Does the Medical Report Have the Final Say? : 
Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*

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**Introduction**

"The beginning is simple to mark" (1)—thus begins Ian McEwan's acclaimed novel *Enduring Love* (1997). With this metanarrative opening statement, the first-person narrator and protagonist, Joe Rose, foregrounds his act of narration. Indeed, one of the main themes of *Enduring Love* is the exploration of the ways in which storytelling serves as a means of making sense of reality, and the narrator Joe draws attention to the arbitrariness of marking the beginning of his story; he knows that the story's meaning can be affected by the way he tells it. Joe recounts the story of his traumatic experience retrospectively, mostly using past-tense verbs; in contrast, he employs present-tense verbs when referring to his state of mind at the time of narration. His narrative comprises twenty-one of the twenty-four chapters of the novel proper, which is accompanied by two appendices.

Joe's narrative specifically requires the reader to determine whose view is justifiable—his own or that of his common-law wife, Clarissa Mellon. Their views differ most radically concerning Jed Parry, a 28-year-old homosexual who stalks Joe, operating under the delusion that their love is mutual. Joe regards Parry as a dangerous psychopath, while Clarissa thinks that Joe is unreasonably obsessed with him. Toward the end of the novel proper, Parry actually becomes violent; he hires two assassins to shoot Joe down, and when his scheme fails, he threatens Clarissa with a knife and tries to kill himself. Joe saves Clarissa by shooting Parry; he then boasts to her that he had been right all along about Parry's violent nature. Clarissa admits as much but argues back, saying, "[y]our being right is not a simple matter" (216); she blames him for having driven Parry to violence.

The question of whose view, Joe's or Clarissa's, should be given more credence leads to a thematic interpretation of the novel, because Joe's triumph has generally been regarded as a triumph of rationalism. Like McEwan's other novels, *Enduring Love* is loaded with conceptual dichotomies, such as reason/emotion and science/literature, and the common assumption is that reason and science are represented by Joe, while emotion and literature are represented by Clarissa. Although the ending of the novel seems to endorse Joe's rationalist worldview, critics have had difficulty justifying this conclusion because, as the plot progresses, Joe's first-person narration becomes increasingly unreliable and thus creates suspicion in the reader regarding the validity of his claim. There are two opposing vectors at work, and critical attention has focused mainly on the issue of how to interpret the unreliability of the narrator.¹

However, there is one thing that critics unanimously accept: the assumption that Joe's judgement about Parry is basically endorsed by the medical report on Parry, which is given after the novel proper as Appendix I. The title of the report is "A homo-erotic obsession, with religious overtones: a clinical variant of de Clérambault's syndrome" (233). The fictitious authors of this medical report, Robert Wenn and Antonio Camia, point out the ways in which de Clérambault patients, especially men, may be dangerous, by citing a passage from an actual medical article titled "The Pathological Extensions of

¹ For example, David Malcolm asserts that "his [Joe's] stubborn rationality is the best bet in the chaos of human impulses" (179). Recent critics such as Martin Randall, Sean Matthews, Jonathan Greenberg, and Peter Childs express reservations about the validity of Joe's rationalist claim in various ways, but they also agree that the novel endorses Joe's judgment about Parry's violent nature.
Love," which says, "in intrusiveness and dangerousness men predominate" (622).2 The authors of this real article, Mullen and Pathé, in turn cite an article by another actual psychiatrist, C. Perez, which was published in American Journal of Criminal Law; this piece states that "an increasing awareness of the threat presented by de Clérambault sufferers is bringing about an 'explosion' of legislation to protect their victims" (235-36).

Indeed, the report encourages us to affirm that Parry is a dangerous psychotic. However, is it really safe to take the accounts of the medical report at their face value and to determine the meaning of the threat presented in their assertions? Critics also assume that the accounts of the medical report correspond with Joe's narrative, but is it really the case?3 As the medical report is itself a narrative, it should unavoidably incur arbitrariness in trying to make sense of reality, just as private narratives do. In this paper, I will explore the question of whether the accounts given in the medical report actually correspond with the private narratives of Joe and other characters and with actual journal articles cited in the report's bibliography. Based on this analysis, I will evaluate the validity of the medical report and give my conclusion as to the meaning of Enduring Love.

