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Saturday



Par Ian McEwan
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Par Ian McEwan : Saturday before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Saturday:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSaturday, February 15, 2003. Henry Perowne, a successful neurosurgeon, stands at his bedroom window before dawn and watches a plane ablaze with fire like a meteor arcing across the London sky. Over the course of the following day, unease gathers about Perowne, as he moves amongst hundreds of thousands of anti-war protestors in the post-9/11 streets. A minor car accident brings him into confrontation with Baxter, a fidgety, aggressive man, who to Perownes professional eye appears to be profoundly unwell. But it is not until Baxter makes a sudden appearance at the Perowne family home that Henrys earlier fears seem about to be realised..co.ukThe critical response to Saturday must be making Ian McEwan a very happy man (not that his virtually unassailable position as Britains leading novelist has been in doubt). While

contemporaries (and rivals) Martin Amis and Will Self have had much more hit-or-miss records recently, each new McEwan novel gleans a host of plaudits, and *Atonement* has been generally hailed as his masterpiece. *Saturday* may not enjoy quite such acclaim, but its a remarkably accomplished piece of work, as richly drawn and characterised as anything he has written. McEwan's protagonist is neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, a man comfortably ensconced in an enviable upper middle class existence. His wife is a successful newspaper lawyer, his daughter Daisy a budding poet. But as he wakes one Saturday morning and witnesses a plane accident through his window, he is not yet aware that this is a harbinger of a sustained assault on all that he holds dear. Its a McEwan trademark to begin his novels with a striking or violent rupture of everyday existence, but this opening is a prelude to his most impressively sustained narrative yet. Its the publication day of Henry's daughter's poetry collection, but a chance encounter with a drunken trio emerging from a lap-dancing club ends violently, even as a march against the war in Iraq streams past nearby. And this encounter with the menacing Baxter, main antagonist of the group, is to have fateful consequences. As Saturday progresses, Henry is forced to examine every aspect of his life and beliefs, not least his attitude to the war. Unlike many of his peers, McEwan is not content to reduce the issues of the war to simple opposition, in which Tony Blair is characterised as a war criminal. Henry has treated a victim of Saddam's brutality, and although a comic encounter with the Prime Minister himself is a highlight of the book, both Henry (and his creator) are obliged to consider the complex skein of the conflict from all sides. While there are missteps (the poetic daughter, Daisy, is thinly drawn), McEwan's invigorating and trenchant novel is an unmissable experience.

