his declaration that “if he were alive I could kill him” (*Light* 74), foregrounds that the tradition of the romantic genre has both

caused violence towards Bob in the form of Sarah, when he undermined their love by cheating, and has caused George to feel violent because once again he has consciously seen evidence that romance is not anything but an idea. In other words, traditional notions of romance have caused George to feel and experience violence as he finally recognizes the heart, symbolic of received traditions of romance, is “just a thing for pumping blood and not all the other things it gets made out to be” (*Light* 302): it cannot fulfill the expectations set out for it by the traditional romance genre.

VII. Interrupted Continuity: Genealogy as Intertext

Contrary to Jürgen Habermas' assertion that modernity is an unfinished project, McEwan and Swift seem to contend that modernity is a floundering project. It offers no consolation for the persistence of violence between human beings or the societies acting in their names. The metanarratives of modernity have failed, as Lyotard would say, leaving the subject with the inability to frame and understand violence, ranging from that of World War II, to 9/11, to home invasion, to the apparently inexplicable murder of a husband, to the desire to do violence to oneself through suicide. Moreover, in the previous section, I demonstrated that received genres do not provide an easy consolation or replacement for the larger loss of explanation contained in metanarratives. While it is no news that McEwan's and Swift's fictions are historiographic metafiction that employ generic conventions to critique generic conventions, it is the persistence with which they examine the psychic violence and loss as constitutive of the need for continued narrative that is most striking. Narrativizing comes to represent a response to loss, to mourning. Throughout the course of the preceding chapters, I have illustrated the ways that violence has contributed to the failure of metanarratives and received genres as a means of explaining the world to subjects. I have also shown how the failure of metanarratives has led to terror for subjects, as there are no longer totalizing stories which justify, and are justified by, violence, nor are there frameworks such as traditionally inherited genres which can take the place of metanarratives. This failure has led subjects to realize that their mortality very much depends on anonymous others, and that what awaits them at the end of life, whenever this may come, is "extinction," and "oblivion," rather than any kind of enlightenment or salvation. In light of this postmodern anxiety, then, it will come as no surprise that McEwan and Swift are both

compelled by issues arising from genealogy: paternity, maternity, and progeny. That is, just as McEwan's and Swift's narrators attempt to replace metanarratives explaining ontology with received genres, so, too, do they attempt to seek legitimacy in offspring. As Michel Foucault points out, genealogy, in its purest form, "is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things...; this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world" (78), and it is this search that narrators such as Tom Crick participate in when he seeks a "a miniature model of reality" in Mary's womb (*Waterland* 42). However, as with other metanarratives, such as religion, that promise a salvation beyond the world we live in, postmodernity has problematized the notion that there is anything that precedes the world as we receive it; as Foucault notes, "it is wrong to search for...uninterrupted continuity" in origins and historical continuity, such as that of children (83), because there is no meaning within in origins or history themselves (Foucault 86). Nevertheless, Swift's fiction, specifically *Waterland*, *Ever After* and *Last Orders*, repeatedly explores these themes, particularly concerning child bearing and male progeny, and his male narrators are consistently unable to fulfill their desires to reproduce themselves. For instance, Tom Crick does not have children because Mary, his wife, is unable to carry a child, Bill Unwin does not have children because his wife died; three of the four main narrators of *Last Orders* have female children who are not interested in their fathers. Even Swift's latest novel, *Tomorrow*, which features a female narrator, focuses on Mike's inability to reproduce, and the role that science has played in the continuity of their family name. However, the main crisis at the centre of Paula's reminiscence is not biology, but rather the question of just what it is that makes Mike a father to her children and how her children will react to the news that Mike is not their biological father. McEwan's novels, such as *The Child In Time*, and *Enduring Love*,

also deal with men who have been denied fatherhood for various reasons, such as Stephen's child's kidnapping and Clarissa's inability to bear Joe's children. However, McEwan seems to suggest there is an answer to this concern over progeny, which is something I will explore shortly, but first I would like to discuss the theme of paternity as it is developed in Swift's *Waterland*.

