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Why Can't Biologists Read Poetry?

Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*

Jonathan Greenberg

Since the reinvention of social Darwinism as sociobiology in the 1970s, and particularly since the reinvention of sociobiology as evolutionary psychology in the 1990s, the deployment of Darwinian ideas and models has been steadily on the rise in a wide variety of academic fields—Brian Boyd offers a list that includes ethology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, neurophysiology, anthropology, analytic philosophy, and psychology (2).¹ Yet literary study has been curiously reticent in engaging this intellectual trend. A recent review of the prominent journal of theory *Critical Inquiry* reveals that while Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud vie for position with Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault among the journal's most frequently footnoted thinkers, Darwin is, apparently, nowhere to be found (Stevens and Williams 217). To be sure, a small and determined group of scholars has attempted to ground the study of literature in evolutionary psychology, and others have investigated Darwin's impact on, and debts to, the literature and culture of his own era.² But literary criticism—in part because of its investments in historicizing and relativizing cultural norms, in part because of a healthy suspicion of the ways in which Darwin's name has been used to justify reactionary views on race, class, and gender—remains wary of the neo-Darwinian vogue, with its axiom, taken from entomologist Edward O. Wilson, that “the genes hold culture on a leash” (167).

Barbara Herrnstein Smith's recent discussions of human-animal relations, for example, are so trenchant in their attacks on the neo-Darwinist linguist Steven Pinker—for his reckless application of metaphors from the human realm to the animal, for his apparent disdain for literature and the arts—that her reader might fail to notice that she is, in fact, arguing

for the recognition of neo-Darwinian insights about the permeability of the human-animal divide. Similarly, although Marjorie Garber challenges neo-Darwinists, most notably her Harvard colleague Wilson, for their reduction of human nature to “the level of the gene” (21), she does not dispute Wilson’s arguments so much as simply dislike them. Rebuking Wilson for his relegation of the literary to a purely ornamental or decorative function, she points out that he quotes Iago’s endorsement of “good name” as evidence for the evolutionary hazards of sexual infidelity but utterly neglects “Iago’s position as the most arrant hypocrite in all of Shakespeare, [and] his own contempt for ‘good name’ as compared to more material and vengeful rewards” (28). It may be accidental that a question of sexual jealousy underlies the example over which Wilson and Garber skirmish, but Garber’s response to Wilson, and Smith’s to Pinker, partake, I suggest, of a slightly different sort of jealousy, a possessiveness about the realm of the literary.

Thus in asking why biologists can’t read poetry, I want to address both senses of the question—I want to ask not only why masterly scientists like Wilson prove to be clumsy and undergraduate-sounding when they talk about Shakespeare but also why literary critics like Garber and Smith (and myself) *want* them to be bad readers. Why *can’t* biologists read poetry? At the same time, however, I pose the converse question: Why can’t poets (or literary critics, or humanists) read science? What cultural strictures or habits of thought make us regard the invocation of Darwin’s name—especially when it comes to explanations of culture—with suspicion? In answering these questions I do not propose to stake out a position on exactly how far Darwinian thinking can usefully be extended to the social sciences and humanities. My inquiry into both the new Darwinism and the resistance to it will remain largely within my own disciplinary territory—literary criticism. In short, I aim to offer less a Darwinian reading of culture than a cultural reading of Darwinism.

This reading will proceed through a detailed analysis of Ian McEwan’s novel *Enduring Love*—a novel that engages contemporary debates about neo-Darwinism by representing a series of interrelated conflicts between scientific, literary, and religious worldviews. The novel seeks not to pronounce authoritatively on the validity of neo-Darwinism but—as novels tend to do—to imagine human beings with conflicting temperaments and beliefs placed in situations of crisis. Through these crises, the novel investigates and tests the legitimacy of the characters’ different worldviews.³ The

major themes of the novel are, moreover, important Darwinian themes, and thus what may initially look like mere disciplinary disputes between the “two cultures” play out in a range of surprising ways—as conflicts about sexual fidelity, childbearing, self-deception, and the power of narrative.⁴

I maintain that the narrator's neo-Darwinist beliefs are taken quite seriously by the novel, and there is good reason to find in the novel an implicit endorsement of neo-Darwinism by the author himself.⁵ However, these neo-Darwinist beliefs, even if held by McEwan the thinker, are complicated and at times even subverted in various ways by McEwan the novelist. In section 1 of this essay I aim to show how *Enduring Love* presents ideas and people, minds and bodies, values and facts as thoroughly bound up with one another and thus forces us to see the beliefs of the novel's characters in the context of their interests. In section 2 I develop this point in three ways: (1) by showing how the novel offers an implicit critique of the narrator's excessive rationalism, which divorces ideas from people; (2) by exploring how the narrator's beliefs are motivated by economic forces (among other interests), and how neo-Darwinism itself is represented as a phenomenon of the publishing market as much as of science; and (3) by examining the novel's attention to the problem of self-deception, which has parallels to the narrative problem of unreliability, and which reminds the reader that Darwin's own theory, seen here through Nietzsche's idiosyncratic reading of it, asserts the bodily origin of what appears as—but never fully attains the status of—the will to disinterested knowledge. Finally, in section 3, I turn to the novel's foregrounding of its own narrative structures and strategies and its implication that narrative and interpretation are inescapable. Both the novel's neo-Darwinian narrator and his primary antagonist, an anti-Darwinian religious stalker, become prisoners of their own narrative constructions and thus illustrate Jacques Lacan's insight that in paranoia narrative or fantasy acquires the capacity to structure facts. Here the critique of neo-Darwinism emerges once again, if more subtly; the novel's illustration of the ways in which rational faculties can be controlled and directed by fantastic desires serves to undercut the triumphalist aspirations of the neo-Darwinist worldview. In concluding, I argue that, despite its multifaceted critique of neo-Darwinism, *Enduring Love* does in fact hold out hope for a rapprochement between the sciences and the humanities.

The infant's smile

Enduring Love presents a troubled marriage of science and literature: Joe Rose, the narrator and a science journalist, is married—by common law only—to Clarissa Mellon, a Keats scholar.⁶ Joe and Clarissa represent, fairly schematically, not only opposing disciplines but also opposing worldviews, even opposing principles: science and literature, reason and emotion, nature and culture. More specifically, they represent opposing attitudes toward Darwin, or at least toward the applicability of Darwin's thought to questions of human behavior and values. Joe has taken up the hobbyhorse of evolutionary psychology and sees the world through the eyes of a sociobiologist, offering Darwinian genealogies for phenomena as diverse as religious belief, amnesia, and the tonal intervals of names called out at Heathrow Airport. Clarissa, in contrast, has “taken against the whole project” (74) of neo-Darwinism, which she regards as “rationalism gone berserk,” a “new fundamentalism” that offers “a reason for everything” (75). By staging a debate between Joe and Clarissa over neo-Darwinism, McEwan inserts in the novel, quite seamlessly, a kind of philosophical dialogue, a dialogue in which he can articulate two sides of a Darwinist/humanist debate without overtly championing either. What seems beyond debate for McEwan, however, is that there is a conflict: science and literature are antagonists, and Darwinism somehow threatens the values of the literary critic.

