



NEW BRITISH FICTION

# Ian McEwan

Lynn Wells



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macmillan



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# GENERAL EDITORS'

## PREFACE

This series highlights with its very title two crucial elements in the nature of contemporary British fiction, especially as a field for academic research and study. The first term indicates the originality and freshness of such writing expressed in a huge formal diversity. The second evokes the cultural identity of the authors included, who nevertheless represent through their diversity a challenge to any hegemonic or narrow view of Britishness. As regards the fiction, many of the writers featured in this series continue to draw from and adapt long traditions of cultural and aesthetic practice. Such aesthetic continuities contrast starkly with the conditions of knowledge at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, a period that has been characterized by an apprehension of radical presentness, a sense of unprecedented forms of experience and an obsession with new modes of self-awareness. This stage of the survival of the novel may perhaps be best remembered as a millennial and post-millennial moment, a time of fluctuating reading practices and of historical events whose impact is largely still unresolved. The new fiction of these times reflects a rapidly changing cultural and ideological reality, as well as a renewal of the commitment of both writers and readers to both the relevance and utility of narrative forms of knowledge.

Each volume in this series will serve as an introductory guide to an individual author chosen from a list of those whose work has proved to be of general interest to reviewers, academics, students and the general reading public. Each volume will offer information concerning the life, work and literary and cultural contexts appropriate to the chosen subject of each book; individual volumes will share the same overall structure with a largely common organization of materials. The result is intended to be suitable for both academic and general readers: putting accessibility at a premium,

without compromising an ambitious series of readings of today's most vitally interesting British novelists, interpreting their work, assessing their influences, and exploring their relationship to the times in which they live.

Philip Tew and Rod Mengham

# PREFACE

This book forms part of Palgrave Macmillan's *New British Fiction Series*, and I am grateful to the publisher and the series editors for this opportunity to conduct a comprehensive study of one of England's most celebrated authors. While I refer to works from across Ian McEwan's career, I give special attention to some of his most famous novels—*The Child in Time*, *Enduring Love*, *Atonement* and *Saturday*—which reward the critic with many complexities of narrative form and textual detail. The focus that I have chosen to bring McEwan's oeuvre is on ethical relationships, both within the texts themselves and between the author and world in which he lives. While moral philosophy offers many ideas applicable to literary analysis, the writings of Emmanuel Lévinas for me have an immediate affinity to McEwan's work, particularly in the image of the face-to-face encounter. In addition to drawing on Lévinas, I deploy a wide range of theoretical models and critical sources that illuminate the fiction in new ways. This study is meant to be "critical" in the best sense of that word; although it sometimes raises difficult questions about McEwan's writing, I believe it does so in a spirit of respect for a talented artist with an ethical stake in the human endeavour.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the series editors, Dr Philip Tew and Dr Rod Mengham, and the editorial team at Palgrave Macmillan, UK—Kitty van Boxel, Sonya Barker, Felicity Noble and Kate Wallis, as well as my project manager Cherline Daniel at Integra—for their professionalism and patience, and for giving me the opportunity to publish this book. I would also like to thank Todd Bryanton for his work on the index. The Humanities Research Institute and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Regina provided financial support without which this project would have never seen completion. I am grateful to Mr McEwan for welcoming me into his home for an interview in December 2005, and for generously giving his time to editing the transcript. A special thanks to the students in my senior seminar on McEwan's work at the University of Regina in 2008, who asked many hard questions and spurred my imagination.

The largest debt of gratitude goes to my family—my husband Brian Johnson; our four children, Annie, Jesse, Ted and Erin; and my parents, Ben and Lillian Wells—who kept faith with me over the years and helped me immensely.

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Black Dogs</i>	<b>BD</b>
<i>The Cement Garden</i>	<b>CG</b>
<i>The Child in Time</i>	<b>CIT</b>
<i>The Comfort of Strangers</i>	<b>CS</b>
<i>Enduring Love</i>	<b>EL</b>
<i>First Love, Last Rites</i>	<b>FLLR</b>
<i>The Imitation Game and Other Plays</i>	<b>IG</b>
<i>In Between the Sheets</i>	<b>IBTS</b>
<i>A Move Abroad</i>	<b>MA</b>
<i>On Chesil Beach</i>	<b>OCB</b>



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# PART I

## Introduction

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### TIMELINE

- 1960** Harold Macmillan “Winds of Change” speech, Cape Town, South Africa  
John F. Kennedy elected as US President  
Aged six, Kazuo Ishiguro arrives in Britain
- 1961** Adolf Eichmann on trial in Israel for role in Holocaust  
Bay of Pigs: attempted invasion of Cuba  
Berlin Wall constructed  
Yuri Gagarin first person in Space  
Silicon chip patented  
*Private Eye* magazine begins publication  
Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*  
Jonathan Coe born
- 1962** Cuban Missile Crisis  
Marilyn Monroe dies  
Independence for Uganda; followed this decade by Kenya (1963), Northern Rhodesia (1964), Southern Rhodesia (1965), Barbados (1966)
- 1963** John F. Kennedy assassinated in Dallas  
Martin Luther King Jr delivers “I Have a Dream” speech  
Profumo Affair