I

To begin with, I will briefly outline the plot of Enduring Love up to the time of the first shooting incident. While picnicking on a finger-shaped piece of land projecting over the Chilterns escarpment, science journalist Joe and his common-law wife and Keats scholar Clarissa encounter a ballooning accident. The narrator Joe marks, as the beginning of his story, the moment when he heard a shout from the man who was involved in the accident. A boy is trapped inside the basket of a huge hot-air balloon, and five men who happen to be nearby, including Joe, rush to the scene and try to rescue him by dragging down the balloon's rope. When the craft is hit by a strong gust of wind, it suddenly lifts several feet, and Joe and three other men more or less simultaneously let go. Only a split second of hesitation, however, leaves John Logan, the fifth man, clinging to the rope, and the next moment, the lightened balloon sails high up into the sky. Logan's strength gives out a few minutes later, and he falls to his death on the farmland below. Joe realizes that if none of them had let go of the rope, the balloon would have stayed on the ground, and Logan would not have died. Joe tries unsuccessfully to rationalize his action by attributing it to evolutionary psychological response. Above all, he is tortured by the suspicion that he might have been the first to let go.

Parry is one of the five men who happened to be present and who tried, together, to save the boy. The night of the accident, at nearly two a.m., he calls Joe for the first time and declares that their love is mutual; that phone call marks the beginning of his stalking of Joe. Joe tries to make Clarissa recognize Parry's dangerousness, but his own obsessiveness leads her to doubt that he is actually being harassed. It is only when Parry breaks into their house and threatens her with a knife that Clarissa realizes how dangerous he truly is.

At this point, I will examine the "case history" described in the medical report (Appendix I). The authors of the report succinctly sum up the circumstances of the Parry affair as follows:

There now began the barrage of letters, door-step confrontations and street vigils so familiar in the sad literature of this condition ... R [Joe Rose] had been living contentedly with his common-law wife, M [Clarissa Mellon], and within days this relationship was under strain from P's [Parry's] determined onslaught. Later they separated ... R and M were reconciled and later successfully adopted a child. (237-42)

The above account clearly attributes the cause of Joe's separation from Clarissa to Parry's harassment, and declares that the couple overcame the estrangement and were reconciled in the end. Factually, this account does seem to
correspond with Joe’s narrative. Until Parry calls Joe for the first time, the emotional bond between Joe and Clarissa appears to be as strong as—or stronger than—ever. As for their reconciliation, Joe’s statement in the final section of the novel proper does imply its possibility: “I caught Clarissa’s eye and we exchanged a half smile, and it was as if we were pitching in our own requests for mutual forgiveness, or at least tolerance” (230).

I would argue that Joe’s estrangement from Clarissa is not caused so much by Parry’s stalking of Joe as by the slight feeling of resentment he feels toward Clarissa at the time of the accident, and that we can detect the faint vestige of this resentment lingering in his narrative. In order to support this argument, I will consider when and how the narrator Joe views the narrated events. The time of narration is difficult to identify; as is typical of present-tense narratives of contemporary fiction, the narrator Joe does not specify the time during which he is telling his story. However, considering that there is obviously a time gap between the events described with past-tense verbs and those that employ present-tense verbs, we can assume that he is telling the story after he has gone through all the narrated events. Based on the passage cited earlier, which occurs at the end of the novel proper, and also on Appendix I, we may assume that Joe’s narrative is recorded after Parry has been hospitalized and Joe has re-established his relationship with Clarissa.

Here it will be useful to distinguish between narrator and character—between the narrator Joe, who exists outside the story world and views the events retrospectively, and the character Joe, who inhabits the story world and experiences the narrated events. I will employ the notion of the “narrating self” and the “experiencing self” in accordance with F. K. Stanzel’s terminology. These terms may be roughly defined as follows:

For instance, when events and actions are reported from the perspective of a now older and wiser narrator, this narrating self often indulges in retrospection, evaluation and the drawing of moral conclusions. Conversely, the text may eschew retrospection and concentrate on the action as it takes place, at any one particular moment in time. In such cases, the focus is on the narrator as protagonist, the experiencing self.