Critics such as Daniel Lea and Ernst van Alphen have explored the value of psychoanalysis for interpretation of Swift's *Waterland*, specifically pertaining to Lacanian notions of motherhood, and though the critics do not connect this concept to terror, metanarratives, and mourning, both McEwan's and Swift's novels repeatedly draw attention to their male narrators' terror at their inability to find authenticity through children, and their inability to ensure their legacies through their offspring. Lea's chapter on *Waterland* contains an analysis of the psychoanalytic intertext. He argues that the mention of "mother's milk" throughout the novel represents Tom's desire to return to the imagined maternal body and wholeness (Lea 85-6). Lea also explores Mary as a mother figure, capable of both reproduction and destruction, as evidenced by her pregnancy and self-induced abortion, and argues that Mary's retreat into silence occurs because "Mary has no stories left" to protect and secure her identity (86); however, Lea does not consider that the stories and narratives being created and recounted are Tom's stories, not Mary's. In fact, Mary does not retreat into silence, as Tom states that she continues to "grieve for her baby. The baby they took away from her and won't give back" (*Waterland* 328-9). This grieving illustrates Kristeva's notion of mourning as the postmodern condition, as Mary sought to replace her lost fertility with another baby, a fertility that Tom suggests is "a miniature model of reality" (*Waterland* 42). For Mary, taking the baby was her way of compensating for her lost biological ability to

access reality in a time when the very idea of reality is being questioned⁹; she occupies a place that Tom cannot understand, a place where “she’s still in the midst of events” (*Waterland* 329). Mary has retreated to a place where Tom can no longer view her as an Other against whom he can identify himself. Nor can he continue to see Mary as a maternal figure through whom he has the chance to return to imagined wholeness as he did in the past when she was his “untouchable madonna” (*Waterland* 48); instead “she had to spoil it all” because “she is leaving him; she is forsaking him” (*Waterland* 132, 147), as a figure that he can understand, and situate in his history—thus situating history for him. Mary’s infertility also denies Tom genetic continuity thus ending the Crick family’s “uninterrupted continuity” (Foucault 83), because he will never procreate, he will never have access to the reality he believes that her womb can provide him, and there will never be another Crick to tell stories about him the way he reproduces his ancestry through stories; essentially, Mary’s actions in aborting their baby have caused Tom to be the end of his own ancestral lineage. The crisis in the novel is not that Mary has retreated from the symbolic, as Lea argues; instead, it is that

⁹ Postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard contends that human subjects no longer have access to reality. Instead, Baudrillard argues, subjects are operating within a simulacrum, wherein language, which is always already figurative, produces a figuration of the real rather than describes the real. Baudrillard goes so far as to say that due to this breakdown “reality” and the “real” do not even exist. However, as much as he argues that metanarratives are dead and that “reality” does not exist, there is evidence within Baudrillard’s argument that what he has produced is another metanarrative to replace the ones that have been undermined by the postmodern understanding of nature of language and signs. For example, his theory of the simulacrum is as totalizing and apocalyptic as many metanarratives that came before it. Also, while Baudrillard seems particularly concerned with the postmodern nature of language and signs as lacking any fixed and inherent meaning, his own account of the simulacrum frequently uses terminology that suggests transcendence and omnipotence. He is very critical of past metanarratives that promote a “universal law” that is not supported by the experience of every individual in the world, yet he seems to get caught in this same problem himself, thus perpetuating metanarratives as ways of ordering the world, and undermining his own argument. This suggests Baudrillard is caught up in an act of mourning the loss of metanarratives as a way of ordering existence, something both McEwan’s and Swift’s narrators must deal with as the intertexts they have used in the past, including metanarratives, cannot explain their current interactions with terror, nor can these frameworks produce the story for them as a means of dealing with the postmodern condition.

Mary, a central figure on whom Tom based his identity from a young age, has disappeared as a symbolic mother who can hold “the contagious symptoms of fear” at bay (*Waterland* 7). This event leaves him in mourning for an irrevocable loss, the loss of the mother, as he recognizes that neither metanarratives such as those of history, nor potential offspring, can provide him with a means of escaping the oblivion that awaits him.