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 1964** Nelson Mandela sentenced to life imprisonment  
Commercial pirate radio challenges BBC monopoly
- 1965** State funeral of Winston Churchill  
US sends troops to Vietnam  
A. L. Kennedy born in Dundee, Scotland
- 1966** Ian Brady and Myra Hindley sentenced to life imprisonment for Moors Murders  
England beats West Germany 4–2 at Wembley to win Football World Cup  
*Star Trek* series debut on NBC television  
Jean Rhys, *The Wide Sargasso Sea*
- 1967** Six-Day War in the Middle East  
World's first heart transplant  
Abortion Act legalizes termination of pregnancy in UK  
*Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album released by The Beatles  
Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*
- 1968** Anti-Vietnam War protestors attempt to storm American Embassy in Grosvenor Square  
Martin Luther King Jr assassinated  
Robert F. Kennedy assassinated  
Student protests and riots in France  
Lord Chamberlain's role as censor of plays in the UK is abolished  
Lindsay Anderson, *If ...*
- 1969** Civil rights march in Northern Ireland attacked by Protestants  
*Apollo 11* lands on the Moon with Neil Armstrong's famous first steps  
Rock concert at Woodstock  
Yasser Arafat becomes leader of PLO  
Booker Prize first awarded; winner P. H. Newby, *Something to Answer for*  
Open University founded in the UK  
John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

- 1970** Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacks five planes  
 Students activists and bystanders shot in anti-Vietnam War protest at Kent State University, Ohio, four killed, nine wounded  
 UK voting age reduced from 21 years to 18 years
- 1971** Decimal currency introduced in the UK  
 Internment without trial of terrorist suspects in Northern Ireland begins  
 India and Pakistan in conflict after Bangladesh declares independence
- 1972** Miners' strike  
 Bloody Sunday in Londonderry, 14 protestors killed outright or fatally wounded by British troops  
 Aldershot barracks bomb initiates IRA campaign with seven dead  
 Britain enters Common Market  
 Massacre of Israeli athletes at Munich Olympics  
 Watergate scandal  
 Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*  
 Samuel Beckett, *Not I*
- 1973** US troops leave Vietnam  
 Arab–Israeli 15-day Yom Kippur War  
 PM Edward Heath introduces three-day working week  
 Martin Amis, *The Rachel Papers*
- 1974** Miners' strike  
 IRA bombings in Guildford (five dead) and Birmingham (21 dead)
- 1975** Microsoft founded  
 Sex Discrimination Act  
 Zadie Smith born in North London  
 Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man*  
 Ian McEwan, *First Love, Last Rites*, which wins the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976

## 4 INTRODUCTION

- 1976** Weak economy forces UK government loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)  
Ian McEwan, *First Love, Last Rites*
- 1977** *Star Wars* released  
UK unemployment tops 1,600,000  
Nintendo begins to sell computer games  
Sex Pistols "Anarchy in the UK" tour
- 1978** Soviet troops occupy Afghanistan  
First test-tube baby born in Oldham, England  
Ian McEwan, *In Between the Sheets* and *The Cement Garden*
- 1979** Iranian Revolution establishes Islamic theocracy  
Margaret Thatcher becomes PM after Conservative election victory  
USSR invades Afghanistan  
Lord Mountbatten assassinated by the IRA
- 1980** Iran–Iraq War starts  
Iranian Embassy siege in London  
CND rally at Greenham Common airbase, England  
IRA hunger strike at Belfast Maze Prison over political status for prisoners  
Julian Barnes, *Metroland*
- 1981** Prince Charles and Lady Diana marry in St Paul's Cathedral with 750 million worldwide television audience  
Widespread urban riots in UK including in Brixton, Holloway, Toxteth, Handsworth, Moss Side  
AIDS identified  
First IBM personal computer  
Alasdair Gray, *Lanark*  
Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, which wins Booker Prize for Fiction  
Ian McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*
- 1982** Mark Thatcher, PM's son, disappears for three days in Sahara during the Paris-Dakar rally  
Falklands War with Argentina, costing the UK over £1.6 billion

Body of Roberto Calvi, chairman of Vatican-connected Banco Ambrosiano, found hanging beneath Blackfriars Bridge, London

- 1983** Klaus Barbie, Nazi war criminal, arrested in Bolivia  
 Beirut: US Embassy and barracks bombing, killing hundreds of members of multinational peacekeeping force, mostly US marines  
 US troops invade Grenada  
 Microsoft Word first released  
 Salman Rushdie, *Shame*, which wins Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger (France)
- 1984** Miners' strike  
 HIV identified as cause of AIDS  
 IRA bomb at Conservative Party Conference in Brighton kills four  
 British Telecom privatization shares sale  
 Thirty-eight deaths during clashes at Liverpool v. Juventus football match at Heysel Stadium, Brussels  
 Martin Amis, *Money: A Suicide Note*  
 Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*  
 James Kelman, *Busconductor Hines*  
 Graham Swift, *Waterland*
- 1985** Famine in Ethiopia and Live Aid concert  
 Damage to ozone layer discovered  
 Mikhail Gorbachev becomes Soviet Premier and introduces *glasnost* (openness with the West) and *perestroika* (economic restructuring)  
 PC Blakelock murdered during riots on Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham, London  
*My Beautiful Laundrette* film released (dir. Stephen Frears, screenplay Hanif Kureishi)  
 Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*
- 1986** Abolition of Greater London Council and other metropolitan county councils in England  
 Violence between police and protestors at Wapping, East London after Rupert Murdoch sacks 5000 print workers

