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## BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE: EXPERTISE AND PROFESSIONALISM IN BRITISH AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

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BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE:  
EXPERTISE AND PROFESSIONALISM  
IN BRITISH AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Patrick Steven Herald

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Peter Kalliney, Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

2017

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE: EXPERTISE AND PROFESSIONALISM IN BRITISH AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

The social sciences have developed robust bodies of scholarship on expertise and professionalism, yet literary analyses of the two remain comparatively sparse. I address this gap in *Boundaries of Knowledge* by examining recent Anglophone fiction and showing that expertise and professionalism are central concerns of contemporary authors, both as subject matter in fiction and in their public identities. I argue that the novelists studied use and abuse expertise and professionalism: they critique professions as participant observers, and also borrow the mantle of expert credibility to bolster their own cultural capital while documenting the pitfalls of expertise in their fiction.

My first chapter shows how acquired technical knowledge and professionalism are the central concerns of Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. In the novel, Henry Perowne's professionalism is the site from which various ethical and political debates radiate. Perowne—depicted as a rather heroic expert in comparison to the other novels studied in the dissertation—is disturbed by a total outsider in the form of Baxter, a man with no prospects or future, professional or otherwise. McEwan aligns himself more closely with Perowne: in part through extensive research for *Saturday*, he has developed a reputation as a public figure who straddles the “two cultures” of the sciences and humanities, a reputation that exists in a synergistic relationship with his particular brand of realist fiction, which emphasizes hard work and professional credibility.

Next, I demonstrate how Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* reveals a deep suspicion of academia, which in the novel serves to cut disciplinary experts off both from the world outside campus and from an appreciation of the subjects they study. Smith's academic professionals are well-intentioned but unable to look beyond field-specific boundaries to appreciate their objects of study (and unintentionally harm outsiders along the way). Larger issues such as race are always present but at the margins of the interpersonal drama that plays out between the novel's numerous characters. I read Smith herself as reluctantly accepting academic life, teaching at New York University while maintaining a qualified distance from American academia in articles and interviews.

Chapters one and two are broadly about the advantages and drawbacks of expert

knowledge, respectively. In my third chapter, Abdulrazak Gurnah offers the most circumspect view of experts yet with a fear of a “summarizing” expert or colonizer of knowledge that is only resolved by the arrival of a more authentic Zanzibari expert. In an analysis of Gurnah’s *By the Sea*, I show how professional networks--the United Kingdom’s immigration and refugee system, the colonial education system in Zanzibar, and the professoriate--raise questions about who is entitled to and capable of narrating people’s lives. These questions dovetail both with the novel’s shifting narrative form and with the concerns of Gurnah’s own work as a scholar of literature.

Beginning with McEwan and ending with Gurnah, *Boundaries of Knowledge* travels from the most socially and economically secure, elite experts to those left behind by contemporary professionalism. My title reflects this troubled landscape of expert knowledge and professionalism: who knows what, the benefits and drawbacks of the accompanying cultural capital, and the barriers between various fields, sets of knowledge, and finally people.

**KEYWORDS:** expertise, professionalism, British literature, postcolonial literature, contemporary literature, knowledge

Patrick Herald

June 26, 2017

BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE:  
EXPERTISE AND PROFESSIONALISM  
IN BRITISH AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

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been and remains a highly useful venue for developing my ideas and engaging with those of others. I would also like to thank the organizers and attendees of the Northeast Modern Language Association and the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association conferences for their engaging discussions of my ideas.

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## Introduction

Leading up to the historic 2016 referendum in which the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, Justice Secretary Michael Gove was confronted by a list of organizations, economists, and public leaders, like the head of the NHS, who supported remaining. Gove, a leader of the Leave campaign, responded by saying: “this country has had enough of experts” (Mance). While Gove’s statement was treated with incredulity by the interviewer, the sentiment is not unfamiliar. Gove’s argument is a response to a contested confluence of cultural factors that elevate and tear down experts in Britain and beyond. Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, experts—and the professions that train and maintain them—have been omnipresent in the United Kingdom, the British Empire, and later postcolonial states. The rise of professions and specialized disciplines since the early twentieth century has led to a world in which daily life is shaped by various forms of expert knowledge, from the vehicles we drive to the traffic signal systems which direct us, and from the increasingly smaller electronic devices used for communication, business, and research to the massive online systems the transmitted information passes through; as historian Harold Perkin puts it in the opening line of his book on modern professional elites, the “modern world is the world of the professional expert” (Perkin, *The Third Revolution* 1). This dissertation tells the story of the intersections between expertise, professionalism, and contemporary British and postcolonial literature.

I want to make the case that, given that we live in a world substantially shaped by expertise and professionalism, examining its role in cultural output is an important task. How do authors write about and interact with these topics? How does it shape their work

and identities, and how do they deploy them for their own purposes? The social sciences have developed robust bodies of scholarship on expertise and professionalism, yet literary analyses of the two remain comparatively sparse. I address this gap in *Boundaries of Knowledge* by examining recent Anglophone fiction—with Ian McEwan, Zadie Smith, and Abdulrazak Gurnah as case studies—and showing that expertise and professionalism are central concerns of contemporary authors, both as subject matter in fiction and in their public identities. I argue that the novelists studied use and abuse expertise and professionalism, each in unique ways: they critique professions as participant observers, and borrow the mantle of expert credibility to bolster their own cultural capital while documenting the pitfalls of expertise in their fiction.

### **Theoretical background and literary examples**

John Marx sets a strong precedent for examining expertise in British literature in *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* (2005), arguing that the cosmopolitan expertise of modernist writers “abjured the Victorian fantasy of a planet divided into core and periphery, home and colony” and instead was deployed to describe and analyze a “new dream of a decentred network of places and peoples” (1). Marx usefully lays out how this globalizing project made way for the spread of English language and literature throughout the world even as the British Empire moved into decline and eventual dissolution. Modernist writing, then, functioned much like the “disembedding mechanisms” laid out by Anthony Giddens. For Giddens, disembedding mechanisms perform a “‘lifting out’ of social relations from local context of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space,” maintaining a sort of dialectical

relationship with everyday life (21).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Marx identifies both the worldwide project of modernist writing as well as how individual writers drew on the discourse of professionalization and expertise to enhance their personal opportunities and global reputations, like Joseph Conrad, who continually used “the trope of suffering to provide evidence of the specialized labour that went into his writing,” (54). Likewise, Conrad’s contemporary, the great sociologist Max Weber, saw specialization in terms of the opportunity to do great work, arguing that passion and total devotion to a subject is necessary to complete significant work in a field (“Science as a Vocation” 7-8). Recent scholarship allows readers to trace an increasing codification of professionalism in the literary field from throughout the twentieth century to the present. Peter Kalliney describes how modernist institutions, at least in some situations, “encouraged writers to think of themselves as literary professionals first and foremost” (*Commonwealth of Letters* 9). And Mark McGurl shows how the creation and spread of graduate programs in creative writing in the United States institutionalized the modernist “make it new” imperative “as another form of original research” in the context of the Cold War university (4). McGurl goes on to mark the increasing connection between literary production and postsecondary teaching in the years since as “about as close to a genuine literary historical novelty as one could hope to see” (21).

Despite the useful work of scholars like John Marx, Lawrence Rainey, Lisa Fluett, and others, though, neither expertise nor professionalism have been as widely examined

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Virilio also covers this subject intriguingly, writing that “reconciliation of nothingness and reality, the annihilation of time and space by high speeds substitutes the vastness of emptiness for that of the exoticism of travel” comes to be seen as “the supreme goal of technique” (Virilio 109).

in literary studies as in many other fields.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most substantial treatment of expertise and professionalism this dissertation follows is Fluet’s own unpublished dissertation, *Vast Expertise: Professionalism and Displacement in Twentieth-century Culture* (2003). Like John Marx, Fluet recognizes a “decentred network of places and people,” but approaches it from a different angle: affect. Fluet emphasizes “displaced professional characters in twentieth-century culture,” writing that her “concern has primarily been narrative attempts to imagine the extension of professional ethics and expertise beyond the communities traditionally designed to house it” (*Vast Expertise* iii, 15). Ultimately, Fluet argues that “attempts to stretch modern professionalism over ‘vast’ spheres of influence reveal underexamined forms of professional affect—self-loathing, sentimentality, defensiveness, lonely uncertainty—that anticipate certain ‘compromised’ modern formulations of collectivity” (16). Fluet’s use of “characters” emphasizes—though not exclusively—literary works themselves, rather than focusing on institutional frameworks surrounding authors, as many other scholars have. *Boundaries of Knowledge* approaches the topic from a similarly-aligned position: I examine the literary output of authors in detail while also turning to the public personas fostered both by the authors themselves and the institutional forces—such as universities and the publishing industry—that surround them. This dual approach is symbiotic; part of this project’s argument is that literary texts and public authorial lives are mutually supportive forces of cultural capital, a form of capital that may be embodied in heritage, institutionalized in

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<sup>2</sup> For examples, see: Marx, *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* (2005); Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (1998); Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (1993) and *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (2007).

educational attainment, or granted socially, then in some instances may be converted to economic capital (Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital 243-4).

To set the stage for my engagement with expertise and professionalism in literature, I offer a couple of brief examples from early twentieth century drama, which serve as a case study of how a literary medium with a high degree of both cultural and economic capital interacts with expertise and professionalism as subject matter.<sup>3</sup> One of the more intriguing depictions of expertise is the character of Straker in Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman* (1903). Straker, a chauffeur and auto mechanic, clearly has an abundance of technical knowledge, and other characters rely on him as a mediator for the new technology. Straker’s abilities take us beyond the merely technical, though. For one, the car is used specifically for social activities in the play; Straker thus enables wealthy characters to maintain their status in a way they couldn’t without him. Straker is working class, “but this chap has been educated,” as Tanner says (88). Straker notes that while they teach one to be a gentleman at Oxford, they teach something more useful at the Polytechnic. His engineering knowledge makes Straker’s business “to do away with labor”: “you’ll get more out of me and a machine than you will out of twenty laborers,” he says (88-89). These remarks, prefiguring John Maynard Keynes’s thoughts on the ideal role of technology as a labor-reducing force, marks Straker out as not just technically adept, but a more concrete thinker as well: a “scientific” socialist rather than the merely “poetic” one embodied by Octavius (89).<sup>4</sup> Straker is the “New Man,”

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<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu places theatre, by the end of the nineteenth century, economically “at the summit” of the literary field: a useful place, I think, to look for trends that may affect the direction of the economically ascendant novel (*Rules of Art* 114).

<sup>4</sup> Keynes predicted in a 1930 paper that “technological unemployment” was a “temporary phase of maladjustment” likely give way to a 15-hour working week (3, 5).

according to Tanner: a scientific expert whose technical knowledge, far from obscuring or supplanting humanistic thought, instead enhances it. Straker also shows remarkable understanding of people: he knows what the other characters have difficulty realizing, that Ann is in love with Tanner, from only cursory observation. When Ann swoons later in the play, Straker is the one who takes charge, clearing the air so she can breathe easier. Straker's expertise is polyvalent: technical, theoretical, and interpersonal.

Ten years later however, in *Pygmalion*, Shaw offers a view of quite a different sort of expertise, in the character of Higgins the linguist. Our first view of him is as a note taker identifying the origins of various speakers by their accents. Interestingly, he sometimes uses this ability to police class boundaries, remarking that the newly wealthy "give themselves away every time they open their mouths" (24). His rudeness prefigures the first description of him as a named character at the start of act II: "He is of the energetic, scientific type, heartily, even violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject, and careless about himself and other people, including their feelings" (30). What separates Higgins from Straker here, I argue, is that Higgins embraces scientific categorization to such an extent that its subjects become entirely separated from one another, with no room for guiding ethical or moral commitments. His interest in people ends with experimentation, as is the case when he endeavors to move Eliza up the social ladder through speech tutoring: not to help her financially, but simply to prove a point.

With Straker and Higgins, Shaw reinforces opposing poles of expertise in cultural depictions that will reverberate throughout the rest of the century. Whereas Straker's expertise seems to enhance his social interactions and engagement with the wider world,



Higgins is unable to see beyond the bounds of his scientific knowledge. These forms of expertise go on to become tropes in the intellectual debates over expertise in the following decades: a professionalized form of expertise (Straker) that represents mastery beyond the technical that may extend into society, culture, and politics on the one hand, and a selfish, dangerously narrow form of expertise (Higgins) that hardens the boundaries between different forms of knowledge, closing experts off from the wider world and even the potential harm their work might bring about. Each of these representative forms of expertise plays a role in the debates over science, technological advancement, and societal organization from the early twentieth century to the present. As we will see, even contemporary novels are influenced by these tropes.

Intellectual debates over expertise and the developing professions had intensified by midcentury. In *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Richard Hoggart lays out a stark division between the “technical languages of the experts” versus mass communication (xli). Experts are often lumped into the impersonal “Them,” a “composite dramatic figure” set against the working-class “Us” (Hoggart 48). The experts, in the formulation reported by Hoggart, defy the interpersonal and familiar knowledge of the working class. The implication here has much to do with knowledge: what “we” know about each other as opposed to what “they” know about the often arcane subject of their expertise. A major facet of Hoggart’s argument is that this results in mass culture overtaking the public sphere, a claim rather in line with Jürgen Habermas’s more wide-ranging *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). In that book, Habermas famously argues that “the process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibrium of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies, special-interest associations, parties, and

public administration. The public as such is included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then it is brought in only to contribute its acclamation” (*Structural Transformation* 176). The attitude of mass society described by Hoggart is a symptom of the disenfranchisement laid out here by Habermas. It is important to realize, though, that expertise is a necessary component of this equation: “the public is split apart into minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical” (Habermas, *Structural Transformation* 175). To some degree, Habermas’s account of specialists is echoed by Pierre Bourdieu, whose invocation of fields as established and maintained by a “specific logic . . . in the form of a specific habitus, or, more precisely, a sense of the game” (*Pascalian* 11). Unlike the earlier Straker, *Pygmalion*’s Higgins is aligned with a closed-off variant of this view of expertise: in possession of technical knowledge in a specific field, but lacking in ethical or emotional capacity, uninterested in public correspondence or collaboration.

Intriguingly, the mid-century distrust of expertise laid out by Hoggart accompanied a historic rise in what we now know as the “service sector,” a trend that continued for the rest of the twentieth century and has gone on to cement professionalism and expertise as central to twenty-first century life. Daniel Bell’s *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) details the rapid change from “a goods-producing to a service economy” underway in the United States (14). Service, as Bell identifies in the U.S. and forecasts for the coming decades in Europe, is expanding in “health, education, research, and government”: “the expansion of a new intelligentsia—in the universities, research organizations, professions, and government” (15). This new class of intellectual, service-

oriented professional is perhaps most well-known by way of Barbara and John Ehrenreich's Marxist-inflected concept of the "professional managerial class," or PMC: "salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations" (12).<sup>5</sup> The rise of this new class was not a short transition; indeed, I see it as ongoing, and a point to which we might return to explain currently evolving professions. For example, in their book *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload* (2010), journalists Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel argue that, in order to be viable, journalism must in the future "develop more expertise," participating in an "era of specialization [that] has already begun. In an age when the press is no longer a monopoly it must earn its authority by providing knowledge" (186). While the idea that the era of specialization has already begun is quite the understatement, it is clear that Kovach and Rosenstiel are responding to a newly uncertain world for journalism: the rapid decline of printed news publications and their replacement with online mediums in the twenty-first century means that journalists must, in Kovach and Rosenstiel's formulation, demonstrate their expertise in order to maintain credibility in the eyes of publics in need of their services.