Swift’s *Last Orders* is also concerned with progeny and the metanarrative of patriarchal continuity. The novel follows four men as they journey to Margate to scatter the ashes of one of their close friends. Unlike *Waterland* and *Ever After*, the novel is narrated by several different characters as they struggle to deal with the death of their friend, as well as their own legitimacy and place within history. Critic Richard Pedot picks up on the theme of threatened masculinity in light of the failure of history to give “Man” a solid foundation for identity in *Last Orders*. Pedot points to the fact that all of the male characters, with the exception of Vic, have daughters whom they classify as “nothing but trouble” (Swift *Last Orders* 48). As such, Pedot states, only Vic can be sure that his biological heritage will carry on, and only he can be assured that his sons will follow his own last orders (63). The rest of the men repeatedly question whether or not their daughters will come to their funerals and carry out their last requests. This undermining of any access to the future for the men, even if it is only being remembered and having their lives marked by another, illustrates the ways in which Swift not only problematizes the metanarrative of history—even though the men participated in the Second World War their contribution was not sufficient enough to be acknowledged by the historical record—but also other metanarratives such as the “uninterrupted continuity” of patriarchal genealogy that support and are supported by history. That is, culture and language in the Western world are of a patriarchal nature and this is

continuously disseminated through metanarratives, so much so that they become their own metanarratives, constantly reinforced by and reinforcing science, history, colonialism, and religion. When the four main male characters recognize that the metanarrative of history, and of their own patriarchal and genealogical continuation, can no longer provide legitimacy for their narratives, as evidenced by the death of Jack as a patriarch of their community who “underwrote [them, as]...he was big, like a wall, like a boulder” (*Last Orders* 88), they begin to mourn their loss of power and control. Essentially, through narrative, they attempt to work through how to ensure their own personal validity when Jack, a father figure to all of them, no longer has presence, but only has the legitimacy they give him.

Swift’s *Ever After* portrays the mourning, not so much for progeny, but rather for genealogy—that is, history; and this, in addition to the inability of received genres to compensate for failed metanarratives, also signals psychic violence for Bill Unwin. Through the course of the narrative, Bill comes to realize that he will not have a place in history, either vicariously through Matthew Pearce or through the writing of Matthew Pearce’s narrative because “I invent all this. I don’t know that this is how it happened. It can’t have been like this simply because I imagine it so” (*Ever After* 120). As Bill realizes the metanarrative of history cannot provide his personal narrative any kind of legitimacy, he also realizes he has no suitable ““*substitoots*”” his stepfather Sam says replace the “real stuff [that] is running out” (*Ever After* 10). In addition, Sam’s revelation about the questionable identity of Bill’s biological father signifies the death of patriarchal certainty present in the metanarratives of religion, history, and science. When Sam dies, Bill realizes he is in an “utterly bogus position” because he no longer has even Sam, who he admits he “really liked” to aid him in forming a legitimate narrative (*Ever After* 11). In the end, Bill causes violence

to himself in the form of a suicide attempt due to the impact of the psychic violence of the failure of metanarratives to hold at bay the “death!” that is “is suddenly all around [him], like a mist, a tide” (*Ever After* 207). The use of the word “tide” suggests that Bill is suddenly overwhelmed by the realization that death is all around him; just as the tide is constantly ebbing and flowing, death is always there and always comes, regardless of whether or not people are aware of it. He is ultimately left wondering “why do we ever reach beyond ourselves to the existence of others, not so say beyond existence itself?” (*Ever After* 195), which suggests that he has come to understand that without metanarratives to provide a story of salvation or of continuity, and no children to continue his own legacy, there is nothing beyond present existence, nothing except death and the same “extinction” Robbie is concerned with.