(Parry 90)

I will keep in mind, though, that in practice, it is often difficult to distinguish between the two phases, because the concept of the experiencing self overlaps that of the narrator, who determines not only the diction, syntax, and imagery of the text, but also which part of his experience should be incorporated into the text.

The opening pages of Enduring Love that describe the fatal ballooning accident have been highly commended as a superb example of a tense, powerful, emotionally charged account. On careful reading, we notice that the tension of the opening section is created in part because Joe repeatedly shrinks from going on with his narration, thereby revealing his pain at telling the story. For example, he says, “I’m holding back, delaying the information. I’m lingering in the prior moment because it was a time when other outcomes were still possible” (2). He also says, “I think that while we were still converging, before we made contact, we were in a state of mathematical grace” (3). Here Joe is using present-tense verbs, which fact implies that this Joe is the narrating Joe, who is recalling the narrated events at the time of the narrative act.

Let me cite another example: “I didn’t know, nor have I ever discovered, who let go first. I’m not prepared to accept that it was me” (14). From this remark, we can sense that even at the time of narration, Joe is still suffering pangs of conscience over John Logan’s death.

By examining the present-tense sentences, we can also glimpse the narrating Joe’s attitude towards Clarissa. The following is the narrating Joe’s account of the moment when he was rushing to the accident site, not yet knowing what was going on.

What was Clarissa doing? She said she walked quickly towards the centre of the field. I don’t know how she resisted the urge to run. By the time it happened—the event I am about to describe, the fall—she had almost caught us up and was well placed as an observer, unencumbered by participation, by the ropes and the shouting, and by our fatal lack of co-operation.
On first reading, the above passage seems to be a factual statement which is not coloured by any shade of emotion. On the second reading of the novel, however, the sentence, “I don’t know how she resisted the urge to run,” seems to hint that the narrating Joe is emphasizing that Clarissa was in a different frame of mind from his. In addition, his use of the word “unencumbered” begins to bear emotional implications; he seems to hint that she escaped the moral responsibility for Logan’s death. Some of the passages that incorporate past-tense verbs also anticipate Joe’s distancing himself from Clarissa. One example is this: “Clarissa came up behind me, looped her arms around my waist and pressed her face into my back. What surprised me was she was already crying... whereas to me, sorrow seemed a long way off” (19).

On the other hand, Joe’s response to Parry right after the accident is much more sympathetic. As he looks at the other man, he thinks:

He [Parry] looked wretched, like a dog about to be punished. In the second or so that this stranger’s clear grey-blue eyes held mine I felt I could include him in the self-congratulatory warmth I felt in being alive. It even crossed my mind to touch him comfortably on the shoulder. My thoughts were up there on the screen: this man is in shock. He wants me to help him...  

I honoured Parry with a friendly nod and, ignoring Clarissa at my back—I was a busy man, I would deal with them all one at a time—I said to him in what I thought was a deep and reassuring voice, “It’s all right.” (19-20, italics original)

It is unmistakably obvious that at this moment Joe is sympathizing more with Parry, who is something akin to his accomplice, than with Clarissa, who has escaped being saddled with the painful feeling of guilt that Joe is to suffer hereafter.6

II

These signs of Joe’s distancing himself from Clarissa, which are found in Chapters 1 and 2, have somehow escaped the attention of earlier critics, probably because Joe’s narrative in the next chapter emphasizes his solidarity with her. This sense of solidarity, though, proves to be only temporary.

Chapter 3 begins with the following line: “By six that evening we were back home, in our kitchen, and everything looked the same” (28). While in the preceding chapters Joe mainly uses the pronoun “I,” the text of Chapter 3 is full of sentences that include the pronoun “we”: “We sat facing each other and began” (28) “Together we heaped curses on the pilot” (29), and so on. The shift from the “I” of Chapters 1 and 2 to the “we” of Chapter 3 is rather sudden and drastic. The narrative of Chapter 3 gives the impression that Joe is feeling as if he and Clarissa were not independent characters but were, rather, sharing the same identity.