--Barry Forshaw

Extrait

One

Some hours before dawn Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon, wakes to find himself already in motion, pushing back the covers from a sitting position, and then rising to his feet. Its not clear to him when exactly he became conscious, nor does it seem relevant. Hes never done such a thing before, but he isnt alarmed or even faintly surprised, for the movement is easy, and pleasurable in his limbs, and his back and legs feel unusually strong. He stands there, naked by the bed he always sleeps naked feeling his full height, aware of his wifes patient breathing and of the wintry bedroom air on his skin. That too is a pleasurable sensation. His bedside clock shows three forty. He has no idea what hes doing out of bed: he has no need to relieve himself, nor is he disturbed by a dream or some element of the day before, or even by the state of the world. Its as if, standing there in the darkness, hes materialised out of nothing, fully formed, unencumbered. He doesnt feel tired, despite the hour or his recent labours, nor is his conscience troubled by any recent case. In fact, hes alert and empty-headed and inexplicably elated. With no decision made, no motivation at all, he begins to move towards the nearest of the three bedroom windows and experiences such ease and lightness in his tread that he suspects at once hes dreaming or sleepwalking. If it is the case, hell be disappointed. Dreams dont interest him; that this should be real is a richer possibility. And hes entirely himself, he is certain of it, and he knows that sleep is behind him: to know the difference between it and waking, to know the boundaries, is the essence of sanity. The bedroom is large and uncluttered. As he glides across it with almost comic facility, the prospect of the experience ending saddens him briefly, then the thought is gone. He is by the centre window, pulling back the tall folding wooden shutters with care so as not to wake Rosalind. In this hes selfish as well as solicitous. He doesnt wish to be asked what hes about what answer could he give, and why relinquish this moment in the attempt? He opens the second shutter, letting it concertina into the casement, and quietly raises the sash window. It is many feet taller than him, but it slides easily upwards, hoisted by its concealed lead counterweight. His skin tightens as the February air pours in around him, but he isnt troubled by the cold. From the second floor he faces the night, the city in its icy white light, the skeletal trees in the square, and thirty feet below, the black arrowhead railings like a row of spears. Theres a degree or two of frost and the air is clear. The streetlamp glare hasnt quite obliterated all the stars; above the Regency faade on the other side of the square hang remnants of constellations in the southern sky. That particular faade is a reconstruction, a pastiche wartime Fitzrovia took some hits from the Luftwaffe and right behind is the Post Office Tower, municipal and seedy by day, but at night, half-concealed and decently illuminated, a valiant memorial to more optimistic days. And now, what days are these? Baffled and fearful, he mostly thinks when he takes time from his weekly round to consider. But he doesnt feel that now. He leans forwards, pressing his weight onto his palms against the sill, exulting in the emptiness and clarity of the scene. His vision always good seems to have sharpened. He sees the paving stone mica glistening in the pedestrianised square, pigeon excrement hardened by distance and cold into something almost beautiful, like a scattering of snow. He likes the symmetry of black cast-iron posts and their even darker shadows, and the lattice of cobbled gutters. The overfull litter baskets suggest abundance rather than squalor; the vacant benches set around the circular

gardens look benignly expectant of their daily traffic cheerful lunchtime office crowds, the solemn, studious boys from the Indian hostel, lovers in quiet raptures or crisis, the crepuscular drug dealers, the ruined old lady with her wild, haunting calls. Go away! she'll shout for hours at a time, and squawk harshly, sounding like some marsh bird or zoo creature. Standing here, as immune to the cold as a marble statue, gazing towards Charlotte Street, towards a foreshortened jumble of faades, scaffolding and pitched roofs, Henry thinks the city is a success, a brilliant invention, a biological masterpiece millions teeming around the accumulated and layered achievements of the centuries, as though around a coral reef, sleeping, working, entertaining themselves, harmonious for the most part, nearly everyone wanting it to work. And the Perownes own corner, a triumph of congruent proportion; the perfect square laid out by Robert Adam enclosing a perfect circle of garden an eighteenth-century dream bathed and embraced by modernity, by street light from above, and from below by fibre-optic cables, and cool fresh water coursing down pipes, and sewage borne away in an instant of forgetting. An habitual observer of his own moods, he wonders about this sustained, distorting euphoria. Perhaps down at the molecular level there's been a chemical accident while he slept something like a spilled tray of drinks, prompting dopamine-like receptors to initiate a kindly cascade of intracellular events; or it's the prospect of a Saturday, or the paradoxical consequence of extreme tiredness. It's true, he finished the week in a state of unusual depletion. He came home to an empty house, and lay in the bath with a book, content to be talking to no one. It was his literate, too literate daughter Daisy who sent the biography of Darwin which in turn has something to do with a Conrad novel she wants him to read and which he has yet to start seafaring, however morally fraught, doesn't much interest him. For some years now she's been addressing what she believes is his astounding ignorance, guiding his literary education, scolding him for poor taste and insensitivity. She has a point straight from school to medical school to the slavish hours of a junior doctor, then the total absorption of neurosurgery training spliced with committed fatherhood for fifteen years he barely touched a non-medical book at all. On the other hand, he thinks he's seen enough death, fear, courage and suffering to supply half a dozen literatures. Still, he submits to her reading lists they're his means of remaining in touch as she grows away from her family into unknowable womanhood in a suburb of Paris; tonight she'll be home for the first time in six months another cause for euphoria. From the Hardcover edition.