The details of this debate merit attention. An argument between Joe and Clarissa erupts when Joe invokes a neo-Darwinist explanation for an infant's smile:

The word from the human biologists bears Darwin out: the way we wear our emotions on our faces is pretty much the same in all cultures, and the infant smile is one social signal that is particularly easy to isolate and study. [. . .] In Edward O. Wilson's cool phrase, it “triggers a more abundant share of parental love and affection.” (74)

Not surprisingly, Clarissa the poetry scholar finds such thinking reductive:

Everything was being stripped down, she said, and in the process some larger meaning was lost. What a zoologist had to say about a baby's smile could be of no real interest. The truth of that smile

was in the eye and heart of the parent, and in the unfolding love
that only had meaning through time. (75)

Joe in turn dismisses Clarissa's position as a consequence of reading too much Keats, whom he calls "an obscurantist" (75) for fearing the rise of science—a fear most famously articulated in lines near the end of "Lamia": "Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings, / Conquer all mysteries by rule and line, / Empty the haunted air, and gnoméd mine— / Unweave a rainbow" (924).⁷ Contra Keats, Joe asserts that philosophy does not and cannot unweave the rainbow:

If we value a baby's smile, why not contemplate its source? Are we to say that all infants enjoy a secret joke? Or that God reaches down and tickles them? Or, least implausibly, that they learn smiling from their mothers? But, then, deaf-and-blind babies smile too. That smile must be hard-wired and for good evolutionary reasons. (75)

Yet Clarissa is not interested in the evolutionary argument: "Clarissa said I still did not understand her, she was talking about love" (75). Like Barbara Herrnstein Smith and Marjorie Garber, Clarissa argues not against the logic of Darwinism but against something more vague: the very way of seeing the world that makes such an explanation satisfactory. Neo-Darwinian discourse appears to make no room for a value—whether it is sensitivity to metaphor as it is for Smith, appreciation of literary irony as it is for Garber, or, in this case, simply love—that the humanist holds dear.⁸

McEwan, it could be claimed, thus only succeeds in evading the central challenge of neo-Darwinism because he articulates objections to it without engaging it on its own scientific terms. By dramatizing the debate over Edward O. Wilson as a lovers' quarrel, he avoids choosing sides and instead merely gives voice to the different positions involved. Yet fiction of necessity claims the liberty to engage with ideas in a more open, fluid, and imaginative way than does philosophy. The questions that the Darwinist/humanist debate raises may prove more interesting to the novelist than any answer he could provide, and the hypothetical may offer more to a literary imagination than the actual. (McEwan's own comments lend some support to this stance: "I wrote the book in a spirit of investigation, rather than try to give a lot of answers to either how people should live

or whether one could live a good life by scientific method” [Interview].) In fact, it is precisely because McEwan has created novelistic characters rather than the mere mouthpieces of a philosophical dialogue that his engagement with neo-Darwinism is distinguished from the kind of popular science journalism that Joe Rose writes. By setting particularized characters within a narrative framework, McEwan is able to suggest the necessary connection between the characters’ intellectual positions and their emotional investments, to demonstrate that the philosophical clash matters primarily as a symptom of deeper temperamental or intrapsychic conflicts.

Whatever his commitment to neo-Darwinism, then, McEwan never loses sight of the fact that Joe and Clarissa are, within the fictional world of *Enduring Love*, not only people but also lovers, and that any disagreement between them will carry significant emotional freight. Most obviously, Clarissa’s insistence that the “truth” of the infant’s smile can only be found in a love that “unfold[s]” over a period of time suggests her belief in the existence of the “enduring love” of the novel’s title. Somewhat less obviously, her insistence also implicitly questions whether Joe shares this belief, and thus hints at a fundamental instability in their marriage. Clarissa’s scholarly quest for some hypothetical last letters which she conjectures Keats to have written but never sent to Fanny Brawne similarly indicates such an underlying conflict. She believes these “lost” letters might articulate in a last burst of eloquence the doomed poet’s enduring love, what Joe calls “a cry of undying love not touched by despair” (238); Joe suspects that his wife’s fascination with the letters “ha[s] something to do with our own situation, and with her conviction that love that did not find its expression in a letter was not perfect” (7)—and thus with his own inability to express his love to her in a letter. Hence the significance of Joe’s irrational ad hominem attack on the long-dead Keats and his attribution of Clarissa’s anti-Darwinist position to her immersion in her literary studies, which suggest a covert resentment of Clarissa’s work. Joe has joked about Clarissa’s obsession with Keats, describing her as “in love with another man” (8), but his levity cannot quite conceal a sexual jealousy latent in the relationship—a jealousy provoked by the ghostly Keats. Hence also Joe’s birthday gift to Clarissa, late in the novel, of a rare edition of Keats’s poetry; Joe in this instance enlists Keats to articulate what he himself cannot. The value of the literary in this novel then seems to be that it offers access to love. If Joe, who knows “little about Keats or

his poetry" (7), seems jealous of Keats, or desirous of his help, it is because the poet, even speaking from beyond the grave, can do what the scientist cannot. The poet can do more than merely describe love: he can enact it, call it into being. Joe is jealous, one might say, of literature itself.

The fact that the philosophical differences between Joe and Clarissa betray deeper emotional struggles between them is not lost on Joe. Joe the narrator, who is sometimes more perspicacious than Joe the character, identifies a personal conflict underlying the whole debate about the infant's smile: "We had had this conversation in different forms on many occasions. What we were really talking about this time was the absence of babies from our lives" (75). Joe's casual insertion of "really" betrays a hermeneutic approach to human motivation that is subtly psychoanalytic, or at any rate less mechanistic, than the often formulaic evolutionary psychology that the reader has gotten used to hearing from him.⁹ He recognizes that his and Clarissa's philosophical positions might result less from logic than from unspoken, even unconscious, motives. And to be sure, the desire for children does prove a crucial subtext in the novel, as befits a book so preoccupied with Darwinian imperatives. For the novel intimates that the inability of Joe and Clarissa to reproduce poses a threat to the endurance of their love. Such a view would conform to a fairly widespread neo-Darwinist view of marriage and heterosexual love, a view that sees monogamy primarily as a mechanism for ensuring the paternal care of offspring. The journalist Robert Wright, for example, offers this description of love: "The genetic payoff of having two parents devoted to a child's welfare is the reason men and women can fall into swoons over one another, including swoons of great duration" (59). That McEwan, who cites Wright's book in his acknowledgments, should echo the last word of this description in his own title may be coincidental, but it suggests that the novelist shares the journalist's conviction about the importance of the questions raised by a Darwinian account of love.

Children after all play a crucial role in the novel. At the outset, Clarissa appears to have comfortably adapted to the lack of children of her own with an almost saintly generosity toward "[n]ephews, nieces, godchildren, the children of neighbors and old friends" (34). But the death of a man named John Logan in the effort to save a child's life has (Joe believes) awakened feelings of loss in Clarissa for the children she has been unable to conceive, as she sees in Logan "a man prepared to die to prevent the kind of loss she felt herself to have sustained" (35). Logan's own children

function in the story as surrogate offspring for Joe: his first encounter with them reminds him of the value of his and Clarissa's mutual but endangered love, and they reappear in the final chapter of his narrative as wide-eyed disciples dazzled by the wonder of science that Joe shares with them.¹⁰ Indeed this final encounter not only suggests that science might help one appreciate the aesthetic (rather than destroying it) but also hints that Joe is overcoming the "uneasiness" (127) he confesses to feeling in the presence of children. The final chapter, in other words, discloses, albeit hesitantly, an increased desire on Joe's part to become a father. (The reader learns of the fulfillment of this desire, significantly, only through the novel's first appendix—a point to which I will return.) In sum, the subtext of the Darwin debate between Joe and Clarissa proves to be the unanswered question of whether their love, like Keats's for Fanny Brawne, can endure without the immediate Darwinian motive of shared offspring who perpetuate a genetic line. (Keats died childless.) The debate over neo-Darwinism may mask a deeper and more particular interpersonal conflict, but that conflict in turn hinges on questions of love, sex, and procreation central to neo-Darwinist theory.