This desperate need of Joe’s to identify with Clarissa is understandable. Now that the three surviving men who were involved in the accident are gone, Clarissa is the only participant left, and Joe needs someone, anyone, to share the terrible experience with him. This leads him to unconsciously attempt to re-establish his bond with her. When she says, “We’ve seen something terrible together. It won’t go away, and we have to help each other. And that means we’ll have to love each other even harder,” Joe is reminded, for the first time after the accident, of their love. He says to himself, “Of course. Why didn’t I think of this? Why didn’t I think like this? We needed love” (33, italics original).

By retracing the accident together with Clarissa, he gradually manages to numb his feeling of guilt. Even then, however, he cannot bring himself to face it. He reminisces as follows: “I felt the sickness of guilt, something I couldn’t yet bear to talk about” (29). This statement is important, because it reveals that even before Parry’s first telephone call, Joe is not open with Clarissa. Joe’s we-narrative switches back to 1-narrative the moment he receives Parry’s call:

We stayed up another half an hour talking, but only because we were too tired to set about going to bed. At two o’clock we managed it. The light had been out five minutes when the phone rang and snatched me from the beginnings of sleep.

I have no doubt that I remember his words correctly. He said, “Is that Joe?” I didn’t reply. I had already recognised the voice. He said, “I just wanted you to know, I understand what you’re feeling. I feel it too. I love you.”

I hung up.
Clarissa murmured into the pillow, "Who was that?"

It may have been exhaustion, or perhaps my concealment was protective of her, but I know I made my first serious mistake when I turned on my side and said to her, "It was nothing. Wrong number. Go to sleep." (36-37)

In saying, "I know I made my first serious mistake," the narrating Joe admits his error, but he cannot figure out why he did not tell Clarissa about Parry immediately. When combined with the above analysis, however, the true reason for his secretiveness and subsequent obsession with Parry becomes clear.

It is also noteworthy that, although the narrating Joe says he still remembers Parry's words correctly, he does not repeat them to Clarissa when he tells her about them two days later.

"Do you remember, the day it happened, just as we were falling asleep the phone rang?"

"Mmm. Wrong number."

"It was that guy with the pony-tail. You know, the one who wanted me to pray. Jed Parry."

She frowned. "Why didn't you say? What did he want?"

I didn't pause. "He said he loved me. . . ." (56)

Joe says, "I didn't pause," but why does he make such a claim? He does not say, nor does he seem to take any notice of it, but the apparently casual insertion of the sentence seems to reveal his subconscious motive at the time of the action and/or at the time of the narration. Presumably, while he wanted to confide in Clarissa, he did not want her to probe too deeply into the matter, for he was afraid that that could lead to a confrontation with his guilt.7

The more he shrinks from facing those guilty feelings, the worse those feelings become, which is probably the cause for his above-mentioned emotional reaction to Parry's words. Most probably Parry meant only that he perceived that their love was mutual. But Joe thinks that Parry is referring to his own agonizing feelings of guilt. At this moment, his re-established solidarity with Clarissa dissolves.

By talking about the accident with Clarissa, Joe temporarily feels that he might be able to overcome his sense of guilt, but the longer-term effect proves to be rather the opposite, because for Joe, the act of narrativization becomes associated with the evasion of guilt. After returning home on the night of the accident, he and Clarissa talk about it for hours on end; they cannot stop. Joe says that they were so engrossed in their talk that "an element of ritual was in play" (28). For them, words "came out in a torrent, a post-mortem, a re-living, a de-briefing, the rehearsal of grief, and the exorcism of terror" (28). He also notes that he found "comfort in re-iteration" (28), and he describes the process of alleviating his pain by means of the narrative act, using metaphors like "tame it with words" (29), "prisoners in a cell, running at the walls, beating them back with our heads" (29-30), and "grinding the jagged edge of memories, hammering the unspeakable into forms of words" (30). Joe and Clarissa even invite their friends over so that they can relate the story to them, and in the course of the telling, Joe feels that "[their] story was gaining in coherence; it had shape, and now it was spoken from a place of safety" (36).