VIII. “The Attempt Was All”: Narrativizing the Postmodern Condition

I have explored the ways in which the postmodern is fraught with the intertexts of terror and violence, as well as the psychic violence of received narrative traditions such as genre. As the notions which ground humans’ sense of purpose and being in the world are called into question in postmodernism, realization of the fragility of the ‘foundation’ upon which humans base their ontological status results in tension within the subject as metanarratives and other received narrative traditions are undermined, and the subject faces a “zero degree of symbolism” (Kristeva *Black Sun* 182). In McEwan’s and Swift’s fiction, this tension manifests itself as a form of mourning for the metanarratives which previously grounded existence and provided personal and cultural meaning, legitimacy, and authenticity. Earlier I made the connection between the intertextuality of violence and the violence of intertextuality, both of which lead to mourning for McEwan’s and Swift’s narrators. There is the obvious mourning of a violence which has changed the world in terms of the loss of human life, which can be seen in many of McEwan’s and Swift’s novels, such as in *Atonement* when Briony writes a new ending to Robbie and Cecilia’s story to cope with the fact that the brutality of the war robbed them of a future together. Similarly, in Swift’s *Ever After*, Bill mourns the death of his wife, mother, and stepfather. However, both McEwan’s and Swift’s texts also point to the mourning of the death of the dream of modernity. That is, in all of the novels I have discussed, the narrators are mourning the loss of metanarratives as a means to know and prepare for their futures; as well, they mourn the realization that there is nothing that can replace metanarratives. As the narrators invoke fictive genres to deal with their terror at actual or metaphorical violence, they set up expectations which portend the outcome for both the narrator and the reader, outcomes

which, Briony's legacy demonstrates, are just as problematic as the apocalyptic conclusions to human "civilization" prophesied by the metanarratives they try to use to explain existence. The inability of genre to replace metanarratives—indeed, as I have argued, received genres cause more violence towards the subject because of the expectations they put into play—suggests that perhaps the conscious recognition of the failure of metanarratives in postmodernity goes beyond just mourning, that it is characterized by "nostalgia for the unattainable" (Lyotard 81). However, as much as both McEwan and Swift incorporate the problematic nature of metanarratives and received genres, and their narrators' concerns about the search for legitimacy, the authors are not completely despondent about personal authenticity. That is, both authors suggest that there is legitimacy in creating narratives, and that language and narrative need not be abandoned just because the language of narratives has been problematized in postmodernism. What the narrators ultimately seem to realize is that there is no idyllic or idealized future waiting for them, nor is there a way to avoid being one of the millions that Tom declares will never make it into history. Yet all is not bleak for McEwan's and Swift's narrators, even for the most extreme cases, such as Bill Unwin. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth discusses the reliving of trauma through memory and the construction of these memories into a narrative. She uses Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to explore the meaning of reliving trauma for the survivor and concludes that the repetition of trauma in narrative is "fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one's own survival*" (Caruth 64). The retroactive narration of each of McEwan's and Swift's novels foregrounds that each of the narrators has come to understand that it is through writing, as in the case of Bill Unwin, Tom Crick, George Webb, and, most obviously, Briony Tallis, or through literature, as evidenced by

Henry Perowne, and Joe Rose, that they can navigate through their mourning and reconcile themselves to the death of the dream of modernity. That is, the dream has failed, but through writing and literature each narrator is able to deal with the violence and terror of a postmodern world where nothing is certain and there are no totalizing metanarratives to hold the “oblivion” at bay. In essence, narrativizing allows each narrator to survive the physical and/or psychic violence each has experience, and though the search for legitimation “entails a certain level of terror” (Lyotard xxiv), the narrators have found a means of coping with that terror.

Briony most obviously makes her own “stand against oblivion and despair” (*Atonement* 372). The narrative that precedes the “London, 1999” section of the novel is her attempt to atone for the violence of her own fictional creation. The novel is also McEwan’s attempt to suggest another way for subjects to see the postmodern world. In his oratorio, “Or Shall We Die?”, McEwan laments the fact that “we continue, of course, to live within a Newtonian universe-its physics are perfectly adequate to describe and measure the world we can see....We frequently describe the world as though we ourselves were invisible” (11-12). In other words, McEwan is lamenting the fact that modernist metanarratives, such as the positivist view of science as enlightenment, continue to haunt postmodernity, even when these types of totalizing stories have been problematized. However, Briony’s maneuverings with genre and her play with notions of ‘truth’ and fiction illustrate that McEwan is attempting to exorcise the haunting of modernity. There is no ‘truth’ in *Atonement*, and the “London, 1999” section illustrates that Briony does not see herself as invisible at all. Instead, she openly acknowledges the changes she has made and that when the novel she wrote is published “Briony will be as much of a fantasy as the lovers who shared a bed in Balham”