Rationalism gone berserk

To review: in *Enduring Love* the reader's effort to evaluate the theoretical claims of evolutionary psychology is complicated, even frustrated, by a novelistic form in which philosophical positions appear as symptoms of underlying emotional conflicts—emotional conflicts that, moreover, themselves are founded on questions essential to neo-Darwinism. George Levine claims that "[f]eeling and valuing are never far from objective and disinterested science, and feeling and valuing are inevitably tied closely to the culture in which the scientist, willy nilly, is immersed" (*Darwin Loves You* 169). If for "culture" we can comfortably substitute "character" or "psychology," then *Enduring Love* seems to endorse this view. But such an endorsement is not a statement that neo-Darwinist claims are null and void; putatively disinterested views may be tied to feeling and valuing, but the novel itself suggests that such feelings and values originate in the same basic motives for survival and reproduction on which Darwin and his sociobiological successors put such great emphasis.

If this recursivity were not enough trouble for a reader, McEwan further complicates the reader's task by undermining his narrator's reliability

and his character's lucidity.¹¹ *Enduring Love* is saturated with the voice, character, and worldview of its narrator, Joe. In its very style it displays his meticulous memory for and attention to detail, his cool and often fastidious regulation of emotion, and (as noted) his careful interpolations of scientific explanations for narrative events. The result is a picture of events, but also a picture of Joe.¹² Initially, the narrative voice performs this characterizing function without undermining the reader's basic trust in the narrator; the novel's much-discussed and brilliantly rendered initial catastrophe provides a perfect opportunity to display how Joe's neo-Darwinist worldview not only presents and evaluates events but also characterizes Joe himself. An attempt to rescue a man and a child during a ballooning accident poses a stark moral question—when do you risk your life in the hope of saving another's?—and Joe's evolutionary psychology neatly frames the conflict between obligation to oneself and obligation to another. Yet at the same time his Darwinian perspective allows him to disburden the problem of its moral freight and restore to it some of the “comforting geometry” that belongs to “the knowable, limited plane of the snooker table” (3). Rather than try to assess moral credit or blame for the failure of the rescue (in which John Logan dies), Joe presents morality as a mere phenotypic manifestation of an evolved genetic program, “a deeper covenant, ancient and automatic, written in our nature” (15). In his account, all the would-be rescuers, faced with a crisis, are thrown back on a premoral instinct—or more precisely, a clash of instincts, between “cooperation,” which Joe describes as “the basis of our earliest hunting successes, the force behind our evolving capacity for language” (15), and “selfishness,” which “is also written on our hearts” (15) and which constitutes the most fundamental of Darwinian motives, survival.

Thus, although Clarissa insists on characterizing Logan as a “good man” (34), Joe tends to see his sacrifice as merely the consequence of an eccentricity in genetic coding; Logan is a man “in whom the flame of altruism must have burned a little stronger” (16). In Joe's neo-Darwinist view, morality in any sense other than self-interest seems to disappear altogether: “Mostly, we are good when it makes sense” (15)—a claim that echoes Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson: “Morality, or more strictly our belief in morality, is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends” (510). Thus while Joe acknowledges the “horrified shame” (16) and “the nausea of guilt” (35) that he felt after Logan's death, his account, in its clinical precision, leaves little room for examination

of such feelings. Joe's Darwinism, which reduces human motives to an unconscious and biological calculus among inborn instincts, appears as avoidance or displacement of the emotional horror of Logan's death. At this point, whether or not one considers Joe fully unreliable as a narrator, we see that he—both in the past as a character and in the present as a narrator—tends to divorce ideas from people, to theorize what Levine calls a “split between the intellectual and the affective” (*Darwin Loves You* 34). Yet this split is precisely what *Enduring Love*, as a work of imaginative fiction and psychological realism, will not—indeed cannot—posit, its very mode being to situate its intellectual conflicts within psychological contexts.

If such extreme scientism initially makes a reader suspicious of Joe's judgments, it is only as the novel progresses that Joe displays the quality by which Clarissa describes the discourse of evolutionary psychology itself: “rationalism gone berserk” (74). As the crises in Joe's life mount—he is convinced that one of the other rescuers, a Christian homosexual named Jed Parry, is stalking him, and that Parry suffers from a mental illness called de Clérambault's syndrome—he appears, both to those in the text and those reading it, increasingly irrational. For example, when frustrated by the inadequate science collection in the London Library, Joe thinks:

The science collection here was laughable. The assumption appeared to be that the world could be sufficiently understood through fictions, histories, and biographies. Did the scientific illiterates who ran this place, and who dared call themselves educated people, really believe that literature was the greatest intellectual achievement of our civilization? (45–46)

Joe, despite his occasional allusions to Wagner, Meredith, and Chesterton, here reveals himself as the philistine that the literary critic might secretly believe all scientists to be; his little learning, like Edward O. Wilson's quotation from *Othello*, is purely ornamental. If, following Wayne Booth, we understand unreliability as a narrator's divergence from the “norms of the work” or “the implied author's norms” (158), then this passage might seem to be a smoking gun, clear evidence that McEwan (the “implied” McEwan) is critical of Joe's worldview. Novelists who don't have much regard for literature are rare, and the reader of this passage is likely to assume that Joe's judgment on the value of literature is at odds with that of his creator. As Timothy Bewes remarks: “This, after all, is an imagina-

tive work of fiction; the text therefore colludes with Clarissa, the literary scholar, over Joe *from the outset*" (431; Bewes's italics). And once Joe has taken such a dubious position on the value of literature, the reader will naturally suspect his other judgments as well.

Joe's authority is further undermined by the presence of other characters' voices, in particular a letter from Parry. Although most readers, even the religiously or mystically inclined, will regard Parry's professions of his love for Joe and unquestioning faith in a benign and loving God as at worst lunatic and at best naïve, his words at times still touch a chord.¹³ He comments incisively on Joe's professional work, which, he claims, never doubts itself for a moment:

You're there with up-to-the-minute truth on bacteria and particles and agriculture and Saturn's rings and musical harmony and risk theory and bird migration. [. . .] It's all shopping. You buy it all, you're a cheerleader for it, an ad man hired to talk up other people's stuff. In four years of journalism, not a word about the real things, like love and faith. (147)

Parry's critique of Joe echoes Clarissa's earlier comments about Joe's failure to understand love, but it also points out the degree to which Joe's journalism is driven less by a scientific pursuit of truth than by what Joe elsewhere calls a "standard [of] readability" (54)—that is, the imperatives of the publishing market.

Representing Joe as nothing more than a middleman who "shop[s]" for "other people's" trendy ideas, "talk[s] [them] up," and then sells them to the consumer at a profit, Parry indicts not only Joe's belief in science but more specifically his career as a journalistic popularizer. As McEwan himself has noted, the genre of science writing in which Joe makes his living has become significant in the contemporary publishing market.¹⁴ The volumes cited in McEwan's acknowledgments include texts by Edward O. Wilson, Steven Pinker, Antonio Damasio, Robert Wright, and Walter Bodmer and Robert McKie—all written for an audience of nonspecialists, many of them in a frenzy of publishing surrounding the much-hyped human genome project. Joe's narrative in fact often reads like McEwan's pitch-perfect imitation of the confident, pedantic tone that such books tend to adopt. Parry's critique, furthermore, finds validation in Joe's own account of his work:

A few years ago, science book editors could think of nothing but chaos. Now they were banging their desks for every possible slant on Neo-Darwinism, evolutionary psychology, and genetics. I wasn't complaining—business was good. (74)

Even as he bemoans his academic failure, Joe concedes, "I've made a lot of money swinging spider-monkey-style on the tallest trees of the science fashion jungle" (80). Joe is, as Bewes notes, "himself already a commodified form of rationalism in its pure state" (431), a professional who turns ideas into best sellers. Parry's critique of Joe's neo-Darwinism, then, overlaps with the implicit critique rendered through the narrative voice; by exploring how the narrator's beliefs are motivated by economic forces and how neo-Darwinism itself is represented as a phenomenon as much of the publishing market as of science, McEwan once again contextualizes the abstract debate—here less in a psychological context than in an economic one, though the two are not in this case easily separated.