The process of narrativization inevitably requires the selection of material and the application of cause-and-effect relationships to the narrative elements. From the above quotations, we can deduce that Joe has managed to construct a narrative that does not touch upon the question of responsibility for Logan's death. He is driven by an urge to tell the story to everyone, and by repeating it, he comes to feel as if his pain were relieved: "I found myself using the same phrases, the same adjectives in the same order. It became possible to recount the events without re-living them in the faintest degree, without even remembering them" (36). However, deep down, he realizes his act of narrativization is an evasion of his guilt.

The association of guilt with narrativization drives Joe further from the idea of confronting his guilt. During the two days after the accident, he writes two scientific pieces about the use of narrative in science. The contents of these articles need to be considered in light of his troubled conscience. The first article deals with a scientific essay, written by a 19th-century scientist, which demonstrates "how the power and attractions of narrative had clouded judgement" (41). The second one includes accounts of 19th-century scientists who used narrative in order to illustrate their theories. After completing the

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7 Childs also notes Joe's failure to share guilt with Clarissa (114).
second article, Joe rereads it and is "astonished that such puny reasoning, such forced examples could have held my attention for so long..." It wasn't written in pursuit of truth, it wasn't science. It was journalism, magazine journalism, whose ultimate standard was readability (50). He goes on:

Narrative—my gut tightened at the word. What balls I had written the night before. How was it possible to tell Mrs Logan of her husband's sacrifice without drawing her attention to our own cowardice? (56)

For Joe, writing journalistic articles has become associated with his own narrative act of evasion. Therefore, though he himself is unaware of it, journalism becomes equated with self-deception, and conversely, academic research becomes equated with truth-seeking. This is probably the real reason why Joe becomes obsessed with returning to his academic career. For Joe, to establish himself as a true scientist means that he can unburden himself of his guilt, which he associates with narrative.

When his application for a post at a university is turned down, Joe next begins to thoroughly research Parry (148). The discovery that Parry displays typical symptoms of de Clérambault's syndrome enraptures him, and he feels "as if [he] had at last been offered that research post with [his] old professor" (124). In order to prove that he is correct in his diagnosis, Joe frantically tries to incite Parry to commit an act of violence and thus demonstrate his dangerous nature. In the course of this process, he begins to resemble Parry in his single-mindedness. Indeed, many critics point out Joe's resemblance to Parry and demonstrate how Joe's rationalist worldview is actually distorted by his own fantasies.⁸

III

I will go on to prove how the validity of the medical report is undermined further by the insertion of Parry's narrative. Chapters 11 and 16 consist entirely of Parry's letter to Joe, and Appendix II is his one-thousandth letter to Joe, in which he expresses his "enduring love." We can deduce that he will go on writing to Joe as long as he lives. His narrative is intelligent enough, and there are no indications whatever of the presence of insanity. For example, when Parry criticizes Joe for his excessive rationalist thinking, he more or less shares this opinion with Clarissa. Parry says to himself, "He [Joe] needs me to set him free from his little cage of reason" (133); likewise, Clarissa complains about Joe's neo-Darwinian ideas, calling them "the new fundamentalism" and "rationalism gone berserk" (70).³⁹

There is another example that serves to blur the borderline between Parry's insanity and the normality of the other characters. Jean Logan, the dead man's bereaved wife, shows a striking similarity to Parry in that she is trapped in a story of her own making. She has found a woman's scarf and food for a picnic inside her husband's car, and is mistakenly convinced that he was having an affair. The difference between Parry and Jean is that only the proof of their judgements is either totally non-existent or derived from misunderstanding. Jean's emotional stability is seriously affected by her grief and jealousy. She is imprisoned in "a narrative that only grief, the dementia of pain, could devise" (123), just as Parry is trapped inside "love's prison of self-reference" (143).⁵⁰

Moreover, Parry's assertion that "he became 'aware' of R's [Joe's] love" (239), as stated in the medical report, is not completely delusional, because Joe himself admits that he "could include him [Parry] in the self-congratulatory warmth" (20), and even feels like touching him comfortably on the shoulder. Is it so strange, then, that Parry should have believed that they fell in love then and there? "The Pathological Extensions of Love," the real medical article which I mentioned earlier, points out the difficulty of diagnosing de Clérambault patients:

The boundary issues are particularly acute in instances where there has been some form of real relationship, however fleeting, between the individual and the object of affection. That the feelings were intentionally encouraged at some stage and even reciprocated makes it difficult subsequently to designate the love as pathological. One solution is to exclude such cases from consideration, but in so doing we believe occasional dramatic examples of pathology will be missed. (621)

³⁹ Greenberg argues that "Parry's critique of Joe's neo-Darwinism, then, overlaps with the implicit critique rendered through the narrative voice" (104).
⁵⁰ Though not in relation to Parry's condition, Clarke and Gordon also note that the episode about Jean's misconception provides a clue to the understanding of the novel (47-48).

⁸ For detailed discussion, see Matthews 91-106.
This is exactly the case in Parry’s situation. Needless to say, any information on Joe’s private thoughts is excluded from the medical report, and Joe most probably did not admit to the authorities that he had harboured such feelings. As a result, Parry’s claim that he felt Joe’s love for him has been dismissed as pure delusion.

Moreover, according to the medical report, “a full psychiatric report” shows that “there was no disorder of form of thought [in Parry] and hallucinations were absent” and that “[there was] no evidence of other schneiderian front-rank symptoms for schizophrenia.” The report also states that “P showed above-average visuospatial abilities, abstraction and concentration” and that “no the Benton test he showed no cognitive impairment” (238). In other words, Parry has been diagnosed as quite normal apart from his delusions. Therefore, the psychiatrists are obliged to return a diagnosis that verges on a conjecture: “The impression formed was of a well-encapsulated delusional system” (238). Parry’s is indeed a border case as discussed by Mullen and Pathé.

Surprisingly, the nosological nature of de Clérambault’s syndrome itself has not been established. In the medical report’s bibliography, McEwan cites a real article from British Journal of Psychiatry: “De Clérambault’s Syndrome--A Nosological Entity?”11 In this report, the real psychiatrists Peter Ellis and Graham Mellsop examine the consistency of de Clérambault’s syndrome and its relationship to other diagnostic labels. They argue that it is difficult to treat de Clérambault’s as an independent disease entity; they support H. E. Lehman’s view that “it would be advisable not to perpetuate the existence of this questionable syndrome in the literature” (qtd. in Ellis and Mellsop 90). The fictitious medical report in Enduring Love is presented as a counterargument to this view; it states that “[Parry’s] case adds to recent literature supporting the view that the syndrome is a nosological entity” (233). Of course we know it does not, because Parry’s “case” is sheer fiction. The nosological entity of the syndrome might have been established academically by now; nevertheless, we should note that de Clérambault’s syndrome is not such a well-established disease entity as Enduring Love critics have unquestioningly assumed it to be.

IV

I do not intend to declare that Parry has no mental problems, but I think it is necessary to consider more closely what exactly is wrong with him, instead of simply dismissing him as a psychotic. Of course, we find his unshakable belief eerie; no matter how strongly and repeatedly Joe insists that he does not love him, Parry does not believe it. However, doesn’t the same thing happen to some extent to us “normal” people? Even Joe himself admits that human beings cannot escape wilfulness in their beliefs. Finding that the three witnesses of the restaurant shooting, including himself, do not agree about even simple facts, such as the flavour of the sorbet or ice cream they were eating or about to eat, he feels dejected and says to himself:

Pitless objectivity, especially about ourselves, was always a doomed social strategy. . . . Over generations success had winnowed us out, and with success came our defect, carved deep in the genes like ruts in a cart track—when it didn’t suit us we couldn’t agree on what was in front of us. Believing is seeing. That’s why there are divorces, border disputes and wars, and why this statue of the Virgin Mary weeps blood and that one of Ganesh drinks milk. (180-81)

Moreover, Joe acknowledges that Parry’s letters are full of such sincere feelings that they almost make Joe feel obliged to react accordingly:

It wasn’t that she [Clarissa] believed Parry, I told myself, it was that his letter was so steamily self-convincing, such an unfaked narrative of emotion—for he obviously had experienced the feelings he described—that it was bound to elicit certain appropriate automatic responses. . . . There were deep emotional reactions that ducked the censure of the higher reasoning processes and forced us to enact, however vestigially, our roles—me, the indignant secret lover revealed; Clarissa the woman cruelly betrayed. (101)

Then, what is it that makes us feel that something is terribly wrong with Parry? It is probably the fact that he never properly registers, let alone responds to, the things that happen to him and to those around him. Neither of the tragic shooting incidents changes his ideas or attitudes in the least; his one-thousandth letter to Joe never
refers to them, as if they had not taken place. The letter, instead, is full of euphoric joy; he is convinced that his love for Joe will soon be rewarded. Most likely he will go on writing to Joe in this same vein until he dies. If his thinking were to be affected at all, it would not be due to external circumstances but to his own groundless fantasies. He will never look back on the events of the past and examine the rights and wrongs of his own deeds. In other words, Parry’s narrative will never contain a “narrating self.” It is in this that Parry differs completely from other people, such as Joe, who are able to look back on the things they did and examine whether they were right or wrong.

Contrary to Parry, Joe as a narrating self shows himself capable of “retrospection, evaluation and the drawing of moral conclusions”; he is able to look at past events from another person’s point of view. Chapter 9 provides a typical example, which begins as follows: “It would make more sense of Clarissa’s return to tell it from her point of view. Or at least, from that point as I later construed it” (79). These opening sentences serve as a frame narrative, and the rest of the chapter is a third-person narrative that uses present-tense verbs with Clarissa as a reflector. The narrating Joe makes Clarissa say to herself, “Like her [Clarissa], he [Joe] reached the senseless core of Logan’s tragedy, but he has reached it unaware” (83). We can see that the narrating Joe possesses a deeper understanding of the situation and himself; the content of his account is fairly consistent with that of Clarissa’s letter in Chapter 23, which accuses him of having an excessive obsession with Parry.

As has been made clear by the analysis in Section I, we now know that Joe has not completely overcome his traumatic experience, nor does he seem to have come to fully accept Clarissa’s view of the Parry affair. But he is now wise and mature enough to put himself in her frame of mind at the time of the event. This self-examination and the use of moral imagination are undoubtedly what have enabled him to overcome the estrangement and make his love for Clarissa “endure.”

Psychologist Mark Freeman has this to say about autobiography:

It’s not stretching things to say that, in a distinct sense, the narrated life is the examined life, where one steps out from the flow of things and seeks to become more conscious of one’s existence. Along these lines, autobiographical narratives are . . . about how to live and whether the life is a good one.

(127, italics original)

The act of narrating one’s own life involves self-examination, a task that is vitally important in our quest to live a good life. When we consider Parry’s problem, there is not much meaning in asking what kind of biological defects or brain malfunctions has caused it. We consider ourselves to be mentally normal and quite different from Parry, but the moment we give up our “narrating selves,” we, too, might become trapped in a prison of wilful self-righteousness.

We also need to recall my argument in Section II, which examined the way in which Joe abused narrative as a means of avoiding guilt. Clearly, Enduring Love illustrates the need for us to continue with our own self-examination as long as we live. Once we become satisfied with one particular type of narrative, we end up incarcerating ourselves in a prison of self-righteousness, as Parry did, or else losing our bearings completely regarding how we should live, as Joe almost did.

Before going on to the final section of this paper, I would like to remark on the unreliability of Joe’s narrative. As I stated in the Introduction, this aspect of the novel has received considerable critical attention. Indeed, the maturity displayed in Chapter 9 is clearly at odds with the unreliability of the narrative in the subsequent chapters. For example, in describing the restaurant shooting, Joe says, “The flavour of my sorbet was lime, just to the green side of white. I already had a spoon in my hand but I hadn’t used it” (171). But then, later, he asserts to a police officer that the flavour of the “ice cream” was “[a]pple,” and that he “remember[s] eating a couple of spoonfuls” (180-81). This type of narrative confusion has indeed puzzled critics; Adam Mars-Jones, for example, complains concerning the flavour issue and says, “To introduce at this late stage an unreliable narrator is perverse.”