(*Atonement* 371). Moreover, the acknowledgment that “Briony will be as much of a fantasy” suggests that McEwan is making his own presence as author known, because Briony always was a fantasy of McEwan’s imagination. Ultimately, through narrative, Briony comes to terms with her past trauma, just as McEwan comes to terms with the haunting of received modernist narratives; at the same time, McEwan also suggests that narrative, though problematic, is far more powerful than we may have previously understood. Briony’s acknowledgment of the fictiveness of her narrative, as well as her acknowledgment that presenting the ‘truth’ “was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point” (*Atonement* 371) suggests that what is ‘truth’ is not what matters. Instead, “the attempt was all” (*Atonement* 371); through narrative Briony has left her legacy and coped with the violence she caused, and McEwan has left his legacy, and perhaps has also coped with the violence of narrative.

In McEwan’s *Enduring Love*, Joe himself problematizes metanarratives and the act of narration. He notes that “the narrative compression of storytelling...beguiles use with happy endings” (*Enduring* 213), and that even within his own story “along the narrative lines there were knots, tangles of horror” (*Enduring* 29). He fully recognizes that received genres cannot provide a framework of legitimacy for his story, nor can he substantiate his narrative with the metanarrative of science because “however scientifically informed we count ourselves to be, fear and awe still surprise us” (*Enduring* 23). In other words, Joe consciously recognizes that the metanarrative of science cannot explain emotion, and that emotion exists in the world outside the realm of any kind of enlightenment promised by science. He also consciously recognizes the flaws in creating any narrative, noting “a day or so later it became a temptation to invent or elaborate details...to force memory to deliver what was never

captured” (*Enduring* 166). As scientifically minded as he is, Joe notes that he has a “bullish way” (*Enduring* 222), and that in the past he acknowledged a “delicacy that I failed...to grasp” in the act of writing and narrativizing (*Enduring* 222). He even goes so far as to say that he “was eager to start writing” (*Enduring* 71) about his experiences with Jed in order to convey them to the people that did not believe him. This eagerness, coupled with the retroactive narrative Joe presents as the novel, emphasizes Joe’s belief that writing, and the process of creating a narrative, will allow him to work through the trauma of seeing a man die, and work through the trauma of being stalked by Jed. The fact that he notes his tendencies to want to “invent or elaborate” illustrates that Joe is aware of the problematic nature of ‘truth’ in narrative, but the novel—as his story—suggests that Joe sees narrative as a valid way of mourning the loss of ‘truth’ narratives. Interestingly, he also reveals that he cannot father children, and that he is a failure as a scientist, both of which suggest that Joe will have no legacy, that he is the same kind of “non-entity” Bill likens himself to in Swift’s *Ever After*. However, the revelation that Joe’s diagnosis of Jed’s illness and of the stalking is apparently correct, suggests that McEwan is foregrounding narrativizing as a means of working through the violence of the present, and as a way of leaving a legacy wherein the narrator still writes, even though she “knows at the heart of things there are limitations and paradoxes...that prevent her from knowing or expressing everything; she has no illusions of her omniscience, and yet her power is limitless because it does not reside in her alone” (McEwan “Or Shall We Die?” 15).