Kovach and Rosenstiel are really responding, I think, to the historical reverberation of the PMC: the dominance of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call "immaterial labor."<sup>6</sup> The demonstration of expertise Kovach and Rosenstiel lay out takes the form of producing and disseminating knowledge, backed by training and professional

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<sup>5</sup> Despite being lumped together into "services," the "new intelligentsia" Bell describes, like the PMC, stands in opposition to the service work traditionally occupied by the working class: "blue collar" jobs like cleaners, maintenance workers, and so on, due to the extensive training/education required for entry.

<sup>6</sup> See *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Penguin Books 2004, 108-115.

development that would make journalists' credibility apparent to readers. Far from being exempt from the rise of professionalism, the literary professoriate, too, has been heavily influenced by it: "the adjustment of critical practice to new socioinstitutional conditions of literary pedagogy is registered symptomatically within theory by its tendency to model the intellectual work of the theorist on the new social form of intellectual work, the technobureaucratic labor of the new professional-managerial class" (Guillory, *Cultural Capital* 181). The rise of theory in literary criticism in the second half of the twentieth century, then, can be seen as the legitimation of the English professoriate as professional knowledge workers, comparable to their peers throughout the PMC. To gather these threads into a more cohesive definition of expertise and professionalism as I use it in this dissertation, I turn to crucial work in sociology.

In *The System of Professions* (1988), Andrew Abbott "aims to show the professions growing, splitting, joining, adapting, dying" (xiii). I find Abbott's study of the professions particularly useful because he blends the concepts of professionalism and expertise more fluidly than most writers working on the area, and does so in a way that analyzes them historically and as part of a system, one that evolves through professional and expert claims to jurisdiction. This is not to say that Abbott confuses the terms of professionalism and expertise; rather, he acknowledges them as interdependent. As he puts it, the "*tasks of professions are human problems amenable to expert service. . . . The degree of resort to experts varies from problem to problem, from society to society, and from time to time*" (35, my emphasis). Abbott's framework recalls Kovach and Rosentiel's prescription for the field of journalism mentioned above. It also allows for both cultural fluidity and fluidity between expertise and professionalism; all professions

are concerned with expertise in a targeted manner, yet not all experts are necessarily ensconced in a profession (the latter might be self-taught, for example, and may transmit knowledge informally or not at all). For Abbott, then, professionalism is the formalized mechanism by which experts apply and transmit knowledge.

In an article building on Abbott's system of professions, sociologist Gil Eyal makes the case for complementary sociologies of expertise and professionalism, respectively (868). Eyal argues that expertise has a wider scope than professionalism and also allows a contrast to be drawn between experts—"actors who make claims . . . by 'professing'"—and expertise, the capacity to collectively accomplish tasks "better and faster" (869). Bruce Robbins stresses the possibility of collective work as a trait of professionalism itself: "cooperation in a common effort which ensures collective efficiency. Someone will have just the right skill for any contingency, any weakness in one will be compensated by another" (*Secular Vocations* 30). It is clear that Robbins is describing cooperation *between* professions, however: that multiple professionals of varying disciplines or specializations might indeed create the networked field of expertise Eyal stresses.<sup>7</sup> Robbins convincingly argues for a view of professionalism that sees disciplines as "never as isolated, specialized, autonomous or private as they think or fear they are" (*Secular Vocations* 21). Eyal's and Robbins's accounts, then, widen the scope of thinking about expertise and professionalism as socially useful without invalidating the

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<sup>7</sup> Despite the distinctions Eyal draws between his work on expertise and Abbott's on professionalism, the two bear many similarities. "If we follow the event of expert statement of performance to the conditions and mechanisms involved in its formulation, replication, and dissemination," Eyal writes, "we end up with a view of expertise neither as an attribution nor as a substantive skill but as a network connecting together not only the putative experts but also other actors, including clients and patients, devices and instruments, concepts, and institutional and spatial arrangements" (872-3). The main distinction is Eyal's acknowledgement of Abbott's concept of jurisdiction alongside a simultaneous argument for the importance of the network of expertise as potentially divisive and stultifying—but, crucially, potentially unifying.

concerns about barriers of knowledge laid out by Habermas, Hoggart, and others. With Eyal's qualification in mind, Abbott's theory of professional jurisdiction remains a particularly useful concept for examining the professional side of expertise, as I do in Chapter 2.

It is important to make clear, however, that *Boundaries of Knowledge* is not an attempt to establish the definitive account of expertise nor professionalism. The use of both terms—rather than focusing exclusively on expertise or professionalism—is deliberate. I see expertise and professionalism as feeding into each other, influencing each other, and both as important related factors in the literature this dissertation analyzes. To clarify this point, let me return once more to Gil Eyal, and specifically to the contrasts he draws between the sociology of professions and the sociology of expertise: “the main point is not to demonstrate the superiority of one approach over the other but to argue for their complementarity, namely, that only by combining the analysis of how networks of expertise are assembled with jurisdictional analysis can we conduct a history of tasks and problems” (868-9). I take the complementarity of Eyal's approach perhaps a step beyond what he would advocate; I offer the above accounts, from Perkin to Eyal himself, as a broad intellectual landscape, one I see as reflecting—and building—a set of reactions to the ascendance of expertise and professionalism from throughout the twentieth century to the present. As a work of literary and cultural criticism, *Boundaries of Knowledge* does not create a new definition of these terms; in this case, I see that as crucial, because there is a definitional looseness based on the writer engaging with, say, expertise in his or her fiction. To be clear, I am not attempting to use expertise and professionalism as an interpretive lens over the literature I analyze in *Boundaries of*

*Knowledge*, but closer to the inverse: to examine how modern authors deploy expertise and professionalism to their own ends, both in literary texts and in their public personas. Indeed, expertise, linked to professions, is now culturally ubiquitous in addition to its omnipresence in the world of work.

### **Historical context: postcolonial decline, Thatcher, and today**

There are compelling historical reasons to examine expertise and professionalism in a British context, specifically in terms of the collapse of the British Empire after World War II. Perkin makes the case that Britain “led the way” in Europe, and perhaps the post-war world, in “most of the major trends of professional society:”

in the rise of living standards until the mid-1960s, the swing to services, the rise of professional hierarchies in both public and private sectors, a modest degree of meritocracy with more upward mobility from the working class than in most countries west of the Iron Curtain, the legal emancipation of women, the growth of government and the welfare state, the opening of higher education to a wider section of the population, the concentration of business in large corporations, and a long-standing involvement in the global economy. (*Third Revolution* 49)

Whether or not the United Kingdom truly “led the way” in most of these areas can be quibbled with, but Perkin goes on to extensively document how these trends did indeed reshape life in Britain throughout the twentieth century. Intriguingly, many of these changes occurred alongside the dissolution of the British Empire, which was a catastrophic blow to Britain’s status as a world superpower. In *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (2016), Erik Linstrum offers an impressive account of how expertise and professional management adapted imperial power to professional life in the postwar and even postcolonial period. “British experts,” Linstrum writes, “discovered that experience of empire conferred intellectual authority even as imperial power was

waning. They succeeded in translating imperial theories about trauma, the family, and the unconscious mind into a central assumption of technocratic planning: that modernization required the mastery of psychological forces” (190). We know that imperial forces made appeals to psychological expertise (and specifically “ethnopsychiatry”) to maintain and defend its foothold in colonized places (Elkins 106-7). Linstrum’s point is that British experts parlayed this experience into evidence of transnational managerial expertise (Linstrum 190).

Linstrum is not alone in identifying a strong connection between British expertise, the end of empire, and its aftermath. Joseph Morgan Hodge convincingly argues that this period of time marks the ascendance of technical expertise: “late British colonial imperialism *was* an imperialism of science and knowledge, under which academic and scientific experts rose to positions of unparalleled triumph and authority” (11, emphasis in original). Alongside the deployment of the welfare state in post-war Britain, in the colonies state bureaucracy joined with expertise in an attempt to “develop the natural and human resources of the empire and manage the perceived problems and disorder generated by colonial rule (Hodge 8). Like Linstrum, Hodge emphasizes the enduring legacy of expertise and empire, despite the broad failures of colonial development initiatives. A “heavy bias in favor of state-centered ideologies and development structures” that continued after the transfer of power from Britain to colonial states paralleled a “depoliticization of poverty and power achieved by recasting social and economic problems as technical ones that could be fixed by rational planning and expert knowledge” (Hodge 19). The ideological foothold and professional credibility these colonial experts developed thus gave way to a technocratic “vision of development” that



would go on to serve as the foundation for international development initiatives and the post-war network of aid organizations (Hodge 19). While Hodge focuses on late colonial development schemes, this project is more concerned with what he and Linstrum gesture toward in their respective books: the status of expertise and professionalism after empire and the “triumph of the expert” (as Hodge refers to it in the title of his book). Timothy Mitchell, whose work plays a crucial role in the first chapter of this dissertation, argues that technical expertise held political centrality “from the opening of the twentieth century to its close” (15). Throughout the century, Mitchell writes, “the politics of national development and economic growth was a politics of techno-science, which claimed to bring the expertise of modern engineering, technology, and social science to improve the defects of nature, to transform peasant agriculture, to repair the ills of society, and to fix the economy” (15). I find Mitchell’s more philosophical methodology highly valuable, as Chapter 1 demonstrates, but in this case it lacks the historical specificity Hodge and Linstrum bring to bear. Part of what I see *Boundaries of Knowledge* as undertaking is to extend this important work by examining cultural output that is not only after empire, but after the rise of a more circumspect view of expertise that has its roots in the time of the Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan governments, frequently identified as a starting point for “neoliberalism.”<sup>8</sup>

In the late 1950s through the early 1960s, with decolonization well underway and the humiliation of the Suez Canal crisis still in recent memory, two British figures

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<sup>8</sup> Neoliberalism is a contested, shifting concept, but it is commonly considered to have risen out of the supplanting of the state-interventionist economic policies of John Maynard Keynes by the more market-driven ones favored by figures such as Milton Friedman, as well as an impetus to financialize as many aspects of society and culture as possible. For a particularly useful overview, I recommend David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005).

attempted to harness the spirit of the moment and encourage an age of professional and technical collaboration. One is C.P. Snow, whose 1959 lecture “The Two Cultures,” titularly refers to the sciences and the humanities. Snow, both a scientist and novelist, sees a “gulf of mutual incomprehension” between the two worlds as stymying intellectual progress (4). He goes on to chide literary professionals for dismissing scientists as “ignorant specialists” while ignoring their own “startling” ignorance and specialization (15). Snow’s larger point is to advocate for British educational reform, both to educate more people and to reduce what he sees as harmful specialization (20-1). Four years later, with Snow’s lecture having been printed and reprinted many times over, Harold Wilson gave a speech as head of the Labour Party aimed at yoking socialism to science. Wilson takes a different tack than Snow’s combativeness toward specialization: instead, he welcomes it in the context of socialized mass production, and in a manner reminiscent of the expert colonials identified by Linstrum and Hodge: “only if technological planning becomes part of our national planning can that progress be directed to national ends” (Wilson 2). Wilson’s remarks are notable for a number of reasons: the recognition of the labor challenges posed by increasingly automated production, anxiety over rising American power against waning British influence, the call for development processes in impoverished areas of Asia and Africa, and for our purposes, the call for a nationwide growth of technical expertise as a potential solution for all of the above. Only a Britain “forged in the white heat” of scientific revolution, bringing to bear this revolution on a socialized labor system, will be capable of maintaining a privileged place—through democratic means—on the world stage (Wilson 7).

Neither Wilson's vision, nor arguably Snow's, was realized. As Wilson's remarks in particular suggest, "the political success of mainstream postwar governments presupposed first the benefits and future expectations of economic growth and . . . competitiveness, and second a national geopolitical identity and position in the international hierarchy of nations" (Krieger 13). When Britain's might waned after 1945 and continued to decline during the economic crises of the 1970s, it made way for an ideological rejection of previously common assumptions, chiefly the value of the welfare state and collectivism. Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979 signaled, at least symbolically, the start of a new era that emphasized a "set of precepts that, whatever the truth of the matter, seemed to indicate a break with what had gone before in their willingness to favour conflict and assertion over consensus and compromise"; these precepts came to be part of what made up what we now know as Thatcherism (Hutchinson 8). Colin Hutchinson usefully implies a connection between this new political era and the mid-century rise of expertise detailed above. Through populist appeals in the wake of the 1970s economic downturn, Hutchinson writes, Thatcherism:

could claim to be attempting to restore economic well-being while responding to libertarian drives for the removal of restraint upon self-gratification. At the same time, however, it could exploit the technological developments and social changes that led to the emergence of those drives in order to strengthen the influence of the capitalist class, and also to make an assault upon the gains made during the postwar period by organized labour, marginalized social groups, and public sector professionals. (25, emphasis in original).

Indeed, as Joel Krieger convincingly asserted even during Thatcher's reign, "it is in the rise and fall of the Keynesian welfare state that one can best trace the origins of Reagan and Thatcher" (22). A line can be drawn between the "libertarian drives" emphasized by Hutchinson and Thatcher's famous proclamation that "there is no such thing" as society,

only “individual men and women and . . . families” (Thatcher). The fragmented view—even wholesale denial—of society by Thatcher answers Snow’s and Wilson’s worries about overly specialized professionals working against the common good rather than collectively bringing their knowledge to bear for society’s benefit. Thatcher represents their worst fears realized.

In the intervening years since Thatcher and today, expertise continues to be under fire, a trend that shows no sign of abatement, as seen in the Michael Gove statement that began this introduction. Indeed, 2016 was a landmark year for populist victory marches and contempt for the elite “Them” that Hoggart reported on more than half a century ago. The unexpected triumph of “Brexit” in the United Kingdom’s 2016 referendum resulted in a great deal of talk about the inability of professional pollsters to gauge the stance of the populace. This event was followed by the election of Donald Trump, behind in polls, as President of the United States, after his prediction of his candidacy as “another Brexit” (Mackey).<sup>9</sup> Supporters and members of both campaigns used these points to hail themselves as triumphant in the face of hostile experts. Most of the texts that I am studying in this dissertation, though, while each author continues to publish, were written and published in the years surrounding the turn of the twenty-first century, a turbulent time that saw the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, including the U.S.-led and British-supported invasion of Iraq in 2003 (both of which loom large and explicitly in *Saturday*). This historical context helps frame the texts produced by McEwan, Smith, and Gurnah

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<sup>9</sup> Despite popular reportage, however, neither Brexit polling ahead of the referendum or election polling in the U.S. election was off base. While referendum polling suggested the close defeat of Brexit for much of the campaign, by two weeks out the prediction had reversed decisively (Hutton). In the U.S. election, national polling accurately reflected the popular vote victory for Hillary Clinton which took place; states polls in the swing states of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania which narrowly granted Trump victory were generally within the margin of error (Newport).

during this period, and readers may differ in their evaluation of the role it plays in their stances toward expertise and professionalism. As this historical survey may suggest, I takes a long view: these authors are responding to—and at times taking advantage of—a history of expertise and professionalism that stretches back for many decades and reflects the experiences of Britain, its empire, and the aftermath during the twentieth century.