Joe not only derives immediate financial benefit from marketing neo-Darwinist ideas, he also derives an important secondary benefit: like the primary readership of this genre, and like McEwan himself, Joe Rose is a wealthy white man—a member of precisely that group which has the most to gain (or preserve) by the neo-Darwinist tendency to ratify existing social advantages as "natural." As Louis Menand has written in a critique of neo-Darwinism, "the sciences of human nature tend to validate the practices and preferences of whatever regime happens to be sponsoring them" (96). Menand continues: "In totalitarian regimes, dissidence is treated as a mental illness. In apartheid regimes, interracial contact is treated as unnatural. In free-market regimes, self-interest is treated as hardwired."¹⁵ Such a critique, it should be emphasized, does not reject scientific knowledge but rather calls attention to the potential for biases and blindnesses that render it less disinterested than it purports to be. Our sciences can (and do) serve our own interests, Menand suggests, and he notes that while the biases of scientific discourse may be obvious when we consider a foreign sociopolitical milieu—the Soviet Union, apartheid-era South Africa—they are likely to be less obvious when we regard a contemporary Western democracy.

But to give the screw one more turn, this very obliviousness to the ways in which our beliefs are entangled with our interests is, ironically, a favorite theme of neo-Darwinism. Joe explains the concept of "self-persuasion," which, he says, is "much loved by evolutionary psychologists":

It was pure armchair science, and it went like this: if you had lived in a group, as humans have always done, persuading others of your own needs and interests would be fundamental to your well-being. Sometimes you had to use cunning. Clearly you would be at your most convincing if you persuaded yourself first and did not even have to pretend to believe what you were saying. The kind of self-deluding individuals who tended to do this flourished, as did their genes. So it was we squabbled and scrapped, for our unique intelligence was always at the service of our special pleading and selective blindness to the weakness of our case. (112)

Joe's explanation of self-deception is an evolutionary account of narrative unreliability itself, and such an account may be taken as a not-so-subtle way of suggesting that Joe himself is unconsciously at the mercy of his own interests. Joe returns to the evolutionary value of self-persuasion later in the novel, after what he believes was an attempt on his life by Parry: "We lived in a mist of half-shared, unreliable perception, and our sense data came warped by a prism of desire and belief, which tilted our memories too" (196). This recognition does not change Joe's firm belief that Parry's intentions are murderous, but he does concede to himself that "Pitiless objectivity, especially about ourselves, was always a doomed social strategy."¹⁶ Indeed, at this moment, Joe the narrator realizes fully the theoretical basis for the excessive trust that his earlier self placed in his own account of the attempted killing, but Joe the character is too entrenched in his own need to prove Parry's murderous aims to concede that his account might be mistaken.

Curiously, whether he knows it or not, Joe here echoes the philosopher whom Daniel Dennett calls "the second great sociobiologist [after Hobbes]" (461), Friedrich Nietzsche. Though Nietzsche did not read Darwin himself, he was familiar with Darwinian theory and was, as Dennett notes, a pointed critic of Herbert Spencer's interpretation of it. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which describes a sociocultural "evolution" of Christian morality from a premoral state, begins with the identification of a paradox: "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge [...] we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we *have to misunderstand ourselves*" (15). The will to knowledge, ironically, impairs self-knowledge and promotes self-deception.

In Nietzsche's evolutionary account, our instrument for acquiring knowledge, the intellect, did not develop as a means of seeking the truth; instead, from its beginnings it has been—to use Joe's own nicely Nietzschean formulation—"always at the service of our special pleading and selective blindness." In "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" Nietzsche describes the evolution of the intellect and its utility as a tool for cunning in plainly Darwinian language:

The intellect, as a means for the preservation of the individual, unfolds its principal powers in simulation; for this is the means by which the weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves, since they are denied the chance of waging the struggle for existence with horns or the fangs of beasts of prey. In man this art of simulation reaches its peak: here deception, flattery, lying and cheating, talking behind the back, posing, living in borrowed splendor, being masked, the disguise of convention, acting a role before others and before oneself—in short, the constant fluttering around the single flame of vanity, is so much the rule and the law that almost nothing is more incomprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could make its appearance among men. (43)

For Nietzsche, if one begins with the fact of the animal's desire for self-preservation, the real problem is not how to account for cunning or deception—that much is almost self-evident, for "simulation" (*Verstellung*, perhaps better translated as "dissimulation")¹⁷ is the primary function of the intellect, which is itself an evolutionary adaptation on the part of a physically disadvantaged species. The real problem, rather, is how to account for the intellect's desire to seek the truth in the first place, "how an honest and pure drive for truth could make its appearance among men." Joe reaches almost exactly the same insight, though with a radically different value judgment; for him, the servitude of the intellect to the instincts is precisely "why metaphysics and science were such courageous enterprises, such startling inventions, bigger than the wheel, bigger than agriculture" (196). To attempt disinterested knowledge is to overcome a deeply inbred penchant for self-interest and self-deception. But whereas Joe sees such striving as heroic, Nietzsche sees it as merely continued self-delusion. Nietzsche, in sum, invokes evolution not to argue for the supremacy of the human being as a creature more advanced than others

(that is, “evolved” in a teleological, non-Darwinian sense), but on the contrary to indict what we could, with only slight anachronism, call the narcissism of the intellect. The intellect so values itself that it forgets its necessary service to the bodily interests that produced it in the first place. As he writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (again using a metaphor from biology): “[O]ur ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit” (16).

Nietzsche’s reading of Darwin, by asserting the bodily origin of what appears as—but never fully attains the status of—disinterested knowledge, thus points up a paradox in contemporary neo-Darwinism, or at least in Joe’s variety of it: in its very rationalism it forgets its corporeal origins, corporeal origins that are of course essential to any evolutionary, materialist account. The novel’s attention to the question of self-deception, and to that of the reliability of narrative, perception, and memory, implies the very connection on which Nietzsche insists: between “our ideas [and] our values” and the entire organism.

Such a connection is of course the point with which I began—that McEwan, as a novelist, consistently presents his characters’ intellectual positions as merely the fruit (Mellon?) or flower (Rose?) of their entire organic, psychological, physiological selves, including their unconscious interests. Joe’s advocacy of empiricist investigation and rational inquiry, his “honest and pure drive for truth,” then, is perfectly valid—except that it fails to recognize the ruses of reason itself. As Clarissa notes, Joe seems unable to apply to himself “those powers of rational analysis [he] take[s] such pride in” (235). McEwan’s novel, in short, offers a Nietzschean critique of the intellect, which, while deriving from Darwinism, trains its attention on precisely that oxymoronic phenomenon which Clarissa decries in her attack on sociobiology: “rationalism gone berserk.” Such excessive rationalism, an intellectual “new fundamentalism” or dogmatism, is an intellectualism that has forgotten its origins in the instincts and, believing itself disinterested, transmutes into a kind of blindness or even madness. Out of Joe’s rational, neo-Darwinist account of self-deception emerges the very grounds for suspecting Joe’s rational neo-Darwinism. Indeed what emerges is something like what Levine, in another context, calls a “critique of triumphant rationalism” (*Darwin Loves You* 101)—with the critique leveled as much at the triumphalism as the rationalism.

