

# Ian McEwan: Art and Politics (in the Age of Terrorism)

An International Conference at  
Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Political issues have come back into contemporary literature for many years. One paradigmatic figure for this development in British fiction is Ian McEwan who has gained worldwide recognition with his more recent novels which have also been turned into major movies.

Whereas his early work is more concerned with the family and its perversions, there is a definite politicization after *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981). The years between McEwan's Venetian novel and *The Child in Time* (1987) were by no means years of silence. Rather it was a period of gestation: he wrote the libretto for the oratorio *Or Shall We Die?* (1983) and the script for *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1985) both taking up the then current debate about nuclear war and Thatcherism. McEwan saw these works as *A Move Abroad* (1989), because they led him away from the genre of the novel to which he then returned with the caustically political *The Child in Time*. Since then all his novels have had strong political undertones which are most drastically visualized in *The Innocent* (1990) where the division of Berlin is shown metaphorically in the dismemberment and cutting in half of the corpse of Otto. In *Saturday* (2005) the mass rally in London against the Iraq War on 15 February 2003 is the background against which the Perowne's Bloomsday takes place. In *Saturday* just as much as in *Black Dogs* (1992) or McEwan's Booker-prize-winning *Amsterdam* (1998) politics are shown in their complex relationship to art which is also celebrated in *The Atonement* (2001).

The conference has four sections which deal with different aspects of politics and art in Ian McEwan's work as an example for more generally prevalent trends in contemporary British and European Literatures and cultures:

<b>Contemporary McEwan</b>	(Keynote: Peter Childs, University of Gloucestershire)
<b>Historical McEwan</b>	(Keynote: David Malcolm, Gdansk University)
<b>Ethical McEwan</b>	(Keynote: Martin Middeke, Augsburg University)
<b>Cultural McEwan</b>	(Keynote: Jürgen Schlaeger, Centre for British Studies, Humboldt University Berlin)

Ian McEwan has a constant output of essays and interviews which also should be taken into account in order to assess the status of politics and art in an age where the blocks of the past have crumpled to make way for a complicated situation which is marred by the constant threat of terrorism.

Abstracts for 20-minute papers with a short CV and a suggestion into which section the paper would fit should be sent to [nicklas@rz.uni-leipzig.de](mailto:nicklas@rz.uni-leipzig.de) by 1 August 2008.