### **Scope and chapter summaries**

This study has some limitations which I find it important to address. The first and most obvious is the limited number of authors studied. While I touch on a number of literary authors throughout *Boundaries of Knowledge*, its intensely close analyses of Ian McEwan, Zadie Smith, and Abdulrazak Gurnah bars me both from a more comprehensive survey of recent literature and the sort of literary history which might chart the use of expertise and professionalism by authors over a longer period of time. This sustained close analysis also rules out the possibility of the kind of “distant reading” espoused most notably by Franco Moretti.<sup>10</sup> The other limitation is temporal: the contemporary nature of the texts and authors studied. Each of the three authors examined closely in *Boundaries of Knowledge* is still writing today; there is little doubt in my mind that future studies will come to justifiable conclusions that I am unable to, for two important reasons. First, given that each of these novelists is continuing to publish, it is not possible to examine the entirety of their output: more is forthcoming from them all, presumably. Second, this dissertation’s historical proximity to the texts analyzed means

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<sup>10</sup> See Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013), or his 2000 essay, “Conjectures on World Literature.”

that many full, retrospective histories of the period—both literary histories and otherwise—are unavailable today.

What the scope of this study does help me demonstrate is that expertise and professionalism are recognizable, primary concerns of these notable, contemporary British and world Anglophone literary authors, each of whom engages with the two in differing, intriguing ways—both in and out of their fiction.

Chapter one demonstrates how technical knowledge and professionalism are the central concerns of Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. In the novel, Henry Perowne's professionalism is the site from which various ethical and political debates radiate. I draw on the political theories of Timothy Mitchell and James C. Scott to aid in this analysis, which connects to each of their respective work and to *Saturday* in its examination of expertise and geographical space. Perowne—depicted as a rather heroic expert in comparison to the other novels studied in the dissertation—is disturbed by a total outsider in the form of Baxter, a man with no prospects or future, professional or otherwise. His subsequent evaluation of Baxter, which is in line with his habit of diagnosing pedestrians from his window overlooking Fitzroy Square in London, shows how expertise in *Saturday* relies on a form of simplification and summarizing that is similar to trends laid out by Mitchell and by Scott. I then survey McEwan's numerous interviews, op-eds and other nonfiction writings to take on an analysis of McEwan as author and public figure. In *Saturday*'s case, McEwan aligns himself more closely with Perowne: in part through extensive research for the novel, he has developed a reputation as a public figure who straddles the “two cultures” C.P. Snow found in the sciences and humanities, a reputation

that exists in a synergistic relationship with his particular brand of realist fiction, which emphasizes hard work, research, and professional credibility.

Next, I show how Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* reveals a deep suspicion of academia, which in the novel serves to cut disciplinary experts off both from the world outside campus and from an appreciation of the subjects they study. Smith's novel is the most sociological in scope of those studied in *Boundaries of Knowledge*, and it is no coincidence that this chapter is the most sociologically informed of the dissertation. Here, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of fields and cultural capital work alongside Andrew Abbott's sociology of professions and Stefan Collini's work on intellectuals to buttress my analysis of *On Beauty*. Smith's academic professionals are well-intentioned but unable to look beyond field-specific boundaries to appreciate their objects of study (and they often unintentionally harm outsiders along the way). Larger issues such as race are always present but at the margins of the interpersonal drama that plays out between the novel's numerous characters. I read Smith herself as reluctantly accepting academic life, teaching at New York University while maintaining a qualified distance from American academia in articles and interviews. This final section of the chapter interprets Smith's public persona in light of recent trends in postsecondary education and the professionalization of the creative writing discipline, arguing that Smith positions herself as outside the boundaries of what Mark McGurl calls "the program era."

Chapters one and two are broadly about the advantages and drawbacks of expert knowledge, respectively. In the third chapter, Abdulrazak Gurnah offers the most circumspect view of experts yet with a Zanzibari refugee's fear of a "summarizing" expert—which may call to mind *Saturday*'s Perowne for readers of this dissertation—or

colonizer of knowledge that is only relieved by the arrival of a more authentic Zanzibari expert. In an analysis of Gurnah's *By the Sea*, I show how late and postcolonial professional networks with their roots in the trends identified by Linstrum and Hodge—the United Kingdom's immigration and refugee system, the colonial education system in Zanzibar, and the professoriate—raise questions about who is entitled to and capable of narrating people's lives. Here, I take up the anthropological theory of Aihwa Ong to show how Gurnah's fiction is in tension with Ong's work on what she terms flexible citizenship. I supplement this analysis with a number of postcolonial and literary critics, including Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Felicity Hand. These secondary sources help illuminate two concerns that intertwine with expertise in *By the Sea*: the experience of refugees at the hands of state power and the use of maps as devices that simultaneously close off and open knowledge of the world and its people. These concerns dovetail both with the novel's shifting narrative form and with the specific interests of Gurnah's own work as a scholar of literature from a migrant background. Ultimately, Gurnah's primary concerns as a scholar mirror those of his fiction: the limits—or boundaries—of knowledge.

Beginning with McEwan and ending with Gurnah, *Boundaries of Knowledge* travels from socially and economically secure, elite experts to those left behind by contemporary professionalism. My title reflects this troubled landscape of expert knowledge and professionalism: who knows what, the benefits and drawbacks of the accompanying cultural capital, and the barriers between various fields, sets of knowledge, and finally people.



1. “A Craving for Work”: Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, Professionalism, and Expertise

*But science’s potential as an instrument for identifying the cultural constraints upon it cannot be fully realized until science gives up the twin myths of objectivity and inexorable march toward truth. One must, indeed, locate the beam in one’s own eye before interpreting correctly the pervasive notes in everybody else’s. (Stephen Jay Gould, The Mismeasure of Man 23)*

*The successful researcher frequently is a literate man, he knows many tricks, ideas, ways of speaking, he is familiar with details of history and abstractions of cosmology, he can combine fragments of widely differing points of view and quickly switch from one framework to another. He is not tied to any particular language for he may speak the language of fact and the language of fairytale side by side and mix them in the most unexpected ways. (Paul Feyerabend, Science in a Free Society 200)*

Ian McEwan’s recent novel *The Children Act* (2014) focuses on High Court judge Fiona Maye in the time surrounding a case she judges of a young man attempting to refuse life-saving medical treatment on religious grounds. The novel abounds with coverage of social issues ranging from religious rights to gender equality to, as suggested by the title, the rights of children. In one scene, the generally admirable Fiona questions an orthodox Jewish father who wants to keep his daughters out of a coeducational school chosen by their mother and return them to a “closed society” (*Children Act* 39). Fiona rules that the girls attend the school until the the age of eighteen, and “observed that Mr. Bernstein had availed himself of female counsel and solicitor, and benefited from the experience of the court-appointed social worker, the astute and disorganized Cafcass lady. And he was implicitly bound to the order of a female judge” (39). Above all, Fiona asks Mr. Bernstein “why he would deny his daughters the opportunity of a profession”

(39). A reader characterizing McEwan by his early fiction, which earned him the nickname “Ian Macabre,” may be surprised by this attention to social issues, justice, and opportunity. After making his mark with two bleak collections of short stories and the novels *The Cement Garden* (1978) and *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), though, it is generally accepted that McEwan’s fiction shifted “to a more mature engagement with the wider world of history and society” (Ryan 2). Since the 1990s, that shift has become even more pronounced, particularly in *Saturday* (2005), *Solar* (2010), and the aforementioned *The Children Act*.

Fiona’s fixation on professions in the above selections from *The Children Act* is symptomatic of a less-acknowledged aspect of McEwan’s recent work. To emphasize this point, I want to examine an extended passage from the novel that is almost shockingly transparent in its paralleling of McEwan’s own professed views. The scene describes Fiona’s recollection of another case, one involving a mother implicated in the deaths of her two infant children:

The pathologist, so it turned out, unaccountably withheld crucial evidence about an aggressive bacterial infection in the second child. The police and Crown Prosecution Service were illogically keen for a conviction, the medical profession was dishonored by the evidence of its representative, and the entire system, this careless mob of professionals, drove a kindly woman, a well-regarded architect, toward persecution, despair and death. In the face of conflicting evidence from several expert medical witnesses about the causes of the infants’ deaths, the law stupidly preferred a guilty verdict over skepticism and uncertainty. (*Children Act* 55).

There are a number of things worth discussing in this passage. For the purposes of this chapter, I want to single out a couple in particular. One is a peculiar view of professionalism and expertise, considering that it is itself written from the perspective of a highly-trained and specialized professional expert. It seems to be a decidedly

ambivalent view at first glance, but it is important to note that Fiona, who devotes herself to her work with a great deal of conscientiousness, is not condemning professionalism itself, but a particular brand of “careless,” mobbish professionalism. Fiona, a kindly woman and individual like the accused, contrasts favorably with the “system” or bureaucracy that drove the guilty verdict. It is also crucial to consider this passage alongside McEwan’s own expressed views in public appearances and nonfiction writings. Consider, for example, his article in *The Guardian* shortly preceding the publication of the novel, in which he covers “one of the sorriest and most sustained judicial errors in modern times,” the clear inspiration for this moment in the novel:

The jury appeared impressed by some breathtaking statistical nonsense from one medical witness. Various other experts disagreed with each other profoundly about the causes of death, but the court showed no appropriate caution and she<sup>1</sup> was found guilty. The tabloids “monstered” her, in jail she was horribly bullied, her appeal was turned down. By her second appeal it was apparent that a pathologist had withheld vital evidence about a fatal bacterial infection in one of Clark’s children and finally she was released. (McEwan, “The Law Versus Religious Belief”)

It makes sense that McEwan would be drawn to these sorts of law cases, such as the above case in which a “bereaved mother, brave and decent, [was] harried by the legal system like a figure in a Kafka story,” because so many of them dovetail with the issues he consistently writes (and speaks) about, in his recent fiction and in the public sphere (McEwan, “The Law Versus Religious Belief”). These include religion, science, and—most importantly, I argue—expertise and professionalism. In relation to these issues, McEwan has most recently created protagonists who are both professional experts, and, in the case of the more heroic or admirable of these protagonists, like Fiona and

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Clark, whose two children died in much the same way as in the case depicted in *The Children Act*.

*Saturday*'s Henry Perowne, these characters tend to mirror McEwan himself both in viewpoint and in their evaluation of expert knowledge.

Focusing on McEwan's *Saturday*, this chapter will consider professionalism and expertise and how these factor into the way its protagonist views the broader political and cultural world. Watching a young couple in the square his apartment overlooks, neurosurgeon protagonist Henry Perowne employs a rather empirical method to map out a sketch of their identities. The young woman's "undecided" movements and seeming ambivalence toward her partner, along with a compulsive scratching of her back, leads Perowne to conclude that the two are drug addicts (McEwan, *Saturday* 58). In effect, Perowne, relying on his medical expertise, diagnoses the couple from a distance. Timothy Mitchell, in *Rule of Experts* (2002), describes a great land map of Egypt administered and surveyed by colonial officials. Mitchell argues that the land map, as part of a "new 'organization of things and powers'" involved "redistributing ideas and values in a simplified way" (98). Like the land map, Perowne uses a kind of simplification to apprehend the couple in the square from a distance, to overlook potential complications and particularities in order to collapse them into one object to be apprehended by his expert observation. This is a running motif in the novel, including the central scenes involving Perowne's encounters with Baxter, whom he also diagnoses, correctly, and later operates on.

This chapter will first focus on Perowne's professional life itself, before continuing with an analysis of expertise in broader terms (though with Perowne still as centerpiece). Perowne's professionalism is interwoven with his individualism, which shapes his view of the wider world outside his clinical experience, as well as his family

life. Like the average citizen, Perowne has little to no ability to shape the political landscape of his society single-handedly. Significantly, *Saturday* takes place on the day of the major worldwide anti-war protests of 2003, yet Perowne's ambivalence is too great for him to commit to a particularly strong or lucid opinion on either the war or the protest. His suspicion of collective action is tied directly to his professional worldview, which emphasizes direct action in the operating theatre by skilled individuals like himself; while he works with a team, Perowne is consistently presented as in charge and doing the bulk of the work himself.

Perowne's professionalism as tied to his individualism is arguably a result of the political environment he occupies. Richard Heffernan argues that "over time, British politics has come to reflect an emerging Thatcherite (or post-Thatcher) settlement," including the "New" Labour Party spearheaded by Tony Blair (3). This settlement also fits within the global rise of neoliberalism, the effects of which are outlined most notably by David Harvey as "the financialization of everything" (33). Both involve a fraught relationship between individual freedom and collective work or responsibility. Harvey identifies it as a split: "neoliberal rhetoric, with its foundational emphasis on individual freedoms, has the power to split off libertarianism, identity politics, multiculturalism, and eventually narcissistic consumerism from the social forces ranged in pursuit of social justice through the conquest of state power" (41). Heffernan, meanwhile, makes the case that twentieth-century British politics writ large "have been characterised by the duality of collectivism and individualism," namely by the rise of collectivism and "its eclipse by the resurgence" of individualism (vii). Certainly *Saturday*, frequently labeled a "post-9/11" novel, can be read perhaps more usefully as a "post-Thatcher" novel, especially

given the tensions between individualism and collectivism that Perowne thinks about and the way his own profession, and the place of professionals in post-Thatcher England, manages this tension. While Perowne is associated with the National Health Service, he nevertheless straddles a line between the public and private sector professionals, occupying that space in a societal context—contemporary England—which in shifting to a general policy of neoliberalism has increasingly de-emphasized its socialist aspects in favor of capitalism and individualism. Perowne’s professionalism, built on technical, expert knowledge, is demonstrably central to the novel, and so *Saturday*’s commentary on issues of, say, class radiate from Perowne’s experiences as a professional.