Though Henry Perowne does not narrate McEwan’s *Saturday* in the first person, he comes to a similar conclusion about the value of literature in coping with the violence and terror of the present. When Daisy reads Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” aloud during the

home invasion, the threat Baxter presents to the Perowne family is neutralized. Interestingly, Matthew Arnold's poem addresses the confusion of the world. McEwan's use of this poem suggests that he is promoting the idea that literature still has value in the confusion of postmodernity, and that even a man such as Henry who is openly critical of literature for its "insufficient imagination" (*Saturday* 67) can come to realize that literature can induce "a yearning he could barely begin to define" (*Saturday* 279). Henry started his day by opening his window and scientifically analyzing what he saw in the square; he concludes his day, after his experiences of violence and terror, by stating he is "timid" and "vulnerable," and that he is "weak and ignorant, scared of the way consequences of an action leap away from your control and breed new events, new consequences, until you're led to a place you never dreamed of and would never choose" (*Saturday* 277). This shift in confidence and in the way he sees the world suggests that Henry has come to realize that science cannot explain everything and that literature does indeed have value, regardless of the fact that the nature of narrative has been deeply problematized. His acknowledgment that he now has no trouble "falling towards oblivion" (*Saturday* 279) illustrates the way that literature has come to represent for Henry, "the modern variant of a soul" (*Saturday* 279) and that it has allowed him to deal with the violence and terror of postmodernity. Ultimately, McEwan is foregrounding the fact that the failure of metanarratives and the problematic nature of received literary traditions do not foreclose on the possibility that narrative and literature can offer us some consolations. As Baxter's reaction to "Dover Beach" indicates, literature can help intervene in the anxiety caused by the failure of metanarratives, and can help subjects cope with the violence and terror of the postmodern condition.

In *Waterland* Tom Crick is coping with the death of the metanarrative of history, as well as the trauma of the retreat of the woman he loved since he was a child. Tom goes about telling his story, trying to make sense of what Mary did, often beginning sections that talk about Mary's gradual breakdown by saying "Once upon a time..." (*Waterland* 116, 122, 126, 127). Through invoking the fairytale, Tom makes the trauma of Mary's imprisonment easier to understand because "once upon a time" removes the events from the "here and now" (*Waterland* 6) where Mary stole the baby. By the end of the novel, he comes to realize that "the Here and Now is history's mirror image: it is a matter of chance or impulse; its logic is the logic of madness or of nonsense; it is and creates the most intense kind of *private* reality" (Janik 85, emphasis in original). As Tom realizes, even without official History, he is able to narrativize that which led to the "Here and Now" where the metanarrative originally failed him; moreover, he can also narrativize an account of his trauma: Mary's retreat from him, and the scene that followed when he came home to discover that she had kidnapped the baby. At the end of the novel, he is no longer at a loss for words as he is in the beginning; instead, through language and his private histories he has been able to explain the event to the best of his ability.

In Swift's *Ever After*, it is only when Bill Unwin realizes he has no metanarratives left on which to base his identity that he begins to tell his story. He has just tried to kill himself, but then begins to chronicle his narrative as a way of working through who he has become, as a way of trying to answer his question about whether or not he was "ever me" (*Ever After* 6). He recognizes that written language cannot accurately portray his thoughts, and the underlying tones and pitches he wishes to convey, but he also realizes that language can "give me an explanation" (*Ever After* 7, emphasis in original). The emphasis on "me" echoes

with Tom's emphasis on explaining the "here and now" to himself. It also suggests that Bill is not only looking for an explanation of his own actions through the production of his story, but he is also looking to the process of narrativization as a means to provide him with the legitimacy denied by metanarratives. *Ever After* thus repeats Swift's insight in *Waterland*. Bill is retroactively narrating his experiences; he constantly points out that he has the "special benefit of hindsight" as he narrates his past (*Ever After* 251), sometimes remembering conversations or events late in the narrative that effect the story he has told earlier, as when he states, "I now recall an earlier and more ambitious lecture of my mother's" (*Ever After* 243); this only serves to emphasize his personal intervention constructing his own private narrative of his past. Like the silt in *Waterland*, the plastic that Sam has invested in, and the profits of which have allowed Bill the time and financial security to construct this narrative, symbolize the neither fact nor fiction of narratives; rather, they symbolize a combination of both, as the plastic is human-created, but it mimics that which is found naturally, just as private narratives mimic the grand narrative-style of history (the plastic), but include the personal details that are left out, details that create history for the individual. It is language and the process of narrativization, that allow Bill to continue on after he tries to kill himself, and it is this telling that gives him the legitimacy he seeks. That is, language and the recreation of his own past allow him to recognize the problematization of metanarratives, and to continue living in spite of this problematization. The last two lines of the novel, "He took his life, he took his life" (*Ever After* 276), again foreground Bill's focus on his father, but they also suggests a form of redemption for Bill. The lines refer to his father killing himself, but the repetition suggests an alternate meaning beyond just suicide; it