The attractions of narrative

Joe's genealogical account of unreliability thus undercuts the very authority of his own intellectual position like a snake eating its own tail, and this circularity suggests that its inclusion in the novel is of paramount importance on a thematic level. In addition to this thematic reason for the digression, however, there is an immediate narrative reason—Joe has just searched, in paranoid fashion, through Clarissa's desk, seeking evidence of infidelity. Jealous because Clarissa has failed to sympathize with his concern about Parry's attention, spurred by the Iago of his own fantasy, Joe imagines Clarissa to be in love with another man—only now he envisages his sexual rival not as the long-dead Keats but rather, in Joe's heated phrase, as "Some hot little bearded fuck-goat of a postgraduate" (114). Far from being feminized (either as Clarissa herself or as the frail, dying Keats from whom there is little to fear), the literary is now figured as a threatening and emasculating rival.

Ironically, Joe represents his descent into paranoia as a descent into the literary—for in order to decode the hidden signs and symbols of Parry's veiled threats, Joe realizes, he needs a critic of Clarissa's talents:

I was attempting to compile a dossier of threats, and while there were no single obvious examples, there were allusions and obvious disjunctures whose cumulative effect would not be lost on the mind of a policeman. It needed the skills of a literary critic like Clarissa to read between the lines of protesting love, but I knew that she would not help me. (162)

No longer disdaining the value of literary interpretation, Joe now believes that the tortured overreadings of the humanist can save him when his clear-eyed empiricism leaves him in the lurch. Once again, less conscious motives are plainly visible: Joe desires Clarissa herself, her love as much as her skills in reading, and his acknowledgment of the value of her professional work becomes a displaced lament for the loss of her love. But Joe, reading Parry's love letters, also needs the ability to make meaning out of incomplete or riddling texts, to supply narrative coherence over and above the empiricist gathering of data.

Thus it is that *Enduring Love*, for all Joe's discussion of science, contemplates, as Childs says, "the stories people tell in order to make sense of the world" (110) and even suggests, at its conclusion, "a common

ground for fiction and science in their joint reliance on narrative" (116). But while science surely relies on narrative just as literature does, Joe is generally suspicious of what he calls "the power and attractions of narrative" (44), particularly in science. In a magazine article he is writing, Joe links the use of narrative in science to "the nineteenth-century culture of the amateur" (51) and the Victorian novel; as modernism rose in the arts, he argues, so science became the domain of experts and dispensed with storytelling in favor of "hard-edged theories" (52). Yet he soon recognizes that his own article is also a "narrative in itself"—and furthermore, a "tired one" (51), one in which he does not even believe, and which he eventually discards because "it wasn't science. It was journalism" (54). Again Joe's own amateurism, his role as a writer rather than a scientist proper, troubles him. Even the way he describes his own marketable skills betrays a certain disdain for the construction of narrative: "People say I have a talent for clarity. I can spin a decent narrative out of the stumblings, backtrackings, and random successes that lie behind most scientific breakthroughs" (79).¹⁸

Joe explains that he regards "the power and attractions of narrative" warily because they cloud scientific judgment. And while the precise role that narrative plays in scientific thought is far from simple, it is worth pointing out that one of the most frequent complaints made against neo-Darwinism is exactly this excessive dependence on narrative. The biologist H. Allen Orr writes that "a serious problem with evolutionary psychology" is that its

research program shows a curious tendency to invert itself. [. . .]
[T]he fact that we can conceive of an adaptive tale about why
a behavior should evolve *becomes* the chief reason for suspecting
it's genetic. [. . .] And so the inversion occurs: the evolution-
ary story rings true; but evolution requires genes; therefore, it's
genetic. This move is so easy and so seductive that evolutionary
psychologists sometimes forget a hard truth: a Darwinian story is
not Mendelian evidence. A Darwinian story is a story. (18)

Orr's complaint is a version of Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin's longstanding critique of sociobiology for telling "adaptive stories" (581)—fictions that it then takes as facts. Orr's critique, like Joe's, places narrative in a secondary role to "evidence." Thus if Joe's professional crisis is a fear that he is somehow tainted by the literary, or by narrative, then his desire

for Clarissa's help in decoding the threats from Parry is a belated recognition of a need for narrative that had been denied or repressed.

The entire novel in fact is saturated with references to story and narrative. Joe describes his initial rush toward the balloon as "racing into this story and its labyrinths" (1); he notes that retelling and shaping the account of Logan's death makes it less frightening (39); Jean Logan's belief in her husband's infidelity is "a narrative that only grief [. . .] could devise" (132); an anecdote about Keats's visit to Wordsworth in 1817 is said to be inaccurate yet valuable: "It isn't true but it tells the truth" (183). And so on. Moreover, despite Joe's neo-Darwinist attribution of countless phenomena to "human nature," he betrays an awareness of the way in which narratives, including his own, are shaped by the clichés of popular culture. During the initial, failed rescue, Joe likens his situation to a cartoon twice (3, 16), to a soap opera (23), and to a dream in which the language of his thoughts scrolls "across a screen" (21). At another moment, he tries to resist Hollywood formulas that "beguile us with happy endings" (231). Recounting a fight with Clarissa, he notes his own "exaggeratedly slow" manner of speaking and even questions his own Darwinism: "Where do we learn such tricks? Are they inscribed, along with the rest of our emotional repertoire? Or do we get them from the movies?" (93). This power of cultural narratives to shape the way in which we see the world is a problem that McEwan the novelist faces along with Joe Rose the narrator. Critics have noted, not always happily, McEwan's debt to pulp formulas:¹⁹ Joe, like many endangered male heroes of Hollywood thrillers, finds (or believes) himself the only rational person in the universe, discounted by his wife, police officers, acquaintances, and professional contacts.

Despite Joe the narrator's awareness of the seductions and distortions of narrative, Joe the character, by the middle of the novel, is narrativizing everything; every event in his world is assimilated to the story of Jed Parry, the sufferer of de Clérambault's syndrome. Just as the pre-Darwinian Jed sees the signs of God's love and presence everywhere in the world, so the ultra-Darwinian Joe sees everywhere the signs of Jed's love and presence. Overreading in this sense has been seen as a sign of madness in the novel since *Don Quixote*. As Foucault writes in his famous pages on Cervantes, Quixote's "whole journey is a quest for similitudes: the slightest analogies are pressed into service as dormant signs" (47). Thus in modern times "the madman fulfils the function of *homosemanticism*: he groups all signs together and leads them with a resemblance that never

ceases to proliferate" (49; Foucault's italics). Just as Cervantes's Duke and Duchess, seeking entertainment, are pulled into Don Quixote's lunatic fantasies, so Joe becomes mad by mimicking the madness of his pursuer, stalking his own stalker; in order to bait Parry into making a violent threat that will give Joe grounds to involve the police, Joe goes so far as to speak Parry's imagined secret language, leaving coded "signals" for him in the rain-slicked hedges. Joe's "rational" attempts to protect himself thus come to mirror Jed's irrational, religious belief in Joe's love. Clarissa even notes, "His writing's rather like yours" (108). Such madness corrodes the reader's belief in Joe's reliability not only on an evaluative level but also in his presentation and interpretation of fundamental narrative facts. Clarissa hints that Joe might have "invented" Parry (90, 93), and Joe himself feels of his elusive stalker, "It was almost as if he didn't exist" (158). The fact that Joe the narrator occasionally does acknowledge his earlier self's emotional blindnesses only confounds the issue further. The reader, far from being able simply to write off Joe as "unreliable," is instead left without clear bearings on how to assess the events that he describes.²⁰

One of the novel's many narrative twists is that Joe, as paranoid as he seems, turns out to be perfectly correct about Parry's violent aims, and the first appendix provides a psychiatric case history of Jed Parry, confirming Joe's amateur but empiricist diagnosis of de Clérambault's syndrome. Although this confirmation can be read as an authorial endorsement of both Joe's judgments about Parry and his confidence in his scientific epistemology, it cannot resolve the novel's conflicts among worldviews: Joe proves to be reliable on a factual level, but any larger evaluation of events remains up for grabs.²¹ After Parry is apprehended, Clarissa can still write to Joe: "I was completely wrong and I'm sorry, really sorry. [. . .] But what I was also trying to say last night was this: your being right is not a simple matter" (233). Despite what Joe scorns as Clarissa's "clammy emotional logic" (239), the novel continues to intimate some imprecise truth in her claim that Joe's reaction to the ballooning accident and the stalking was the source of the disintegration of their love.