A brief conclusion examines McEwan the author as presenting himself as a kind of expert researcher. *Saturday* seems to be his most autobiographical novel, with Perowne living in the same square McEwan once did in London (Zalewski).<sup>2</sup> His writing process involves intensive research through which he attempts to gain the expertise of his protagonists, in the case of *Saturday* shadowing a neurosurgeon for years. This section is intended to illustrate how professionalism and expertise extend beyond the pages of *Saturday* into McEwan’s role as a public intellectual, arguing that his strategic privileging of particular forms of cultural capital—both in his novels and in his public appearances—have carved out a place for him outside the boundaries of most literary authors. That is, demonstrating professional aptitude and expertise in the literary realm as well as other, more scientific venues has established McEwan’s reputation as a particular brand of public intellectual who straddles the boundaries of the “two cultures” of the humanities and sciences. McEwan’s method of research and writing, and the public persona that he has developed, thus reinforces the particular form of realism on display

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<sup>2</sup> Fitzroy Square, in the Fitzrovia district of central London.

particularly in his later novels: a realism that resonates from within and without with the value of hard work, empiricism, and professionalism.

### **Perowne's professionalism and its influence on his personal life**

It is made abundantly clear in *Saturday* that Henry Perowne is, for the most part, a consummate professional. There is perhaps more space devoted to descriptions of Perowne at work, and Perowne thinking about work, than of any other character in the novels studied in this project - and this on a Saturday, his day off. As the third person limited narrator notes in the opening pages of the novel, “Forty-eight years old, profoundly asleep at nine thirty on a Friday night—this is modern professional life” (*Saturday* 5). Yet at this point, Perowne has awoken “to find himself already in motion, pushing back the covers from a sitting position, and then rising to his feet,” and has begun to reflect on his individual experience of “modern professional life” (*Saturday* 1). These opening pages detail several surgeries Perowne has recently performed. The first few are almost neutrally, clinically descriptive, such as “a craniotomy for a meningioma in a fifty-three-year-old woman, a primary school mistress. The tumour sat above the motor strip and was sharply defined, rolling away neatly before the probing of his Rhoton dissector—an entirely curative process” (*Saturday* 6). As these descriptions progress, though, it becomes evident that Perowne gets more out of his work than a mere paycheck. Take, for instance, the description of his surgery on Andrea, a teenaged immigrant from Nigeria, who suffers from a pilocytic astrocytoma, a rare brain tumor. Perowne seems to have taken some interest in this patient, whose characteristics and personality are laid out before the narrative proceeds to the surgery. The most notable moment of this sequence is

when Perowne reveals Andrea's cerebellar tentorium, which separates the cerebellum from the cerebrum: "Finally it lay exposed, the tentorium—the tent—a pale delicate structure of beauty, like the little whirl of a veiled dancer, where the dura is gathered and parted again" (*Saturday* 9). This passage reinforces Perowne's admiration for good design, both natural and artificial, that is made apparent in his observations of the square his home overlooks, as well as London more generally. It also begins the process of demonstrating how enamored Perowne is with his profession, particularly when he is performing in the operating theatre. "Operating never wearies him" we are told. "Once busy within the enclosed world of his firm, the theatre and its ordered procedures, and absorbed by the vivid foreshortening of the operation microscope as he follows a corridor to a desired site, he experiences a superhuman capacity, more like a craving, for work" (*Saturday* 10). This craving, this passion for his work is what marks Perowne out as a successful surgeon; his professionalism is as important as his expertise.

Perowne's experience of work stands in stark contrast with another technical expert in McEwan's fiction, Michael Beard, the protagonist of *Solar* (2010). Beard seems to lack the true passion Max Weber saw as integral to doing great work in a field, and for personal fulfillment as well: "Nothing has any value for a human being as a human being unless he *can* pursue it with *passion*" (Weber 8, emphasis in original). We could tie this to Beard's loose morals and general failure in his personal life. Perowne has his expertise *and* his professional life to keep him busy and as a release valve for personal frustrations. Beard is clearly an expert in his field: a Nobel prize-winning theoretical physicist, he takes several opportunities to demonstrate his knowledge in *Solar*. On a climate change retreat in the far north which turns out to be populated mainly by authors and artists,



Beard dresses down a novelist who attempts to make a connection between Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and "morality": "Beard said that the principle had no application to the moral sphere. On the contrary, quantum mechanics was a superb predictor of the statistical probability of physical states. The novelist blushed but would not give way. Did he not know who he was talking to?" (*Solar* 89). On the other hand, Beard is not much of a professional: he hasn't done major original work since his big breakthrough, doesn't know his colleagues by name, and most crucially, doesn't always keep up with emerging theories. This final item is quite disturbing to Beard, who realizes that some of the physics his new colleagues "took for granted was unfamiliar to him" (*Solar* 24). This unfamiliarity reveals both a lack of true passion for his field, as well as a failure to accept a fundamental reality of science, "where we all know that what we have achieved will be obsolete in ten, twenty, or fifty years. That is the fate, indeed, that is the very *meaning* of scientific work" (Weber 11, emphasis in original). While Weber's sentiment is perhaps an exaggeration, given the continuing presence of major theoretical bodies like quantum mechanics—which comes up in both *Solar* and *Saturday*—the fundamental point rings true: science is a method reliant on continual revision and reinvention, which is what McEwan himself finds so attractive in it: "Only science is able to correct its course constantly as its knowledge base grows and more evidence is gathered" ("Author Interview" 132-3). Beard, though, "hitched a ride behind" Einstein with his "Beard-Einstein Conflation" decades ago, clinging to it for professional advancement for decades (*Solar* 57). If "Every scientific 'fulfillment' gives birth to new 'questions' and *cries out* to be surpassed and rendered obsolete," Beard finds it in his best interest to resist a broader scientific advancement (Weber 11, emphasis in original). Perowne, in contrast to

Beard, relishes the work he does in the operating theater, and it is this fact which marks him out as a heroic figure rather than the comic and pitiable Beard.

Despite Perowne's craving for work, however, there are responsibilities he has that weary him. Unlike in his surgical work, Perowne is exhausted by all of the accompanying tasks that are directly or indirectly required to continue surgeries:

It was the paperwork on Friday afternoon that brought him down, the backlog of referrals, and responses to referrals, abstracts for two conferences, letters to colleagues and editors, an unfinished peer review, contributions to management initiatives, and government changes to the structure of the Trust, and yet more revisions to teaching practices. (*Saturday* 10).

In this sense, then, Perowne's professionalism may be open to criticism; he is perfectly happy working, and working effectively, to perform surgeries and better individual lives through his efforts, but when it comes to the broader responsibilities of his profession, particularly bureaucratic work, he falters. This seems to be a source of some frustration for Perowne, and "In the past year he's become aware of new committees and subcommittees spawning, and lines of command that stretch up and out of the hospital, beyond the medical hierarchies, up through the distant reaches of the Civil Services to the Home Secretary's office" (*Saturday* 10). The "distant reaches" cited here contrast sharply with what is the source of Henry's craving for his working life: getting his hands dirty—bloody—in the operating theater. There is a tension, then, between Perowne's individual work and his responsibilities for the collective structure of his profession.

We might see Perowne in these passages as being connected with a larger structure, or as in possession of a more collective responsibility. But if Perowne is 'good' or working for society's benefit, he is so almost in a vacuum – almost solely absorbed with professional education and work. That is, while Perowne might try to do the right thing in his day to

day life, he operates more or less exclusively as an individual. He does not relish participating in bureaucracy both because he values his individual work more, and because, at least from the impression the narrative gives, bureaucracy discourages actual work. There is almost no connection between the distant bureaucratic system and the immediate, visceral work Perowne is doing in the operating theater, work which yields clear results that can be seen in the change in patients' well-beings. Here, the post-Thatcherite landscape seems to lurk in the background: Perowne, while embedded in the welfare-state holdover of the National Health Service, nonetheless seems largely uninterested in his position as part of a welfare apparatus. The work, to Perowne, is what being a neurosurgeon is really about—the surgery itself—and it is what energizes him.

In addition to Perowne's inner satisfaction with his work, there is a performative dimension to professionalism in *Saturday*. The narrative details not only Perowne's attitude and thoughts, but even his appearance to patients. This is often paired with patients' own expectations or preconceptions of what a surgeon should be like: "Most people at their first consultation take a furtive look at the surgeon's hands in the hope of reassurance" (*Saturday* 18). A surgeon with steady hands indeed seems like a logical reassurance for patients. However, it is not only Perowne's hands that influences how patients see him. Even his physical appearance plays a role in how patients view his abilities, as "His slight stoop gives him an apologetic look," and patients are "also put at their ease by the unassertive manner and the mild green eyes" (*Saturday* 19). At first glance, it is odd that these characteristics put patients at ease, because they seem to be directly in contrast with the desire for steady hands. Yet this makes sense at a certain level, because the stoop and unassertiveness are suggestive of someone who is not prone

to rash decisions, someone who moves slowly and carefully - patients do not seem to want a severe doctor. Slow, steady, and careful are all in a line with their concern with hands; or, to put it another way, an older, comforting paternal presence with the nonetheless steady hands to carry out intricate operations without slipping up. This is the ideal image of a surgeon which Perowne's patients hold.

Intriguingly, these desired traits patients imagine for their doctor are purely external. That is, none of these descriptions touch explicitly on what we might imagine to be the most important aspect of a doctor: his or her knowledge. Perowne's expertise, as we know from other passages describing him at work, rests on a foundation of knowledge, rather than physical prowess. Perowne's diagnosis of Baxter is a nearly supreme triumph of mind over matter, Baxter's punch to his chest notwithstanding. But Perowne's knowledge is, like most forms of expert knowledge, beyond the ken of his patients - it is highly specialized and unfamiliar to the layperson. Indeed, this is demonstrated quite clearly in the novel's descriptions of surgery, which for the medically uninitiated are difficult to navigate merely at the level of language. Perowne's patients, then, are looking for signs of expertise that they can understand and which are, to some degree, within their control. They might identify a questionable surgeon by his shaky hands and choose another; it would be far more unlikely for a patient to talk to Perowne and identify a fault in his knowledge, because that knowledge itself is so unfamiliar that they cannot judge it. Amusingly, we can see that what is beneath Henry's exterior would give patients an entirely different source of anxiety than any lack of knowledge: "Patients would be less happy to know that he's not always listening to them. He's a dreamer sometimes" (*Saturday* 19). It is clear from the surgeries Perowne performs in the novel

that his knowledge in his field is excellent; what might not cross the minds of his patients are the other parts of his personality that could potentially inhibit the level of care they receive. It is possible to take from this passage that Henry does not always listen to his patients because he assumes they have little that is useful to tell him. I say this because based on other observations he makes in the novel, Perowne rarely hesitates to make a diagnosis, and in the one major case where his knowledge is tested and we learn the results—Baxter—his diagnosis is accurate. Perowne appears to require little more than a symptom; the rest of his patients' talk is superfluous. As the narrative notes, "when he comes to, seconds later, he never seems to have missed much" (*Saturday* 20). Additionally, based on how often his mind wanders toward thinking about work, it does not seem unlikely that Perowne is dreaming of an upcoming or completed surgery at any time, whether on the patient he is speaking to or otherwise.

Perowne's patients would doubtless be relieved to have the perspective on Perowne offered by the above analysis of his relationship with bureaucracy, though perhaps only in terms of their relationship with him as patients. That is, understanding how much Perowne values the work he will be doing on patients' brains over his bureaucratic responsibilities would likely reflect well on him as a surgeon of choice. However, Perowne's professionalism is interwoven with his personal life away from work in a number of significant ways. This is perhaps best explored by considering the mostly offstage backdrop of the novel: *Saturday* takes place on February 15, 2003, a day of worldwide protests against the invasion of Iraq staged in the same year. In England, the London protests were reported in the press, even in conservative publications like the *Daily Mail* as both "the biggest public demonstration held in Britain" and "almost

entirely peaceful,” with only seven arrests made during the gathering of between 750 thousand and two million people (“Anti-war Protest”). The protest is unavoidable for Perowne even within the vast city of London, as one of the two starting points for the march—two separate groups marched to meet at Piccadilly Circus before stopping in Hyde Park—was the north end of Gower Street, which passes Henry’s home in Fitzroy Square a mere two blocks to the east. As a result, Perowne’s route to his planned squash match with a coworker is interrupted by the early stages of the protest, which he avoids by managing to cross Gower Street just south of the march, setting in motion his run-in with the criminal Baxter.

Significantly, the protest itself occurs entirely out of Perowne’s view, or at best, in his periphery, and Perowne’s lack of engagement with it radiates from his professional interests. He takes a more or less ambivalent stance toward the protesters gathering near his home, and to some degree goes out of his way to avoid interacting with the protest, or even thinking about it. Paired with the narrative descriptions of expanding bureaucracy discussed above, Perowne’s hesitance to take a definite stand on the protest reveals a certain unease surrounding collectivism in *Saturday*. “Despite his skepticism,” we are told, “Perowne in white-soled trainers, gripping his racket tighter, feels the seduction and excitement peculiar to such events” (*Saturday* 71). For an explanation of Perowne’s skepticism, McEwan turns again to what I argue is the focal point of the novel: Perowne’s professionalism and expertise. Indeed, “he might have been with them, [the protesters,] in spirit at least, for nothing now will keep him from his game, if Professor Taleb hadn’t needed an aneurysm clipped on his middle cerebral artery. In the months after those conversations, Perowne drifted into some compulsive reading up on the

regime” (*Saturday* 72). Miri Taleb, an English-educated Iraqi academic, was arrested and tortured by the Hussein regime nine years previous during an archaeological dig, for reasons unknown. Now living in London again, Taleb is in a good position to provide some perspective to Perowne. In his research, “Naturally, Henry followed closely the accounts of measures taken against surgeons who refused to carry out . . . mutilation” ordered by the Hussein regime (*Saturday* 72). Thus, “He concluded that viciousness had rarely been more inventive or systematic or widespread” (*Saturday* 72). Notably, then, Perowne’s political views in this case are doubly rooted in his professional life. First, his connection to the wider world, to Taleb’s Iraq, is through his work, with Taleb as patient. Next, he researches the subject, coming to his conclusion after reading about punishments for others practicing surgery.

Taleb’s torture represents a violation of human rights in general, but for Perowne what really drives the point home is the assault on his profession and the right of professionals to work with individual autonomy; that is, it is primarily through professionalism that Perowne identifies with Taleb. His research into the abuse of his overseas colleagues not only gives Perowne a reason to question the protest, but acts as a sort of scapegoat for questions of class that emerge as he ponders it. Bruce Robbins notes that Carolyn Kay Steedman, author of *Landscape for a Good Woman*, feels an “impulse to self-justification” for her own success when considering her working class origins (*Upward Mobility* 160). Perowne’s self-justification is almost entirely inward-looking, however. “Opinions are a roll of the dice” he thinks: “by definition, none of the people now milling around Warren Street tube station happens to have been tortured by the regime, or knows and loves people who have, or even knows much about the place at all”

(*Saturday* 72). This is clearly a kind of ideological fantasy: Perowne is confident that any reasonable person, armed with his knowledge, would necessarily come to the same conclusions he has. And of course, he has just finished thinking about Taleb, an Iraqi intimately familiar with Hussein's Iraq, living in London; Perowne simplifies his view by a steadily descending logic, from Taleb's direct experience to imagining that none of the protestors could know much about Iraq or what they are protesting. Perowne's research thus works toward bolstering him against the uncertainty introduced to his thoughts when he feels a connection with a man sweeping the gutter: "For a vertiginous moment Henry feels himself bound to the other man, as though on a seesaw with him, pinned to an axis that could tip them into each other's life" (*Saturday* 73). The thought clearly disturbs Perowne out of his musings, and he somewhat wistfully thinks of a time when one's ignorance of how their privileged beliefs "served [their] own prosperity," a statement which he again ties back to the medical realm, identifying it as "anosognosia, a useful psychiatric term for a lack of awareness of one's own condition" (*Saturday* 74).