I believe that this type of unreliability is due to a sudden shift from the narrating Joe mode to the experiencing Joe mode. After Chapter 9, present-tense verbs disappear from Joe’s narrative, and his thoughts and feelings are almost entirely situated in the time and place of the story world. This implies that he has changed from “the narrating self” to “the experiencing self.” Of course, this explana-
tion is not enough, because we still cannot help but wonder why the narrating Joe is silent regarding the apparent contradiction in the experiencing Joe's narrative; it is as if the narrating Joe has completely disappeared from the scene. This lack of consistency is probably the reason that *Enduring Love* gives the reader an impression of ambiguity and elusiveness—this is intriguing, for sure, but at the same time, it undermines the force of the novel.

V

Finally, I would like to return to the issue of the thematic dichotomy of reason/emotion. I hope by now it is clear that Clarissa's intuitive understanding should be given more credit than it has up until now. After the shooting, she states in her letter to Joe: "perhaps you put my life in jeopardy—by drawing Parry in, by overreacting all along the way, by guessing his every next move as if you were pushing him towards it" (218). She also writes:

> It was quite clear from the things you were saying then that you were very troubled by the thought that it might have been you who let go of the rope first. It was obvious you needed to confront that idea, dismiss it, make your peace with it—whatever. I thought we would be talking about it again. I thought I could help you. . . . Isn't it possible that Parry presented you with an escape from your guilt? You seemed to be carrying your agitation over into this situation, running from your anxieties with your hands over your ears. . . . (217)

The main reason that Clarissa's view has tended to be dismissed is that the medical report supports Joe's view of Parry, not hers. But we know now that the report does not reflect the reality of the situation. As Randall points out, McEwan makes Joe describe how, in the process of forming public narratives, people simply dismiss private narratives that do not fit into their narrative mould (61). For example, Joe calls the police in order to complain about Parry's talking behaviours, but the responding officers just move dispassionately through "the interrogative flow chart":

> "Are you the person being harassed?"
> "Yes, I've been . . . ."
> "And is the person causing the nuisance with you now?"

> "He's standing outside my place this very minute."
> "Has he inflicted any physical harm on you?"
> "No, but he. . . ."
> "Has he threatened you with harm?"
> "No." I understood that my grievance would have to be poured into the available bureaucratic mould. There was no facility refined enough to process every private narrative. (73)

Other types of public narratives, such as journalistic narratives, are fundamentally the same as bureaucratic narratives. For instance, in describing the shooting incident at the restaurant, the media employs clichéd language, such as "restaurant outrage," "lunchtime nightmare," and "bloodbath." Looking at these descriptions, Joe feels that "[i]t was as if the subject had been mapped out long ago, and the event we had witnessed had been staged to give point to the writing" (175). Like the above-mentioned police officer, the media also forces Joe's experience into a public narrative mould.

The authoritative tone of the medical report at the end of the novel makes us feel as if we were relieved of the burden of determining which story to believe, Joe's or Clarissa's. It also encourages us to dismiss Parry simply as a psychotic. However, as my analysis has clarified, the report does not guarantee us the objective "truth." It is meaningful that the novel is not concluded with the medical report (Appendix I) but with Parry's letter to Joe (Appendix II). The medical report does not have the final say, not only figuratively but also literally.

It is true we feel inclined to take the report at its face value, but isn't it because we possess the desire, like Joe, to rid ourselves of uncertainty as to the meaning of the story and to feel assured of the "truth" on the authority of the medical narrative? That is probably the very thing against which McEwan wants to warn us. Just as the novel demands that Joe engage in his endless process of "retrospection, evaluation and the drawing of moral conclusions" and continue with his "story," it also tells us that we readers should retain our own "narrating selves" and "endure" the uncertainty regarding the meaning of our respective life "stories." In the book's opening sentence, Joe says, "The beginning is simple to mark." That might be so; but the story has not ended yet, not for Joe and not for us readers.
Works Cited


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