In other words, for Clarissa and (I would argue) for the novel as a whole, the factual vindication of Joe's triumphalist rationalism does nothing to negate the significance of his paranoia. Lacan's famous axiom about the paranoid is wholly applicable here: even if the jealous husband is right about his wife's infidelity, such a fact in no way means that the husband is not paranoid. As Slavoj Žižek writes:

[E]ven if all the facts [the husband] quotes in support of his jealousy are true, even if his wife really is sleeping around with other men, this does not change one bit the fact that his jealousy is a pathological, paranoid construction. (*Sublime* 48)

Such a counterintuitive thesis holds, according to Žižek, because “pathological jealousy is not a matter of getting the facts false, but of the way these facts are integrated into the subject’s libidinal economy” (*Enjoy* 220). For Lacan, in Žižek’s words, it is not the facts but fantasy that “gives support to that which we call ‘reality’” (*Sublime* 44). A perfect example of the way in which fantasy so operates is the apocryphal story, told at the fatal birthday lunch for Clarissa, about Keats’s visit to, and rejection by, Wordsworth—a story that is said to “tell the truth” even though it isn’t “true.” Whereas the commonplace reading of this idea would be that literature extracts a “higher” truth than history—as Aristotle says, it tells of universal truths rather than particular ones (54)—Lacan’s notion is exactly the opposite. For Lacan, the Keats story would be “apocryphal” even if it were true, because it meshes so neatly with the ideological needs of its audience. It confirms a reality that is in the first place structured by fantasy, by story.

In this sense, Joe’s paranoid knowledge about Jed is wrong even though it is factually quite right—much as Clarissa suggests in her final letter. Such a Lacanian analysis of Joe’s pathology, a pathology in which the facts will always confirm the symbolic fantasy structure, suggests de Clérambault’s syndrome itself, the illness with which Jed is diagnosed. For in de Clérambault’s cases, we learn, the obsession of the patient is completely invulnerable to any response he or she might receive from the object of the obsession. This invulnerability is what makes Jed’s love, according to the case history, “a most lasting form of love” (250) and also what makes it so terrifying. As the case history puts it:

The fact that the object is already married is likely to be regarded as irrelevant. His protestations of indifference or even hatred are seen as paradoxical or contradictory; her conviction that he “really” loves her remains fixed. (250)

Such an analysis conforms perfectly to Žižek’s Lacanian understanding of ideology: “An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor” (*Sublime*

49). Indeed, according to one historian of psychiatry, “Clérambault described erotomania as a representation of reality that though insane was ‘logical’” (Roudinesco 25). Such an overlap between Lacan’s thinking and de Clérambault’s should not be a surprise: the thinker whom Lacan called his “only master in psychiatry” (Lacan 5n5; Roudinesco 25) was neither Freud nor Lacan’s own analyst Rudolph Lowenstein but an early supervisor at the Paris Police Special Infirmary for the Insane, a mentor who proved enormously influential on Lacan’s first theoretical work in paranoia and psychosis, a teacher who even fell out with Lacan over the similarity of their theoretical work—Gaetan de Clérambault.²²

Because Lacan’s theory of paranoia derives directly from de Clérambault’s thinking about erotomania, Joe’s “normal” Lacanian-style paranoia and Jed’s de Clérambault’s syndrome are related diagnoses, and it is hardly accidental that the two antagonists share so much. Clarissa after all calls Joe’s neo-Darwinism a “new fundamentalism,” suggesting a parallel to Jed’s fundamentalism of the old, Christian variety. As Morrison points out, Parry is, at least in Clarissa’s view, “the kind of phantom that only I [Joe] could have called up, a spirit of my dislocated, incomplete character” (McEwan, *Enduring Love* 110)—in Morrison’s words, an image of “the neurosis implicit in Joe’s own consciousness” (260).²³ This is not to claim that Joe is every bit as mad as Jed, but to emphasize the continuity between the pathological love Jed feels for Joe and the “normal” love of Joe and Clarissa. One of the more unsettling suggestions of the novel is that love always courts pathology. “De Clérambault’s syndrome was a dark, distorting mirror that reflected and parodied a brighter world of lovers whose reckless abandon to their cause was sane” (137), Joe thinks, and the psychiatrists Paul Mullen and Michele Pathé quoted in appendix 1 confirm his judgment: “the pathological extensions of love not only touch upon but overlap with normal experience, and it is not always easy to accept that one of our most valued experiences may merge into psychopathology” (259). Thus appendix 2, in a final gothic flourish, offers the reader a last letter from an institutionalized Jed, a letter that Joe never sees. In this final intrusion of the epistolary on Joe’s generally monological narrative, Jed’s last, “lost” letter eerily parallels the (apocryphal?) lost letters of Keats so desperately sought by Clarissa. Jed’s is the letter that proves to be the “cry of undying love not touched by despair.”

Both the rational scientist and the insane religious man can equally become prisoners in their own symbolic constructions. This symmetry

does not suggest that science is itself a faith (or any similar vulgarism), but it does imply a critique of neo-Darwinism by showing the ways in which rational faculties can be controlled and directed by fantastic desires. Lacan's point about paranoia, historically derived from de Clérambault's study of erotomania and one of the main topics of *Enduring Love*, is the priority of fantasy in structuring the way reality is understood. In this regard, the endurance of Jed's love serves to undermine (once again) the triumphalist aspirations of Joe's neo-Darwinist worldview.

A happy marriage?

The end of the novel contains another twist as well: Joe and Clarissa's reunification and adoption of a child, a narrative resolution of which the reader learns in only the most oblique manner—buried in a subordinate clause that is buried in appendix 1, a dry, technical case history of Jed Parry, where Joe and Clarissa appear merely as initials:²⁴

While in this case R and M were reconciled and later successfully adopted a child, some victims [of de Clérambault patients] have had to divorce or emigrate, and others have needed psychiatric treatment because of the distress the patients have caused them.²⁵ (259)

The obliquely mentioned adoption suggests that despite the threats to it, Joe and Clarissa's love does indeed endure. The reunion and adoption, occurring outside Joe's narrative, stand as a subtle but unmistakable rebuke to the evolutionary psychology that Joe has been promulgating for the entire novel: adoption entails a love uniquely free from immediate Darwinian motives. Joe and Clarissa take the chance on a parental love that offers no hope of ensuring the survival of their genes, wagering that they will be able to free themselves from the tyranny of their Darwinian inheritance—snapping the leash on which culture is held by the genes.