As Perowne's thoughts continue, he turns to the wider world, revealing more uncertainty than his narrower view of the protestors does. "After the ruinous experiments of the lately deceased century," the reader is told, "after so much vile behavior, so many deaths, a queasy agnosticism has settled around these matters of justice and redistributed wealth. No more big ideas. The world must improve, if at all, by tiny steps" (*Saturday* 74). One might be tempted to see this statement as further emphasizing Perowne's suspicion of large, collective movements, but Perowne is more thoughtful than such a reading would give him credit for. Looking at the sentences surrounding this quote, it's clear that he is describing what he sees as the general state of society, rather than



advocating for a particular view of his own. Indeed, what makes this passage especially striking is Perowne's reluctance, even to the reader, to spell his political views out clearly. "It's not a visionary age," he concludes (*Saturday* 74). Perowne's take on the protest is precisely in line with ambivalence, which Colin Hutchinson has called "the distinguishing feature of the contemporary white male left-liberal":

In political terms, this manifests itself in a reassessment of the individualistic-libertarian sensibilities that dominated the post-war decades, and in a consequent revival of interest in collectivist discourses. Yet this, in turn, is countered by a persistent individualism that insists upon independence from what is fearfully perceived as the unbending dogma of collectivist programmes. (Hutchinson 3)

This passage describes Perowne's thoughts of the protest fairly well, but is also useful in considering his working life: Perowne works as an individual; even with his surgical team, he is in charge, listens to the music he chooses, and so on. He likes to be alone with a patient, with a brain. However, Perowne doesn't necessarily see himself as a "left-liberal"; his reluctance to espouse a definite politics more or less leaves such a specific identifier out of the equation.

Much as Perowne's tendency to research an issue find common ground with McEwan's notoriety for rigorous research into his novel's subjects, so does Perowne's stance toward political programs, to a degree, echo McEwan's own. On one hand, Perowne seems to actively avoid politics, and yet given the events of the day, from the plane crash he witnesses early in the morning to the protests, his mind cannot help but drift toward it. In that sense, even Henry's relationship to politics is ambivalent: he is a waffler. While Perowne does not give this information up explicitly, McEwan has been more deliberately transparent. McEwan himself recalls the same protest Henry witnesses in an interview, stating that he "did feel some joy at the prospect of Saddam Hussein

being overthrown,” but that, admittedly, “like Henry, I was a little repelled by the joy on the streets . . . they’re probably right, but they should be somber in their view” (Gregg). McEwan’s expressed ambivalence here takes the form of individualism against collectivism: note that what McEwan finds agreeable is centered on an individual, Saddam Hussein, while he identifies the collective joy of the group of protesters as what pushes him away from their cause. Like the contemporary white male left-liberal Hutchinson delineates, McEwan wants to, in a sense, have his cake and eat it too: he “probably” agrees with their cause, but wants to remain aloof and separate from it. In other words, McEwan demands the rhetorical space to demonstrate how he would go about things differently, how he would improve on their methods even though they may be reaching the same conclusions. This is a bit different from the “fearful” perception of collectivist dogma that Hutchinson outlines. It may be more useful to think of resistance to collectivism as an insistence or affirmation of individualism rather than the fear of dogma; this seems to more accurately describe the impulse for both McEwan and Perowne. Intriguingly, Perowne’s most direct approval of collective work comes after listening to Theo’s band, reflecting on “rare moments” when musicians find something “beyond the merely collaborative or technically proficient” (176). Describing once more the futility of “visionary projects,” which are little more than “mirages for which people are prepared to die and kill,” Perowne finds a truer, if ephemeral, dream rooted in music (176). “Only in music,” he thinks, “and only on rare occasions, does the curtain actually lift on this dream of community, and it’s tantalisingly conjured, before fading away with the last notes” (176). Perowne’s forthright appreciation here might be read as capricious alongside his lack of faith in visionary political projects; however, it is worth considering

the parallels between Perowne's team in the operating theatre and a band like Theo's. Both are small groups who work within the confines of a chosen medium: the twelve-bar blues on the one hand, and the theory and conventions of neurosurgery on the other. Perowne can appreciate the work that goes into composing the song Theo's band performs for him at their practice space, while any "visionary dreams" fade quickly and comfortably from consciousness.

Perhaps the most revealing passage in *Saturday* in terms of its implications for how Perowne's professionalism shapes his view of the world, though, is the one which describes how he met his wife, Rosalind. Rosalind was once a patient of Perowne's or, more accurately, a patient of the doctor Perowne was working under during his training. As a result, the account of their meeting and courtship rests on the foundation of the operating theatre, and Perowne's profession more broadly. His growing adulation of his work, and the particular surgery she will undergo, suffuses the early moments Henry spends with Rosalind: "the elegance of the whole procedure seemed to embody a brilliant contradiction: the remedy was as *simple as* plumbing, as elemental as a blocked drain. . . . And yet the making of a safe route into the remote and buried place in the head was a feat of technical mastery and concentration" (*Saturday* 46, my emphasis). Perowne here seems enamored with the paradoxical simplicity and delicacy of the surgical work he will be performing throughout his career. The scientific methodology and progress required—"Almost a century of failure and partial success lay behind this one procedure"—is also a source of wonder for the young Henry (*Saturday* 46). But, crucially, it is Rosalind's body, specifically her face, that takes Henry's excitement to the next level: "as the closing up began and the face, this particular, beautiful face, was reassembled without a

single disfiguring mark, he felt excitement about the future and impatient to acquire the skills. *He was falling in love with a life. He was also, of course, falling in love. The two were inseparable*” (*Saturday* 46, my emphasis). The fusion of Perowne’s wife and his profession here can tell us a good deal about how he sees the world. It places Perowne’s professional life squarely in the private sphere: there is for him an inseparable tie between his familial life and his work. Rosalind also functions as a kind of case study for Perowne—again, of course, an individual—through which he can expand his thinking about the benefits of his chosen profession.

Alongside the depiction of Perowne as “profoundly asleep” discussed above, the details of his falling for his wife function as a commentary on how Perowne’s profession is not just something that affects him *at work*, but at home as well. To some extent this could be said about any line of work - a coal miner might be likely to be “profoundly asleep” early in the evening as well. But it is clear from reading *Saturday* that Perowne’s work life encroaches on his life away from work in more ways than simple exhaustion. He does not only meet his wife during his development as a professional, she is his patient. In one sense, this places Perowne above Rosalind, both in perspective—he is physically above her during the operation and recovery—and in status: he is the expert, or is becoming the expert, while she is the layperson. Significantly, the operation Rosalind undergoes is one that restores her vision, which was failing due to the presence of a tumor; Henry is thus, despite not performing the surgery itself, part of what allows her to see. The defining experience which Perowne identifies as setting him for good on the path to health professional and neurological expert—the path from Henry to Perowne—is one of his own (literal) privileged vision, as he gazes upon Rosalind’s face

while her own sight has failed and is returned to her. The blurring of the boundary between his professional and personal life is at the root, then, of Perowne's tendency to diagnose even total strangers from his window.

Indeed, Perowne's professional experiences and his life at home and around the rest of London are continually intermingling; the operating theatre is never far from his conscious mind. We learn that he walks into work suffused with things from his personal life, but work quickly takes precedence. Recounting times when he is in the mood for sex and he and Rosalind's schedules or other factors don't permit it, his desire is efficiently sublimated by his duties at work: "once he's through the double swing doors, and crossing the worn chessboard linoleum tiles by Accident and Emergency, once he's ridden the lift to the third-floor operating suite and is in the scrub room, soap in hand, listening to his registrar's difficulties, the last touches of desire leave him and he doesn't even notice them go" (*Saturday* 23). It is crucial to note the last part of this quote: his not noticing. This is in sharp contrast with the inverse, with work carrying over into the personal sphere, because Perowne's work is almost always on his mind: he both thinks about it directly and explicitly, and also traces certain moods back to events at work. At a less conscious level, Perowne also often drifts into thinking about work, apparently without realizing it. Perowne's profession, then, both consciously and unconsciously, suffuses his very identity. It is not only a performance, but a central, arguably the central, aspect of his identity.

### **Expertise, simplification and Perowne's view of London life**

When Perowne considers the simplicity of Rosalind's operation—despite the vast time and intellectual energy that lay behind its adoption as a standard procedure—he offers a clue to understanding how his professionalism shapes his view of the wider world. Perowne's professionalism and work life encroaching on other parts of his life: this is something to remember when reading his stance toward the people he watches in the square (and of course his accurate diagnosis of Baxter). That is, Henry never seems to fully be away from work. Perowne's expertise seems to contribute to him having a kind of lofty or even godlike feeling, particularly when watching from the window onto the square. The best example of this is when Perowne is watching what he assumes are two nurses: "They cross towards the far corner of the square, and with his advantage of height and in his curious mood, he not only watches them, but watches *over* them, supervising their progress with the remote possessiveness of a god" (*Saturday* 11-12, my emphasis). Perowne is in possession of two things here that contribute to the judgments he often makes from his window: his expert knowledge and the physical perspective offered by his home overlooking the square. In this sense, Perowne's home has some parallels with the dam at Aswan as described in Timothy Mitchell's *Rule of Experts*, a book which examines twentieth-century politics and expertise through a case study of Egypt. The dam project, as Mitchell notes, relies on a familiar opposition: nature versus humans. Specifically, Mitchell sees one side of the divide as human expertise: "several features of the new construction helped produce the effect of a world divided into human expertise on one side and nature on the other" (35).

For Mitchell, the world divided between expertise and nature is one of the defining features of the twentieth century. Indeed, the expertise/nature opposition itself is one of many fostered by the political developments of the twentieth century. Mitchell argues that human individuals do not simply master or control elements of the world, or the world itself. Instead, “more often there occurs a series of claims, affinities, and interactions all of which exceed the grasp or intention of the human agents involved. Human agency and intention are partial and incomplete products of these interactions” (Mitchell 34). In order to present a picture of the world that suited its purposes, then, politics had to simplify:

But why insist on all these additional agencies, circulations, and forces? . . . the answer I want to propose here has to do with the role of expertise and reason, explanation and simplification, in the politics of the twentieth century. *Politics itself was working to simplify the world, attempting to gain for itself the powers of expertise by resolving it into simple forces and oppositions.* (Mitchell 34, my emphasis)

By attempting to gain control of expertise, politics was attempting to gain mastery of the branch of knowledge that it presented as the control of nature. That is, politics at large presented expertise as the way to control (simplified) nature, and also fused itself with expertise by presenting these simple binary oppositions. Mitchell’s analysis operates on a vast scale, incorporating twentieth-century politics as a whole, and even his example of the Aswan dam is quite large, the culmination of a tremendous amount of physical and intellectual labor resulting in a structure that can be seen even from space. Applying Mitchell’s analysis to the micro scale of a single character in a literary text offers some challenges; but *Saturday* is not the dam at Aswan, nor should it be treated as such, and Mitchell’s intellectual output can usefully serve such an analysis without encompassing it. Structurally, Mitchell’s book takes various events—the construction of the dam, a

malaria epidemic—and shows how they are symptomatic of broader cultural trends.

Literary analysis might well hope to do the same, and so *Saturday* should be seen not in isolation, but in connection to the events it describes explicitly—such as the Iraq War protest—as well as those broader underpinnings like post-Thatcherite England.

Indeed, Perowne himself exemplifies the tendencies Mitchell outlines in significant ways. For example, Perowne’s descending order of logic described above, when he thinks about the protesters, beginning with none of them being tortured by the Hussein regime and concluding that none of them can know much about Iraq at all, is reliant on a tripartite fusion of expertise, politics, and simplification. Perowne first researches the issue, confident in his abilities as a well-educated professional who regularly presents research in his field. He then has what appears to be an ideological reaction, a repulsion from the “joy” he perceives among the protesters. Ultimately, Perowne simplifies the political landscape the Iraq War occupies by dividing it implicitly into two sides, one made up by those who don’t know “much about the place at all”—the protesters—and the other by those who do: the ones who, like himself, are educated about the issue.

While it is important to account for how Perowne’s expertise shapes his political views, it is crucial to first consider how he experiences life in the city itself, for London is not simply a blank backdrop for the plot of *Saturday*; here, Mitchell’s large-scale analysis is particularly applicable. Like Mitchell’s description of the dam at Aswan, Perowne’s musings on the modern city of London present it as a triumphant victory of expertise and technology over nature. In the opening pages of the novel, Perowne indeed compares the city favorably to nature itself, as he “thinks the city is a success, a brilliant invention, a



biological masterpiece—millions teeming around the accumulated and layered achievements of the centuries, as though around a coral reef, sleeping, working, entertaining themselves, harmonious for the most part, nearly everyone wanting it to work” (*Saturday* 3). The city itself as well as various aspects of contemporary urban life are on more than one occasion described in similar biological terms. It seems that Perowne cannot help but compare London and London life to the natural world. In the same scene, though, we see this comparison taken a step further, when he considers “the Perownes’ own corner, a triumph of congruent proportion; the perfect square laid out by Robert Adam enclosing a perfect circle of garden—an eighteenth-century dream bathed and embraced by modernity” (*Saturday* 3). The Perownes’ house, located in Fitzroy Square—also where McEwan himself lived for years—encloses and thus demarcates the boundary between the natural and the urban. But as Mitchell argues convincingly, the experience of nature is socially mediated in a crucial way: “Nature was not the cause of the changes taking place. It was the outcome. The very scale of the technical and engineering works of the twentieth century produced a new experience of the river Nile as exclusively a force of nature” (35). This early twentieth-century engineering project transformed the concept of nature around the dam into one that covered over previous human interventions. In contrast to the local forms of expertise and distributed engineering that were there previously—attempts had been made to build a dam at the location for centuries—“the dam at Aswan gathered all the engineering into one location, providing an observation point where writers like [Emil] Ludwig could stand and suddenly ‘comprehend’ the river as a force of nature tamed by man” (Mitchell 35-6).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The similarity between this passage from Mitchell and Marshall Berman’s description of a moment in Goethe’s *Faust*, when it is decided that an old couple must be removed from their land, is chilling: “They

The dam was one in a series of projects during the twentieth century that transformed the stance of human beings to nature:

The new scale of twentieth-century engineering, of which the Aswan Dam was among the first and most dramatic examples anywhere in the world, turned the bizarre religion of the Saint-Simonians into an everyday belief: that ‘human ingenuity’ could now dominate the ‘mighty elements’ of nature. In manufacturing the dam, the engineers also manufactured nature. (Mitchell 35)

This is quite what Perowne experiences as he looks out from his window. The “perfect square” enclosing the “perfect circle” of garden is the contemporary culmination of twentieth-century engineering: Fitzroy Square is embedded in an urban landscape mediated by technical expertise, which creates a certain experience of nature as distinct from, yet tamed by, the city.