suggests action and taking control of his life, something that Bill has achieved through narrativizing his confrontation with death.

In his critique of Swift's *The Light of Day*, Daniel Lea argues that George is an unreliable narrator, as evidenced by his frequent acknowledgment that he is imagining and narrativizing how events occurred even though he was not present (Lea 208), and his dismissal from the police force because he created a false confession to imprison a man he believed he knew to be guilty. Yet, even though it can be argued that George is unreliable, his unreliability points to the way that he is mining the depths of what he knows and what he speculates, both in the past and the present in an attempt to create a narrative that will allow him to understand the frozen moment of meaninglessness that trapped him two years prior. True, parts of his narrative are fictionalized, but his private narrative allows him to believe that he will "step out at last into the clear light of day" (Swift *Light* 324), where the "clear light of day" symbolizes a thawing of the frozenness of his present. This novel, perhaps most clearly of all of Swift's novels, foregrounds the idea that private narratives are necessary for understanding the present and for gaining legitimacy. Perhaps, their power is not in their truth value, as much as it is in their use value as a strategy to articulate the self. Butler argues that in order to remain a victim and to avoid moral responsibility for acts of violence against a subject's own culture, the person telling the story must begin with the act of violence as perpetrated *against* him/her. While George begins his narrative by discussing how Sarah's act of violence has affected him, by the end of the story he seems to have found some kind of release from this moment. Though critics such as Lea suggest that there is no indication that Sarah returns George's feelings, he does not point out that this does not matter. Sarah serves a crucial function for George. She teaches him to write, and to use language to express

himself; in essence, she teaches him how to narrativize his private experiences, which functions to allow George to come to terms with the trauma of the death of metanarratives, as well as the death of his mother and father, and the murder of Sarah's husband. By telling his story, he attains a measure of legitimacy *for* his story, just as Unwin achieves legitimacy for his. These are private narratives—albeit gone public—which are not endorsed by modernist metanarratives, nor finally engendered by an established literary genre or convention. Rather, the act of telling allows George to locate writing as a means of narrativizing his life. Writing allows him to confront the insecurity of his postmodern condition, his incredulity. Ultimately, narrativizing has allowed him to navigate his frozen position, and has given him the belief that he will “step out at last into the clear light of day.”

In Swift's *Ever After*, Bill Unwin asks the following: “Why march with banners of protest unless to save a world in which happiness can exist?...And what are these things: the theater, poetry?...It doesn't take a bomb to shatter them. They only tell us what is in our hearts. They are only mirrors for our lost, discredited souls” (*Ever After* 263). It may not take a bomb to shatter these ideas, but that does not mean that a bomb *can* shatter them. After all, the narrators are still writing, they are still narrativizing, they are surviving. McEwan and Swift suggest that there can be a much more measured security in the uncertain and terrifying postmodern world, despite the mourning for a lost sense of security in the organizing metanarratives that have failed us. That security can be found in the story of the self, in its very telling. If, as Unwin suggests, forms of literature such as theatre and poetry are “mirrors for our lost, discredited souls,” mirrors, we must note, reflect back an inverted image. Perhaps, then, what Bill conveys is one of the central insights of McEwan's and Swift's fiction: literature and narrativization reflect back to us a kind of legitimation and a mode of

comprehension—and it may be the only legitimation we ever have. Certainly, it is one of our consolations as we mourn for a certainty that was never really present and for the discredited sense of determinate being, that, in truth, failed to explain us to ourselves. We must, as Swift suggests, continue telling our stories.

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