In this last detail, *Enduring Love* holds out hope for a rapprochement between the disciplines. To return to the title question of this essay: biologists, it turns out, can't read poetry because (or, more charitably, when) they become triumphant rationalists, refusing to acknowledge the origins of their ideas in their interests—economic, psychological, or corporeal.²⁶ Conversely, literary critics can't read science when, like Clarissa, they attend solely to an instinctual or emotional register and dismiss reflexively

the legitimacy of science and reason. And finally, adherents of both the neo-Darwinist and the religious worldview fail as readers when they become delusional Quixotean overreaders—whether de Clérambault's sufferers like Jed or mere garden-variety Lacanian paranoiacs like Joe—for whom the external world is effortlessly subsumed into a fantasy structure, a story, or a novel. If a happy marriage is to exist, McEwan's novel ultimately suggests, it must exist somewhere between these failures.

Notes

1. As Robert Wright observes, most current-day academics applying Darwin's ideas to the social sciences prefer the label *evolutionary psychology* to *sociobiology* because of the right-wing political connotations that Wilson's sociobiology acquired during the 1970s. This is not to deny that “doctrinal differences” (Wright 394) exist between the two subschools. According to Joseph Carroll, “Evolutionary psychologists emphasize proximal mechanisms of adaptation” whereas “sociobiological thinkers [...] place a greater emphasis on the direct and immediate pursuit of reproductive advantage” (107); the newer school allows for a more flexible understanding of the mechanisms by which particular traits might lead to evolutionary advantage. With this in mind, I will favor the term *evolutionary psychology*, though not with exceptional rigor, since the doctrinal differences are relatively inconsequential for my argument. I should also distinguish between my uses of *Darwinism* and *neo-Darwinism*. Darwin, famously unaware of Mendelian genetics, lacked a causal mechanism for the inheritance of characteristics; not until the synthesis of Darwin and Mendel in the early twentieth century did the language of evolution become spiraled around the language of genetics. In this essay, then, I will use *neo-Darwinism* to refer to the schools that have emerged over the last 30 years or so; *Darwinism* will refer to a broader invocation of Darwin's thought.

2. Among the major books in this field are Carroll, Dissanayake, and Storey. Special issues of *Philosophy and Literature* (25.2, Oct. 2001) and *Poetics Today* (23.1, Spring 2002) have been published on the topic. Articles by Brian Boyd and Harold Fromm offer overviews. On Darwin and the Victorians the most lasting works are by Gillian Beer and George Levine (*Darwin and the Novelists*). Margot Norris and Paul Sheehan explore Darwin's impact on modernism.

3. Critics have noted and analyzed the conflicts among science, religion, and literature in *Enduring Love*, but they have paid relatively little attention to the novel's engagement with neo-Darwinism in particular. Timothy Bewes reads

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Enduring Love in the context of “philosophical honesty,” asking whether its philosophical questions are genuinely engaged or decided in advance. Rhianon Davies and Jago Morrison both read the novel as an attempt by the narrator to reassert his masculine identity as a subject in the face of multiple threats. Olga Cameron’s Lacanian reading also sees the initial incident as a symbolic castration that unravels the narrator’s identity and the rest of the narrative as an attempt to reconstitute that identity even as it reveals its dissolution. David Malcolm and Peter Childs offer more general thematic studies.

4. McEwan has returned to these themes in his most recent novel *Saturday*, where he stages a similar conflict between literature and science and explores the links between mind and brain. The main character is a brain surgeon who repeatedly quotes from the final paragraph of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (“there is grandeur in this view of life”) but happens to be a philistine when it comes to literature, unable to find value in *Anna Karenina*; his daughter is a poet. The plot hinges on the recitation of Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” a poem whose emotional power alters the mind (and hence the brain) of a criminal character who, like Jed Parry, is pathological and violent.

5. McEwan’s comments in interviews suggest a strong sympathy for neo-Darwinism. See notes 14 and 20.

6. A brief summary: Joe Rose, the novel’s narrator, is a middle-aged popular science writer married by common law to a Keats scholar named Clarissa Mellon, who cannot bear children as a result of a medical accident. During a picnic, Joe attempts to save a boy being borne away in a helium balloon by an unexpected gust, and in the rescue attempt—which results in the death of another would-be rescuer, John Logan—he meets a born-again Christian named Jed Parry, who becomes obsessed with Joe and stalks him, professing the undying quality of both his own love and God’s love for the atheistic Joe. From this initial incident arise several plotlines: Joe’s reciprocal obsession with his stalker, which makes his behavior appear increasingly desperate, irrational, and even paranoid; the resurgence of Joe’s old doubts about the value of his work as a journalistic popularizer rather than an academic scientist; an awakening of Clarissa’s deep grief for the loss of the phantom children she can never bear, and her growing impatience with Joe’s inability to understand such feelings; and, resulting from these individual crises, a joint one—the disintegration of the love between Joe and Clarissa, a love that Joe repeatedly describes as exquisite and precious.

7. Susan Wolfson cautions against decontextualizing these lines too hastily, since the rainbow can also suggest the illusoriness of the aesthetic. Denise Gigante points out that this view was widespread among the British romantics.

8. Levine, in *Darwin Loves You*, attempts to negotiate the conflict between recognizing the validity of an often disenchanting science and retaining the values of an enchanting humanism by attending to the affective qualities of Darwin's prose and the sense of wonder that he often found in nature. Contemporary neo-Darwinism often assumes a rhetoric of disenchantment, but Darwin's own writing retains a romantic enthusiasm for the natural world.

9. The relation of evolutionary psychology to psychoanalysis is ambivalent. Freud's interest in instinct, his view of the self as a battlefield of warring desires, and his recognition of the capacity of the conscious mind to deceive itself, all anticipate the views held by current-day neo-Darwinists. Yet neo-Darwinism seems often to disdain the inadequately scientific methods of Freud's research and speculations. Joe, despite his flashes of psychoanalytic insight, refers to psychoanalysis as "fabulation run riot" (53), dismisses the value of "professional listener[s]," calls "the talking cure" a "genteel fraud" (107), and, even when his marriage is on the brink of dissolution, suggests that "[t]oo much [is] made in pop psychology [...] of talking things through" (155).

10. Joe by the end of the novel is no longer so rationalistic that he can't find a mystical quasi divinity in particle physics. He describes the mystery of the electromagnetic force that holds together a water molecule as "a mysterious powerful force" (243); later in the chapter, another witness of the balloon accident says, "These things bind you together, you know" (247). Childs points out the obvious parallel to the force of love binding a couple together as well as the less obvious ambiguity of the metaphor: the triangular model of the water molecule could represent a child binding together parents or it might suggest a more violent love triangle involving the dangerous Jed Parry (116). The notion of finding wonder through science rather than by denying it is a major theme for both Levine (*Darwin Loves You*) and Adam Philips.

11. The first-person form tends to encourage unreliability: first, because the knowledge possessed by a particularized, embodied human narrator has limits that a disembodied third-person narrator logically does not; and second, because the voice of a first-person narrator inevitably performs a characterizing function beyond the presentation of narrative data. Michal Glowinski (104) and Franz Stanzel (115) emphasize the logical differences between first- and third-person narrators; David Goldknopf (38–39) suggests that first-person narrators always have an implicit "confessional" motive; and Dan Shen discusses the characterizing function of unreliability. My use of the term *unreliable* deserves some explication. Felix Martinez-Bonati distinguishes between narrators' "unreliability as persons" and their "structural [un]reliability as narrators" (115), between unreliable evaluation and unreliable presentation of narrative

facts that constitute the fictional world in which the narrator exists. Joe's unreliability is largely of the first variety: to the extent that he (as a narrator) loses the reader's trust, it is generally through his judgments rather than his basic presentation of narrative data. But at times—as I will discuss—this evaluative unreliability slides into factual unreliability; the reader comes to suspect the fundamental narrative facts that he presents, a suspicion whose importance is by no means nullified when his version of the facts is ultimately validated. But if Joe's judgments as a narrator are sometimes unreliable, his judgments as a character are also sometimes questionable—and questioned, if indirectly, by his own (later) narrating self. Thus Joe's narrative may be aptly described in Dorrit Cohn's terms as "dissonant self-narration": "a lucid narrator turning back on a past self steeped in ignorance, confusion, and delusion" (145). Yet even here the problem is subtle and complex, for Joe as a narrator is rarely explicitly judgmental about his former self, and when Joe the character makes aberrant judgments, Joe the narrator often withholds his own qualification of them. In these instances the self-narration is more consonant than "dissonant," and a greater degree of explicit mental distance—more dissonance—between narrating Joe and narrated Joe would likely stabilize the reader's interpretation and generate more confidence in the judgments of the narrator. In this essay, where relevant, I distinguish Joe the narrator from Joe the character.