The square, opposing nature and technical engineering, also offers Perowne a perspective which seems to influence his worldview in important ways. He has a habit of watching people in the square from his bedroom window, even remembering individuals who appear there regularly. The bedroom window, for Perowne, offers him a distinctly privileged viewpoint. In the novel’s opening pages, for example, he considers a pair of people walking through the square, and thinks to himself that “in the lifeless cold, they pass through the night, hot little biological engines with bipedal skills suited to any terrain, endowed with innumerable branching neural networks sunk deep in a knob of

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must go, to make room for what Faust comes to see as the culmination of his work: an observation tower from which he and his public can ‘gaze out into the infinite’ at the new world they have made” (67). Despite the age of the text he is studying, it is clear from Berman’s treatment that the Faustian “tragedy of development” resonates quite clearly with the kind of high modernist engineering projects on display in Mitchell’s analysis. Berman argues that “this is a characteristically modern style of evil: indirect, impersonal, mediated by complex organizations and institutional roles” (67). In the context of *Saturday*, this might shed light on Perowne’s dissatisfaction with the institutional responsibilities of his position; however, even if Perowne would see himself as having moved beyond the dated modernist idea on display in the Faustus tragedy as Berman conceives of it, he arguably remains within one branch of this “modernist evil”: the indirect, impersonal judgment cast on the visitors to the square.

bone casing, buried fibres, warm filaments with their invisible glow of consciousness—these engines devise their own tracks” (*Saturday* 12). Again we see Perowne vacillating between biological and engineering terms. “Biological engines” is the prime example in this case. This tendency to bounce between terms suited to engineering and those that seem to describe the natural or biological world, (or is he blending them?) is encouraged by Perowne’s perspective, which allows him to watch over them “with the remote possessiveness of a god.” Like the engineer standing atop the dam at Aswan, Perowne is able to comprehend his slice of the city from a privileged viewpoint which allows him to obscure complications, inconsistencies, and any phenomena that are contrary to his opinions. This becomes particularly clear in an illuminating scene in which Perowne watches what appears to be a young couple during a dispute.

Perowne’s observation of the square reveals something about his psychological relationship with the world and how his expertise might function as a mediating force. His thoughts on the upcoming squash match with Jay Strauss are “instantly dispersed by the flood of low winter sunlight, and by the sudden interest of what’s happening in the square” (*Saturday* 57-8). What Perowne sees is a pair that “could be sisters, standing by the railings of the central gardens, oblivious to passers-by, lost to a family drama of their own” (*Saturday* 58). Despite the apparently uncertain picture, he then “decides that the figure facing him is a boy. . . . Perowne is persuaded by the posture, the way the feet are planted well apart, the thickness of the wrist as he places a hand on the girl’s shoulder” (*Saturday* 58). The couple is in the midst of an argument, as the one Perowne is now convinced is female “shrugs [the other] off. She’s agitated and crying . . . she lands ineffectual blows on his chest, like an old-fashioned Hollywood heroine” (*Saturday* 58).

Already intrigued, Perowne's interest is piqued when he "thinks he sees in her face a reminder of his daughter's delicate oval, the little nose and elfin chin. That connection made, he watches more closely" (*Saturday* 58). Now, after progressing from uncertain gender to a resemblance to his own daughter, Perowne thinks the other individual's "look is feral, sharpened by hunger. Is it for her?" (*Saturday* 58). Identifying one of the pair with his daughter seems here to immediately introduce a vulnerability to the scene, an air of someone being preyed on. It is at this point that Perowne makes his largest observation, which also takes him to his final conclusion about the scene being played out before him:

Repeatedly, her left hand wanders behind her back, to dig under her T-shirt and scratch hard. She does this compulsively, even as she's crying and half-heartedly shoving the boy away. Amphetamine-driven fornication—the phantom ants crawling through her arteries and veins, the itch that cannot be reached. Or an exogenous opioid-induced histamine reaction, common among new users. The pallor and emotional extravagance are telling. These are addicts, surely. (*Saturday* 58)

Perowne, then, has watched this scene with what is—in his eyes, at least—growing clarity. After becoming convinced that the two are drug addicts, the conclusion seems obvious: "A missed score rather than a family matter is behind her distress and the boy's futile comforting" (*Saturday* 58).

There are two aspects of Perowne's life—indeed, arguably the two most fundamental and important aspects of his life—that have immediate bearing on this scene: his family and his profession. McEwan has remarked in an interview that he wanted to "catch something of that flavor of the ways in which we compartmentalize little bits of our lives" in *Saturday* (Gregg). Mental compartmentalization is something that Perowne does in many clearly stated ways throughout the novel, as his thoughts

vacillate between his family, his profession, and occasionally politics. When he observes these two people in the square, Perowne is also compartmentalizing, though in a less obvious manner, and certainly in a way that he himself does not appear to be aware of. Perowne's conclusion comes only after narrowing his vision to identify some physical attributes of the couple, and specifically, after he is reminded by the one of them of his daughter. His daughter, Daisy, is established as having different views and interests from Perowne, but is greatly loved and admired by him. Shortly before observing the scene in the square, Perowne's thoughts are of Daisy as he marvels at her knowledge of poetry, something he admires more in her than his father-in-law, a well-known poet: "Her training was so different from her father's. No wonder they like their disputes. What Daisy knows!" (*Saturday* 56). He respects her humanistic knowledge enough that he "is counting on Daisy to refine his sensibilities" (*Saturday* 57). Though Perowne's love for his daughter is nothing notable in itself, his response to seeing something of her in this troubled pair is. Made uncomfortable by the resemblance, Perowne immediately retreats to professional and technical explanations for the situation. His medical knowledge here operates as a mediating factor that allows him to effectively simplify the situation and reduce it and the couple to a simple, singular fact: these are just drug addicts. He doubles down on this distancing move by separating the couple entirely from the familial as well: this is surely no "family matter."

A key component of Mitchell's critique of colonial Egypt involves the command of space, which is demonstrably a prime concern of Perowne's as well. Mitchell's description of the twentieth-century breed of state-sanctioned maps, exemplified by the "great land map" of Egypt, argues that the "making of these maps introduced new forms

of measurement, representation, and calculation. They seemed to be part of the new character of calculability, in Simmel's phrase, that would define the politics of the twentieth century" (86). Calculability, conjoined with mapping, resulted in political power with "a new form: the knowledge and command of space" (Mitchell 90). This diagnosis is also found in James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998), which shares Mitchell's concern with the kinds of local knowledge which were glossed over and tempered by large-scale projects like the map and the dam. Scott's book grew out of a desire to understand "why the state has always seemed to be the enemy of 'people who move around'"; the resultant "efforts at sedentarization" came to look like a given "state's attempt to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions" (Scott 1, 2). Here, then, simplification is seen at two levels: a simplification of society (or a view of society) and a simplification of what the state itself does. The issue of legibility is crucial: control of the population is contingent on understanding a population, preferably in the simplest way possible, ie through a demographic map which designates that population visually and spatially. Indeed, "power over persons was to be reorganized as a power over space, and persons were merely the units arrayed and enumerated within that space" (Mitchell 90). Considered in this fashion, the land map of Egypt, the dam at Aswan, and Perowne's watchful gaze over Fitzroy Square are analogous in allowing a spectator to apprehend a whole: the Egyptian population through the map, the natural surrounding through the dam, and the Fitzrovia locals through Perowne's privileged, expert perspective.

While Perowne does not seem to be after the kind of consolidation of power by a state that the land map and the dam represent, he is nevertheless a privileged individual

within a state, conditioned by the particular forms of political power that have been exercised by states like England and delineated by Mitchell and Scott. While Perowne is not consciously pursuing political power, there *is* a politics, I argue, to his view of the city and its inhabitants. The class anxiety which has been written on extensively and is evident throughout the novel is one symptom that points to Perowne's politics, and this anxiety is also tied to his suspicion of collective action detailed above. The idea of control of space and the ability to make the complex legible, though, are crucial to understanding how Perowne thinks when he stands at his window, as well as how he navigates the artificial divide between his home and public life. Regarding space, it is significant that Henry is able to make his smug diagnosis from his window, yet things get much messier during the confrontation with Baxter. Critics often point to Perowne as a kind of domineering figure. For instance, Lynn Wells argues that "Perowne himself, tall and fit, has a powerful physical presence, which he exerts in his athletic competitions with colleagues, whom he dominates both at work and outside" (Wells 113). However, I find that Wells misses the mark regarding Perowne's physicality; physical endeavors are, contrary to Wells's statement, where Henry desperately wants control but has to fight for it. His squash match is a real struggle, anything but a domination, and it is perhaps for this reason that it so frustrates him. Rather, Perowne is reliant on both a control over space and the mediation of his expert knowledge to maintain what dominance he has.

Both the squash match and the encounter with Baxter which makes him arrive late to it are emblematic of Perowne's grappling with control and how both space (especially spatial boundaries) and his expertise are operative factors in that struggle. When he is not in command of as great a level of control, Perowne is enclosed in his own

square/theatre—a literal square in the case of the squash court—rather than being able to take the stance of observer commanding the space. For Perowne, there are distinct boundary lines he would like to keep between his own, enforced version of reality, and the more uncertain space of the city at large. At his door, he details the “three stout Banham locks, two black iron bolts as old as the house, two tempered steel security chains, a spyhole with a brass cover, the box of electronics that works the Entryphone system, the red panic button, the alarm pad with its softly gleaming digits” (*Saturday* 37). This almost obscene level of security might seem remarkable, but what Henry notes is, on the contrary, its ordinariness. “Such defences, such mundane embattlement,” he thinks. “Beware of the city’s poor, the drug-addicted, the downright bad” (*Saturday* 37). The simple binarisms Mitchell outlines at the state level are found here in the family home, in the form of perhaps the most fundamental opposition conceivable: the binary of inside and outside, which Derrida argued must “be accredited as the matrix of all possible opposition” (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 103). The Perowne family locks and security systems divide their world into easily parsed sections. But there is a clear discrepancy between inner and outer reality for Perowne when it comes to mastery; while Wells locates this mastery in part in Perowne’s physicality, my conclusion is that his mastery is dependent on maintaining boundaries between inner and outer reality, with Perowne’s home standing in here for his conscious mind. Interiors can be controlled, whether they be the expert knowledge housed in his brain, an organ he is an undisputed master of, or the interior of a home that can be cordoned off from the outside world, or even the operating theatre itself, where he is indeed the dominating presence Wells describes (though far more due to his acknowledged expertise than his physical presence).



Perowne, then, needs a perspective, like one looking at a map, to maintain his control; this perspective is reliant on him being in control of space as well, even if that is at the level of maintaining the inner space of his thoughts without being interrupted by outside forces. This perspective necessarily involves simplification in order for Perowne to make sense of larger issues like the Iraq War and the protest against it. This is not shocking, because if Perowne is “mapping,” which I argue that he is—particularly in the case of diagnosing the couple in the square, whose bodies he maps in order to come to a conclusion that leaves him comfortably distant from them—then he is by default simplifying. Scott usefully lays out a hypothetical complaint against mapping and why such a complaint would be senseless:

to complain that a map lacks nuance and detail makes no sense unless it omits information necessary to its function. A city map that aspired to represent every traffic light, every pothole, every building, and every bush and tree in every park would threaten to become as large and as complex as the city that it depicted. And it would certainly defeat the purpose of mapping, which is to abstract and summarize. A map is an instrument designed for a purpose. We may judge that purpose noble or morally offensive, but the map itself either serves or fails to serve its intended use. (Scott 87)

It is clear that Perowne is uninterested in minutia and complexity in the case of both the couple and the protest: while he himself does not have a prescribed function in the same way a map might, his “mapping” does have a function, which is to operate as a coping mechanism through which he can make sense of the seeming uncertainty and chaos of the London metropole. When he is down on the ground, among local knowledges and actions as opposed to the grandiose and godlike viewpoint from his window, he loses his sense of control. Perowne does not have the advantage of perspective, nor the barrier of his heavily-secured front door, during the Baxter encounter, for instance. So, unlike during

his observation of the couple in the square, he is able to make a diagnosis, but not consequence-free; Baxter is in position to react and even physically attack him. And, notably, when Perowne's expert knowledge is brought to bear successfully, he uses a spatial metaphor to describe the shift in power: "The moment of the thrashing is passing and Perowne senses the power passing to him. This fire escape recess is his consulting room" (McEwan, *Saturday* 96). Even at work, he is most in control, at his most powerful, when he is in the operating theatre, when his subject can't talk back to him; in the case of the consulting room and in patient recovery, his control resides in the twin powers of space and expert knowledge, as the patients have come to him, to his place of professional practice, to be subjected to his expert knowledge.

If Perowne's mappings and simplifications are only coping mechanisms, this raises questions about the role of experts in contemporary societies: with expertise at arguably its highest level in history, does this translate to increasingly secure and affluent societies? Why does a highly professional expert like Henry seem so closed off and disengaged from major problems of his time? That is, while Perowne helps many people by virtue of his occupation, why does his high level of education and knowledge not seem to translate to a greater understanding of the world around him? One stumbling block may be that, like Henry's life itself, expertise is segmented and compartmentalized, with various expert systems and fields that do not necessarily interact well with one another. In *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), Anthony Giddens describes how the higher degree of knowledge in the modern world does not translate to greater control and greater overall knowledge for the average person:

For the ordinary individual, all this does not add up to feelings of secure control over day-to-day life circumstances. Modernity expands the arenas

of personal fulfilment and of security in respect of large swathes of day-to-day life. But the lay person—and *all* of us are lay persons in respect of the vast majority of expert systems—must ride the juggernaut. (146, emphasis in original)

So, while living conditions improve on average, the world does not become more comprehensible, because the increase in expert knowledge is directly tied to an increase in the complexity of the world as mediated by society. Additionally, the majority of expert knowledge is out of reach and not helpful at the conscious level for each individual, as “no one can become an expert . . . in more than a few small sectors” (Giddens 144). If this is the case, then Perowne is quite a believable expert: in possession of advanced knowledge in his field, but not necessarily on other subjects. Indeed, struggling with his “education” at Daisy’s hands, it is clear that Perowne, while doubtless intended to be a heroic figure, is no renaissance man. In reaction to Alvin Gouldner’s positing of a “culture of critical discourse” shared by humanistic intellectuals and technical experts alike, Alan Sinfield argues that “a critical discourse is surely what we require. However, it may be only a manner of speaking, and need not produce radical analysis” (Sinfield 309). In *Saturday*, Henry’s son, a blues guitarist named Theo, “came up with an aphorism: the bigger you think, the crappier it looks” (35). The pessimism built into this statement goes more or less uncommented on by Henry, but one might gather based on the rest of the novel that he does not agree: for Henry, the big problems can still be mapped out and made legible (inaccurately or not).