## 6 INTRODUCTION

*Challenger* shuttle explodes  
Chernobyl nuclear accident  
US bombs Libya  
Peter Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor*

**1987** Capsizing of RORO ferry, *Herald of Free Enterprise*, off Zeebrugge kills 193 people  
London Stock Exchange and market collapse on "Black Monday"  
Remembrance Sunday: eleven killed by Provisional IRA bomb in Enniskillen  
Ian McEwan, *The Child in Time*, which wins Whitbread Novel Award in 1987 and the Prix Fémina Etranger in 1993  
Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion*

**1988** US shoots down Iranian passenger flight  
Pan Am flight 103 bombed over Lockerbie, 270 people killed  
Soviet troop withdrawals from Afghanistan begin  
Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

**1989** Fatwa issued against Rushdie by Iranian leadership (Khomeini)  
Fall of Berlin Wall  
Exxon Valdez oil disaster  
Student protestors massacred in Tiananmen Square, Beijing  
Hillsborough Stadium disaster in which 96 football fans die  
Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*, which wins Booker Prize for Fiction  
Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*

**1990** London poll tax riots  
Fall of Thatcher; John Major becomes Conservative PM  
Nelson Mandela freed from jail  
Jeanette Winterson adapts *Oranges* for BBC television film  
A. S. Byatt, *Possession*  
Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which wins Whitbread First Novel Prize  
A. L. Kennedy, *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains*

- 1991** Soviet Union collapses  
 First Iraq War with 12-day Operation Desert Storm  
 Apartheid ended in South Africa  
 PM Major negotiates opt-out for Britain from European Monetary Union and rejects Social Chapter of Maastricht Treaty  
 Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) helps create the World Wide Web  
 Hanif Kureishi: screenplays for *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and *London Kills Me*  
 Pat Barker, *Regeneration*
- 1992** “Black Wednesday” stock market crisis when UK forced to exit European Exchange Rate Mechanism  
 Adam Thorpe, *Ulverton*
- 1993** Black teenager Stephen Lawrence murdered in Well Hall Road, London  
 With Downing Street Declaration, PM John Major and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds commit Britain and Ireland to joint Northern Ireland resolution  
 Film of Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*, starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson  
 Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting*  
 Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*
- 1994** Tony Blair elected leader of Labour Party following death of John Smith  
 Channel Tunnel opens  
 Nelson Mandela elected President of South Africa  
 Provisional IRA and loyalist paramilitary cease-fire  
 Homosexual age of consent for men in the UK lowered to 18  
 Mike Newell (dir.), *Four Weddings and a Funeral*  
 Jonathan Coe, *What a Carve Up!*  
 James Kelman, *How late it was, how late*, which wins Booker Prize for Fiction  
 Irvine Welsh, *The Acid House*
- 1995** Oklahoma City bombing  
 Srebrenica massacre during Bosnian War



Pat Barker, *The Ghost Road*  
 Nicholas Hytner (dir.), *The Madness of King George*  
 Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album*

- 1996** Cases of Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (Mad Cow Disease) in the UK  
 Divorce of Charles and Diana  
 Breaching cease-fire, Provisional IRA bombs London's Canary Wharf and Central Manchester  
 Film of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (dir. Danny Boyle), starring Ewan McGregor and Robert Carlyle  
 Graham Swift, *Last Orders*, which wins Booker Prize
- 1997** Tony Blair becomes Labour PM after landslide victory  
 Princess Diana dies in Paris car crash  
 Hong Kong returned to China by UK  
 Jim Crace, *Quarantine*  
 Jonathan Coe, *The House of Sleep*, which wins Prix Médicis Étranger (France)  
 Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love*  
 Iain Sinclair and Marc Atkins, *Lights Out for the Territory*
- 1998** Good Friday Agreement on Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Assembly established  
 Twenty-eight people killed by splinter group Real IRA bombing in Omagh  
 Sonny Bono Act extends copyright to lifetime plus 70 years  
 BFI/Channel 4 film *Stella Does Tricks*, released (screenplay A. L. Kennedy)  
 Julian Barnes, *England, England*  
 Ian McEwan, *Amsterdam*, which wins the Booker Prize
- 1999** Euro currency adopted  
 Macpherson Inquiry into Stephen Lawrence murder accuses London's Metropolitan Police of institutional racism  
 NATO bombs Serbia over Kosovo crisis  
 Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament both open  
 Thirty-one passengers killed in Ladbroke Grove train disaster