12. Malcolm emphasizes the characterizing function of Joe's language and worldview and discusses Joe's character at length (164–69). He calls Joe a "substantially reliable first-person narrator" (160) but concedes that "his rationalist, materialist approach to things can seem reductive" (170). Davies notes the self-consciousness with which Joe presents his narrative, particularly the opening scene, and though she does not use the term *unreliable*, she interprets this self-consciousness as a sign of a "masculine self-fashioning" (109) through which Joe writes himself as a hero, even if a failed one.

13. Davies concurs: "Whatever Parry's mental problems, his analysis of Joe seems astonishingly sane and very accurate" (118).

14. McEwan cites these works with unadulterated praise:

I think we've been very fortunate—we've had a golden age in science, for 15 years. The number of highly literate scientists writing for an intelligent lay public is extraordinary. There's a kind of science writing that seems to bridge the gap between informing laymen but also informing other sciences. To take an immediate example—Steven Pinker's book on language certainly addresses not just lay people like myself but other scientists outside his immediate field. Similarly, my own particular intellectual hero is E. O. Wilson. He's a biologist. He wrote *The*

Diversity of Life, and that was just genius. The thing that really interested me was the extent to which scientists are now trespassing into other areas. (Interview)

15. The degree to which applying Darwin to the social sciences necessarily implies social Darwinism or laissez-faire economics has always been controversial, but a certain homology does exist between the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith and the blind “agency” of natural selection, a homology that can lead in both cases to the naturalistic fallacy—a slippage in both cases between the *is* and the *ought*.

16. In an argument nicely compatible with Joe's recognition of the impossibility of objectivity, Ellen Spolsky argues that the deconstructive view of language as necessarily ambiguous has a strong basis in evolutionary theory: language has acquired a near-optimal or “good enough” balance between vagueness and rigidity, either of which quality alone would make language an adaptation less effective in the struggle for survival.

17. My thanks to J. D. Minninger for his help with Nietzsche's German.

18. Most of the commentators discuss the the novel's self-consciousness about narrative. Morrison maintains that narrative functions as a “means of containment and control” (257) in Joe's attempt “to constitute and to defend his embattled masculinity” (255) but also concedes that “the instability and disjunction potentially implicit in narration are constantly foregrounded” (257). Davies similarly reads Joe's self-consciousness about his own narration as a sign of an underlying awareness of the fragility of his own masculine identity.

19. James Wood, for example, dislikes the novel for its close adherence to the formula of a Hollywood thriller (qtd. in Childs 107).

20. What further complicates any judgment on Joe's reliability are the extratextual comments of the author. McEwan has described E. O. Wilson as “my own particular intellectual hero” and acknowledged that while Joe's scorn for literature is meant to be “provocative,” he shares Joe's belief that many humanists undervalue the sciences (Interview). Yet even if the extranovelist McEwan actually endorses Joe's neo-Darwinist views, Joe might still be said to be unreliable. McEwan could be lying or joking or posturing; and his comments in interviews can support a range of interpretations. He has said, for example, “There is something about Clarissa's take on the world that Joe badly needs” (Interview); but also that he “wanted [...] to write a book somewhat in praise of rationality” (qtd. in Childs 109). One should also note that while Booth himself measures a narrator's reliability against “the implied author's norms” (158), he also takes pains not to equate the implied author with the

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actual author (71–76). One can thus, without regressing to New Critical orthodoxy, still invoke D. H. Lawrence's old injunction, "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale," and set out "to save the tale from the artist who created it" (2). McEwan might, in other words, be seen as a critic of neo-Darwinism in spite of himself—his novelist's instincts overcoming the intellectualism of the novel's philosophical content.

21. Interestingly, readers who focus on the construction of Joe's masculinity (Davies, Morrison) tend to be suspicious of his Darwinism and his rationality, while others (Childs, Malcolm) incline to the judgment that the novel itself ultimately endorses his values.

22. Cameron does not discuss this connection despite her detailed articulation of Lacanian theory. For biographical details of de Clérambault's influence on Lacan, see Roudinesco 22–25. Roudinesco writes of de Clérambault:

Despite his conservatism regarding theory, he agreed with Freud that madness was close to truth, reason to unreason, and coherence to delirium. Clérambault's influence was evident in Lacan's first theoretical text, published in July 1931 [. . .] "Structures of Paranoid Psychoses." (24)

23. The doubling of Joe and Jed also conforms to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussion of "male homosexual panic" in many respects. Sedgwick writes:

Because the paths of male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most reprobated bonds, an endemic and ineradicable state of what I am calling male homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement. (185)

Men acquire a privileged social position only at the risk of straying from the homosocial to the homosexual, making the threat of identification as homosexual a threat to one's identity in a social sense. That one can never know whether one is in fact truly homosexual only increases the anxiety under which male power is exercised. Thus accumulates "a reservoir of potential for *violence* caused by the self-ignorance that this regime constitutively enforces" (186; Sedgwick's italics)—a reservoir that overflows at the end of *Enduring Love*. Joe and Jed's bond, forged in the masculine homosocial activity of a physical rescue, leads to a doubling whereby Joe is under increased anxiety to distinguish his heterosexual identity from Jed's homosexual one. Not coincidentally, then, does *Enduring Love* borrow from the tradition of the gothic, "the literary genre in which homophobia found its most apt and ramified embodiment" (Sedgwick 186). Therefore when Clarissa hears Joe's first reports on Parry's phone calls and letters, she jokes, "A secret gay love affair with a Jesus

freak! I can't wait to tell your science friends" (60) and asks whether the two men are getting married. While a traditional psychoanalytic reading would say that her joke expresses the unconscious truth of Joe's latent homosexual desire, a Sedgwickian reading would claim, with somewhat different emphasis, that Clarissa indicates the shifting terrain on which male homosocial relations must always be enacted.

24. Like the news of *Lolita's* death that Nabokov hides in the fictional preface to his novel, here essential narrative information is deliberately concealed from the uncaring reader. McEwan apparently shares Nabokov's interest in word games too; as Nabokov planted anagrams of his own name in his novels, so the authors of appendix 1, Wenn and Camia, anagrammatically recombine to spell Ian McEwan. Other parallels abound between *Lolita* and *Enduring Love*, particularly between Humbert Humbert's relation to Quilty and Joe's to Parry: the temporary uncertainty about the reality of the narrator's persecution by his "double," the culmination of the conflict between the men in gun violence ostensibly in defense of a beloved woman, and the gothic stylings and homosexual panic described by Sedgwick (see note 23).

25. Of the critics cited here, only Cameron and Childs seem to note the significance of the adoption.

26. This is a trait in neo-Darwinism that Levine critiques at length; he quotes William Connolly on the tendency of the rationalist/scientific worldview to "misrecognize itself and [. . .] to advance dismissive interpretations of any culture or ethical practice that engages the visceral register of being" (qtd. in *Darwin Loves You* 35).

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