It seems that any sensible path, at the state or societal level, would necessarily rely on collective work, which is the only way to take advantage of numerous expert fields simultaneously. This is made especially difficult, however, in post-Thatcherite England, where the political center has shifted to a more market-based and neoliberal

framework. Perowne, who would have been in his thirties, recently embarked on his professional life, when Thatcher famously proclaimed that “there is no such thing as society,” can be defined just as well as a post-Thatcherite character as a post-9/11 one. Indeed, with his suspicion of collective action, even with his compartmentalized and field-specific knowledge, he apparently isn’t interested in working with other experts in other areas, but would rather presume to have it all figured out, provided there are not too many outside interruptions. Ultimately, though, even the violation of the “mundane” defenses of his home by Baxter brings Henry at first not to a greater conscious uncertainty, but to the most direct and comprehensive political statement of the novel: “No amount of social justice will cure or disperse this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town. . . . all you can do is make them comfortable somehow, minimize their miseries” (*Saturday* 282). As his day ends, this vague yet confident statement is undermined by his fear: “He’s weak and ignorant, scared of the way consequences of an action leap away from your control . . . until you’re led to a place you never dreamed of and would never choose—a knife at the throat” (*Saturday* 287). These conflicting ideas are resolved, however, by Perowne’s final thoughts before sleep: as he holds Rosalind, he thinks “there’s always this,” and finally, “this day’s over” (*Saturday* 289). The implication seems to be that Perowne is closing the door on the eruptions and uncertainties of the day—it’s over—retreating instead to his divided world of family and professional life.

## McEwan as Expert Researcher

The central concerns of professionalism and expertise I have outlined in *Saturday* are not only confined to the plot of that individual novel. The prestige and celebrity of McEwan himself as a major literary author rests in no small way on his reputation for intensive, even scientific, research. McEwan's public persona, both in terms of his self-presentation and in the way he is portrayed by the publishing industry surrounding his various writings, consistently emphasizes his research, specifically his capacity to gain expertise in various areas through that research. In a sense, we might think of Perowne as an echo of McEwan himself not only by way of where he lives and by McEwan's admissions of similar views on the Iraq War protest, but also in his tendency to research an issue before coming to a conclusion or expressing his thoughts. McEwan's writing process is suffused with research through which he attempts to gain the expertise of his protagonists. For example, McEwan shadowed a neurosurgeon, Neil Kitchen, while preparing to write *Saturday*, becoming so familiar with the practice of neurosurgery that he allegedly walked senior medical students through operations Kitchen performed (Zalewski). Indeed, his acknowledgements for *Saturday* simultaneously thank Kitchen while noting the lengthy time spent learning from him: "It was a privilege to watch this gifted surgeon at work in the theatre over a period of two years, and I thank him for his kindness and patience in taking time out of a demanding schedule to explain to me the intricacies of his profession, and the brain" (*Saturday*). This statement acknowledges the skill of the professional McEwan was shadowing while also reinforcing his own dedication to his craft by including the extended time period he spent with him. In a profile written for the *New Yorker*, Daniel Zalewski notes that "McEwan's empirical

temperament distinguishes him from his friends Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, and Julian Barnes,” effectively marking McEwan out from his contemporaries by focusing on his habits and focus on technical explanations.

While *Saturday* spends a considerable number of pages detailing complex surgical procedures in medical terms outside the reach of the uninitiated layperson, McEwan’s demonstrations of his level of technical knowledge are not confined to the pages of his fiction. As Zalewski recalls, McEwan “punctuated his observations about *Homo sapiens* with the citation of a peer-reviewed experiment” during their conversations. As I mention in the introduction to this dissertation, John Marx has argued that Joseph Conrad, as a way of demonstrating the value of his work, especially by way of the gout that he suffered from, used “the trope of suffering to provide evidence of the specialized labor that went into his writing” (54). I want to make the case that McEwan pursues the same goal by way of different evidence: that of expert research. McEwan’s presentation of himself as a dedicated researcher operates as a proof of his expertise and his genuine literary powers. It has also occasionally been leveled at him as an accusation, as in the plagiarism accusations surrounding *Atonement*.<sup>4</sup> In an interview, McEwan describes the careful process of research for *Saturday*. “I started to hang out in the National Hospital in Central London,” he says, “asking questions first and then beginning

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<sup>4</sup> Not long after the publication of *Saturday*, though several years after the publication of the novel in question, McEwan was suspected of “copying phrases and sentences” from a 1977 memoir written by Lucilla Andrews, who as a wartime nurse bore at least a professional resemblance to *Atonement*’s Briony Tallis (Cowell). McEwan openly acknowledged a debt to Andrews in the author’s note for the novel, and subsequently in printed columns (he also acknowledged using his father’s memories of the war as inspiration). In another reinforcement of his self-presentation as a careful researcher, McEwan noted that “as one crosses and re-crosses the lines between fantasy and the historical record, one feels a weighty obligation to strict accuracy,” adding that he “know[s] well from researching *Saturday*, a novel about a neurosurgeon, that patient traumas, medical procedures, hospital routines or details of training demand the strictest factual accuracy” before detailing his discovery of Andrews’s memoir in a medical library (“An Inspiration”).

to spend time in the operating theatre” (Gregg). This shows McEwan as not entering the research process with any assumptions. It is also clear that the research itself is a primary goal for the author; this was not a short stint meant to add a few surgical terms to the novel, but was rather a formative element of the novel’s composition from the beginning. It is only after this early foundational work that McEwan began to understand this particular field: “Then I began to really exalt, once I understood a little more, in the expertise of these teams” (Gregg). McEwan’s immersion, then, allowed him to gain some measure of the expertise of his surgical patrons.

This research was all in service of what I take as the central element of *Saturday*, Perowne’s professional life. “I was keen on work,” McEwan notes: “I wanted this novel to have a really strong element of the sort of identity that comes from work: the self-esteem, the pleasures, as well as all the demands that people get from doing difficult work. And I really saw it, all those elements, in neurosurgery” (Gregg). This understanding of difficult work also dovetails with McEwan’s account of researching the novel: McEwan understands what it is to do difficult work not only from watching intricate surgeries, but from putting in the hours over a period of years, to do so, on top of the already large task of writing a novel. It also is clear that this type of intensive research is in service of what is predominantly a realist mode of writing in McEwan’s fiction; this is apparent both from the accurate, clinical descriptions in novels like *Saturday*, as well as McEwan’s own statements on fiction. Given McEwan’s scientific and empirical predilections, it is unsurprising that realism is his preferred mode of writing. Indeed, he has remarked on what he sees as its value even in the context of postmodern writing:

The recursive, or self-referential or intertextual in literature has to be embedded in the warmth of the real, the warmly living. Otherwise, it’s

dull and dry. In fact, all these elements that postmodern critics like to discuss only arise with any interest if they grow out of the effort, the sweat of passionate commitment to creating the humanly real—that’s when the business of making the artifice spills into the very thing it describes. (“Author Interview” 134)

Again, this statement subtly reinforces McEwan’s own abilities as an author; the implication is that he understands the difficult, heady work—the “sweat of passionate commitment”—that lies behind quality realism. But this statement also offers a view of what McEwan thinks a good literary writer *should* be doing. As in the example of the protesters, even if McEwan and his contemporaries are on the same side, so to speak, he maintains a view of how they should go about things.

McEwan’s opinions on literary writing extend into the public sphere in terms of the role of public intellectuals. When asked about the role of novelists in mass media, McEwan replies that “we have a noisy, opinion-rich media. Novelists, in one of the minor leagues of celebrity culture, can get drawn in to lend their voices to the babble. Sometimes I can’t resist—it’s too interesting—but mostly I say no” (“Author Interview” 136). This response, lumping together—not inaccurately—celebrity culture and mass media, notes the temptation to get involved, but his overall distaste for the “babble” of the media. In *The Economy of Prestige* (2005), James English operates under the “key assumption” that “every form of ‘capital’ everywhere exists not only in relation to one particular field, but in varying relations to all other fields and all other types of capital” (English 9-10). An important form of capital in English’s book is more or less in line with Bourdieu’s “cultural capital,” and English deploys it as part of his broader analysis of awards culture. McEwan’s statement reflects a deemphasizing of one form of cultural capital: fame and mass media celebrity status. At one level, this could be seen as a



Bourdieuian “strategy of condescension” which disparages a form of capital while simultaneously participating in it (English 189); I find that in this case, though, it is more useful to consider what is being left out of McEwan’s statement. That is, what is McEwan implicitly privileging by denigrating the celebrity culture element of mass media?

McEwan privileges particular forms of cultural capital, namely expertise, professionalism, and empiricism - and as a result has been able to negotiate his way into venues which might be otherwise off limits for a literary author. His statement on celebrities and mass media finds its unstated and privileged opposite in McEwan’s participation in more scientific venues than might be expected of someone immersed in literary culture. Alongside the thought that it might simply seem more professional to stay out of petty news blurb arguments, the “babble” could also be seen as being set unfavorably alongside something a book like *What We Believe but Cannot Prove*. *What We Believe but Cannot Prove* is a collection of short essays by dozens of thinkers, largely scientists, on precisely what the title suggests: what these notable authors believe despite not having irrefutable proof of. McEwan’s name simply being on this list is notable: dozens of thinkers, and McEwan, a novelist, is listed as one of the leading thinkers of today on science. He is also listed first on the back cover summary, alongside well-known names in the sciences like Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist, and Daniel C. Dennett, a cognitive scientist. McEwan, the literary novelist, not only has one of the short essays included in the collection, but has also written the introduction for the entire volume, where he makes such statements as “perhaps it was the greatest invention of all, greater than that of the wheel or agriculture, this slow elaboration of a thought system,

science, that has disproof at its heart and self-correction as its essential procedure” (McEwan, “Introduction” xiv). This is remarkable: a literary novelist writing the introduction for, and making large claims praising science, in a collection of essays by scientists.

It is no coincidence that McEwan, rather than, say, Martin Amis, was asked to be involved so heavily in a project like *What We Believe but Cannot Prove*: his status as a literary author or celebrity is infused with associations between his writing and empiricism, expertise, and research. McEwan’s portrayal of technical experts like Henry Perowne and Michael Beard reinforce the perception that he is a literary author who also possesses scientific expertise. It has become part of his identity as an author. Alan Sinfield’s definition of literature is relevant to this point:

Literature is an institutional arrangement we have made to dignify some writing (at the expense of others). This is not surprising or sinister: any culture will value some texts more highly than others. But finally we are talking about *authority claims*. To have your work accepted as art or literature, or to be judged an expert, is to gain a voice in a discourse with certain claims to significance. (31-2, emphasis in original)

Discussions of authors as authority figures or experts—for example, on the “human condition,” or the literary tradition itself—are fairly commonplace. What I take from McEwan, with *Saturday* as the most appropriate case study, is an example of how the discourse of literature is not a closed circle. Rather, McEwan’s portrayal of modern expertise and professionalism, along with his self-presentation as an expert researcher, cause he and his fiction both to be seen as extra-literary, in a sense. That is, *Saturday* is not only a literary novel by a Booker Prize winner, but it is also an examination of what it means to be a professional in post-Thatcherite England, which is written—crucially—by an author who makes particular appeals to expertise and empiricism, gaining cultural

capital not only in the literary world, but beyond. Sinfield observes that “literature is writing that is acknowledged as such within a powerful publishing, reviewing and educational apparatus” (33). We might see *Saturday*, then, not just as a novel about professionalism and expertise, but as part of a discourse about expertise surrounded by a second layer of discourse on the expertise of its author.

## 2. The Campus off Campus: *On Beauty*, Intellectuals, and Professional Jurisdiction

*There has been a striking change in the behavior of the intellectual class in recent years. The left intellectuals who 60 years ago would have been teaching in working class schools, writing books like "mathematics for the millions" (which made mathematics intelligible to millions of people), participating in and speaking for popular organizations, etc., are now largely disengaged from such activities, and although quick to tell us that they are far more radical than thou, are not to be found, it seems, when there is such an obvious and growing need and even explicit request for the work they could do out there in the world of people with live problems and concerns. That's not a small problem. (Noam Chomsky, "Postmodernism?")*

Late in Alan Hollinghurst's 2004 novel *The Line of Beauty*, Conservative MP Gerald Fedden and his wife Rachel receive a gift on their 25th wedding anniversary: a painting.<sup>1</sup> Gerald's reaction seems to accurately reflect the experience of looking at an unfamiliar gift while surrounded by an expectant audience: "Gerald said, 'You're too kind, really . . .'" and stared earnestly at the picture, hoping someone would say what it was" (317, ellipses original). A short summary of the painting's content follows, apparently from his point of view. Gerald's reaction is especially striking in that it is one of only a few times readers are allowed access to his thoughts; most of the rest of the novel is centered on the younger Nick Guest, a doctoral candidate in literature who punctuates his observations with impressive—even intimidating, I find—literacy in the arts. The distinction between the two characters is drawn more sharply when Nick accurately identifies the painting; when more guests arrive, Gerald shows them the painting, already misremembering the title, and remarks that upon looking at it he "can't

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<sup>1</sup> An apparently fictitious one by post-Impressionist Paul Gauguin: *Le Matin aux Champs*.

help thinking of our lovely walks in France’” (318). This experiential reading of art aligns Gerald with an unexpected associate: Kiki Belsey, of Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty* (2005). Kiki’s view of art is likewise appreciative and involves personal experience, though hers is perhaps a bit more imaginative (she imagines herself walking in a field when she looks at an Edward Hopper painting; Gerald only recalls a lived experience). The two characters, though separated by race, gender, and citizenship (Kiki is American), nonetheless cede ground to the artistic expertise of those around them: Gerald to Nick and his daughter Catherine, Kiki to her husband Howard and his humanities colleagues from Wellington College. An additional wrinkle of interest is that both of these characters would *seem* to occupy social positions that would make for familiarity with the arts: both live in economic comfort, are well-educated, and are surrounded by people who possess expert knowledge of the arts - yet each is peculiarly uncertain in speaking and thinking about it. The sense of unease experienced by figures like Gerald and Kiki is the starting point for this chapter’s analysis of fields and the professional jurisdiction of intellectuals in *On Beauty*.

*On Beauty*, the author’s third novel, is set in the fictional Boston suburb of Wellington, a college town hosting a university of the same name. The plot mostly revolves around two families, the Belseys and the Kippses, each headed by a British—Caribbean British in the case of Kipps—academic man and a nonacademic woman. Howard Belsey is an art historian specializing in Rembrandt, as is Montague Kipps; their similarities end here, with Howard as a left-leaning white academic and Montague (Monty) as a black conservative public figure. In the tradition of the campus novel, *On Beauty* features major characters who are college professors and administrators, yet

perhaps in contrast, most of its action takes place off campus, and many major characters are only associated with Wellington College through family ties. The plot mostly revolves around the Belseys, struggling to rebuild after a revelation prior to the plot that Howard had engaged in an affair (explained as a one night stand at a conference, but later revealed to be a lengthy affair with colleague Claire Malcolm).

It is abundantly clear that one of the major tensions in the novel is between Wellington the institution and what might be called the wider or outside world. At first glance it may also appear that *On Beauty* depicts Wellington as in line with the early wave of mid-twentieth century campus novels, which showed the campus “aiming to supplant,” or at least threatening to supplant, the outside world (Trask 52). This tendency of the classic campus novel hits close to the mark for *On Beauty*, though it is important to recognize that the novel does not lay out a simple binary between the campus and the world outside. *On Beauty* goes to great lengths to lay out and complicate the various intersections between an institution of higher learning, with all its administrators, faculty, and staff, and the contentious issues from the world “outside” that it both encroaches on and is invaded by. These intersections certainly include the triple cultural studies foci of race, class, and gender—race especially—but these in turn are in tension with the professional lives of Wellingtonians, professional lives that raise questions about knowledge and intellectualism: what demarcates the cultural boundary between Wellington the college and Wellington the surrounding community? This is best seen by looking closely at a combination of characters characters who are 1) embedded in the institution, like Howard; 2) depicted as standing outside it, like Kiki; and 3) like Claire, those who seem to uneasily straddle the boundary between Wellington the campus and

Wellington the city (and by extension the greater Boston area). The disputes between these characters take the form of contesting different forms of knowledge; as Kiki asks: “You know what’s weird? Is that you can get someone who is a professor in one thing and then is just so *intensely stupid* about everything else?” (*On Beauty* 15, emphasis in original). The dichotomy Kiki notes between Howard’s specialized, theoretical knowledge—represented by his post as an art historian—on the one hand, and the practical, “real-world” applicable knowledge she cites in this argument about parenting sets the stage for much of what follows.

The limits that Howard’s field-specific knowledge apparently puts on his knowledge of “everything else” is, I think, a historically situated element of *On Beauty* as a contemporary form of campus novel. The history of colleges since World War II, particularly American colleges, helps draw out a number of threads from this wide-ranging novel with its almost overwhelming number of major characters. Richard Ohmann writes that during the Cold War, English and related humanities fields—the disciplines *On Beauty* is most concerned with—“were for the advancement of knowledge, *trust in expertise*, professional autonomy, cultivation of the individual . . . and so on; these attitudes put us at ease in the liberal universities that employed us” (80, my emphasis). Further, “we held that our work for Culture was in the *real* interest of American society. If only it would pay attention we could help raise it out of the commercial crassness and and jingoistic anti-intellectualism that somehow kept diverting it from a nobler historical mission” (80, emphasis in original). These apparently naive dreams have since eroded in the wake of the Reagan and Thatcher governments, producing what Jeffrey J. Williams calls the “post welfare-state university”: “Although

some of the terms are still fuzzy, the university was part of the strategic defunding of the welfare state from the Reagan Era onwards, and universities have come to operate more as self-sustaining private entities than as subsidized public ones” (Williams 195).<sup>2</sup> The autonomy of the individual as worker, particularly the expert knowledge workers that Ohmann describes, may be read as eventually fueling the increasingly privatized university detailed by Williams--a snug fit in the neoliberal market economies that have become so dominant around the globe.

Narrow disciplinary knowledges like Howard’s, exacerbated by the tendencies of the post welfare-state university, are in line with what Bourdieu describes as the “specific logic of a field [which] is established in the incorporated state in the form of a specific habitus, or, more precisely, a sense of the game, ordinarily described as a ‘spirit’ or ‘sense’ (‘philosophical,’ ‘literary,’ ‘artistic,’ etc)” (*Pascalian* 11). I read Howard’s separation from and lack of knowledge of “real world” concerns as emblematic of Bourdieu’s conception of fields while being conditioned by historical shifts in higher education and culture; if Howard seems out of touch, as Kiki suggests, it is the result of both his professional training in an era of more openly radical politics and his failure to adapt the knowledge that training has wrought to the present moment. Race is of special significance in the cultural complications that serve as stumbling blocks for Howard, and it is race which serves as the primary device through which Smith inserts politics into the novel: from debates over affirmative action to the plight of Haitian immigrants in largely white Wellington (and Haiti itself). The clash between Howard’s and Monty’s views of the world, and the intimate look readers get at Howard’s inability to effectively engage

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<sup>2</sup> I reference both Reagan and Thatcher not only due to the innumerable parallels between their ideological stances and policies but also because *On Beauty* splits its setting between the United States and England.



with the issues they raise in is one way the novel examines professional intellectuals in higher education and contemporary culture in the US and UK.

Through analyses of Claire, Kiki, Howard, and ultimately Smith herself, this chapter shows how *On Beauty* reveals a deep suspicion of academics while still maintaining some admiration for higher education itself. Drawing on theorists from sociology, intellectual history, and literary criticism, I argue that rather than cultivating a genuine and informed appreciation of beauty—and perhaps contemporary culture, by extension—in themselves and their students, experts in the novel use their professional jurisdiction to stake a claim on field-specific authority while cutting themselves off from “the world outside” the campus. In addition to this separation, academics—aggressively in Howard’s case and more subtly in Claire Malcolm’s—undermine the ability of others to gain authority and professionalize; in a particularly striking scene, one student gains literal authority by earning a section of the novel written from her point of view before dropping from the novel entirely due to Howard’s pedagogical failures. This argument is reinforced by Smith’s own public engagement with universities, which I read as reluctant acceptance: she currently teaches at New York University while simultaneously keeping her work in the American creative writing program at a qualified distance in interviews and other appearances, developing a public persona that resists the disciplinary trends outlined in Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era* (2009).

### **Cultural Authority and Professional Jurisdiction in *On Beauty***

This chapter draws on many secondary sources, but is particularly informed by the work of three figures: Stefan Collini, a professor of literature and intellectual history, Andrew Abbott, the most well-known sociologist of professionalism, and Pierre

Bourdieu. Despite his somewhat antagonistic stance toward the sociology I also draw on, I have found Collini's work on intellectuals to be a useful backdrop to my analysis of *On Beauty*.<sup>3</sup> In *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (2006), Collini "attends to the mechanisms by which a culture enables some figures to *combine* being recognized as having attained a certain level of intellectual or cultural distinction *with* addressing non-specialist audiences on matters of general concern" (7, emphasis in original). While somewhat tautological—intellectuals are those who "attained a certain level of intellectual . . . distinction"—this brief statement does usefully break down the lengthy study of the intellectual which Collini embarks on. Collini is primarily concerned with what he terms the "cultural sense" of the intellectual, rather than a sociological or attitudinal sense. This cultural sense "focuses on those who are regarded as possessing some kind of 'cultural authority,' that is, who deploy an acknowledged intellectual position or achievement in addressing a broader, non-specialist public" (Collini 47). The relationship Collini posits between an expert knowledge worker and a non-specialist audience is the key to his theory. As Collini puts it:

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<sup>3</sup> Collini worries that Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is "narrowly economic" (57). However, Bourdieu's goal is not to funnel cultural authority into a constraining economic formulation, but quite the opposite. In describing the development and "autonomization" of the various fields (ie scientific, literary, philosophical), Bourdieu argues that the "symbolic activities" of the fields "always have a denied economic dimension," a repression particularly relevant in culturally centered fields like the humanities, which are presented as ends in themselves (Bourdieu, *Pascalian* 19). That is, Bourdieu "does not assume that an economic account of classes is sufficient in itself. Such an account would omit precisely what in Bourdieu's theory is 'cultural'" (Guillory viii). To argue that forms of cultural authority are better understood "on their own terms," as Collini wishes, necessitates a complete rejection of Bourdieu's theory of capital, as the economic dimension is inextricably tied to the cultural; it is inscribed in the very concept itself (Collini 57). This may indeed be a move Collini is willing to make, but I find that Bourdieu's use of cultural capital, as well as field and habitus, remain too useful to simply bypass. Indeed, cultural capital is particularly relevant when it comes to education and academia: Bourdieu notes that his conception of cultural capital, used at first as an explanation for unequal scholastic achievement between classes, grew from a realization that a failure "to relate scholastic investment strategies to the whole set of educational strategies" allows for "the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital," to remain unexamined (Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital" 243-4).

Here, not *all* those who engage in ‘intellectual occupations,’ even in the narrowest version of that sociological category, nor all those disposed to interest themselves in cultural activities, are termed ‘intellectuals’: they must also be recognized as having acquired a certain standing in society which is taken to license them, or at least to provide them with opportunities, to address a wider public than that at which their occupational activity is aimed. (47)

In Collini’s formulation, then, an academic or professor does not automatically qualify for status as an intellectual by way of their expertise; an intellectual must have some level of public recognition and be able to communicate their expertise to that audience. An intellectual under this rubric has cultural authority; for Collini, intellectual is essentially shorthand for “public intellectual.” For the purpose of clarity, my use of “intellectual” in this chapter can be also be taken as aligned with Collini’s theory unless otherwise qualified.

Preliminarily, Collini’s cultural theory of the intellectual provides a way to theorize a crucial distinction between Howard and Monty; both would be seen sociologically—occupationally—as intellectuals, yet only Monty is a culturally recognized intellectual, which clearly plays a role in the troubled relationship between the two scholars. Of particular interest is Collini’s characterisation of public perceptions of intellectuals: “the very word irritates people. They sense pretentiousness, arrogance: on most of its outings, ‘so-called’ travels with it like a bodyguard, never far away even if not immediately in view” (Collini 2). Perhaps it is surprising, then, that Howard, not Monty, is the character most vilified for pretentiousness in *On Beauty*. It is Monty who both possesses the cultural authority of the Collini intellectual and the accompanying successful relationship with a wider public outside the university, seen most clearly by his book on Rembrandt, a potential bestseller whose anticipated success drives Howard to publish an inflammatory critique of a Monty Kipps article on a Rembrandt portrait.

Howard's article prompts a devastating rejoinder by Monty: "Even given the extreme poverty of the arguments offered, the whole would of course be a great deal more compelling if Belsey knew to which painting I was referring. In his letter he directs his attacks at the *Self-portrait* of 1629. . . . Unfortunately for him I make it more than clear in my article that the painting under discussion is the *Self-portrait with Lace Collar*" (Smith, *On Beauty* 28). The combination of Monty's rising fame and Howard's embarrassing error and lack of scholarly output virtually guarantees a continuation and expansion of the gap in prestige between the two, and the attendant cultural authority Collini outlines.

Cultural authority can certainly be read as reliant on performance: the intellectual must publicly demonstrate their authority to speak on matters of public concern in a convincing fashion. This is troublesome for Howard, especially considering that status as an intellectual is also reliant on a kind of professional foundation; that is, in order for one to be an intellectual and foster such a relationship with a public, one must first develop in a field. As noted above, Collini writes that to be an intellectual one "must *also* be recognized as having acquired a certain standing in society"; the relationship with a public is thus supplemental, and will not stand without professional grounding (47, my emphasis). With this in mind, we might read Howard's attempts at advancement as misguided attempts to be an intellectual: he goes through the performative motions but lacks a fully developed professional ethos: at some level, he is missing an authenticity perceived by a public. Howard's hostility to mainstream art and culture might also be connected to the "denied economic dimension" Bourdieu identifies in certain fields; Howard's elitist stance against the major figures of culture, from Mozart to Rembrandt,

functions as his striving toward a kind of pure intellectualism that effaces concern with capital - but he still wants to be tenured (Bourdieu, *Pascalian* 19).

Another concept this chapter draws on, related to cultural authority, is sociologist Andrew Abbott's concept of jurisdiction, the foundation of what he calls "the system of professions." For Abbott, jurisdiction in the professional sense involves occupational groups' "control [of] knowledge and skill," accomplished through control of both technique and abstractions; the grounds of this control are often contested, resulting in professions continually vying for jurisdictional control through the act of work (Abbott 8). The common point at which Collini and Abbott meet is in the effect cultural attitudes have on both intellectuals and professions. Both rely on the assumption that intellectuals on the one hand and professions on the other are always in a process of legitimizing their work and status. Indeed, I see jurisdiction as one way of synthesizing Collini's intellectuals and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. For Bourdieu, any form of capital is "accumulated labor" which allows individuals or groups "to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital 241). Capital can appear in economic, cultural, or social guises, the latter two "convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital" ("Forms of Capital 243). As theorists and historians have demonstrated, the concept of cultural capital is eminently useful for examining professions. Harold Perkin argues that theories of human and cultural capital wrongly "assume that investment in specialized training *of itself* yields a differential return without any control of the market" (*Rise of Professional Society* 7). "Professional control of the market," then, or jurisdictional dominance, is the necessary "transforming device"

through which cultural capital channels its value (Perkin, *Rise of Professional Society* 7).<sup>4</sup> In Bourdieusian terms, this is a conversion of capital from one form to another. Collini's and Abbott's theories come closest to intersecting on the subject of academia. When Collini writes that "the term 'intellectual' should be understood as describing performance in a role or, more exactly, a structure of relations," we should also call to mind Abbott's discussion of the "academic, abstract knowledge system," which is "universally important throughout the professions. It is therefore not surprising that jurisdictional assaults are often directed at the academic level" (Collini 57, Abbott 55). Abbott argues that "the true use of academic professional knowledge is less practical than symbolic. . . . Academic professionals demonstrate the rigor, the clarity, and the scientifically logical character of professional work, thereby legitimating that work in the context of larger values" (54). Academics' ability to "demonstrate" suggests the broader public stressed by Collini, while "legitimating" for "larger values" connects to Bourdieu's conversion of cultural capital. Keeping these statements on the performative aspects of intellectualism and the symbolic capital of academic professions in mind is one way I attempt to avoid merely generalizing about professionalism; this analysis, while taking some cues from broader arguments about the professions, remains focused on the academic professions, by far the most prevalent in *On Beauty*. The academy, particularly the humanities, which Thorstein Veblen associated over a century ago with what he labeled the "conspicuous uselessness of education," represents for many a culture of

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<sup>4</sup> Perkin goes on to put this under a lens opposed to traditional economic class models. "A professional society," he argues, "is not merely the old class society fitted out with a new ruling class" (*Rise of Professional Society* 9). Quite in line with Abbott, Perkins's theory makes the case that "the matrix of the new society is the vertical career hierarchy rather than the horizontal connection of class, and social conflict . . . takes the form of a competition for resources between rival interest groups" (*Rise of Professional Society* 9).

contemplation and a rejection of industrious efficiency, criticizing the outside world but producing little of utility (Veblen 93). One could be forgiven for describing Howard Belsey, whose book critiquing Rembrandt has been in a state of arrested development for years, remaining “unfinished and strewn across the floor before his printer on pages that seemed to him sometimes to have been spewed from the machine in disgust,” in the same manner (Smith, *On Beauty* 21).

As his older son Jerome says, Howard is “someone who says *no* to the world,” an observation that carries implications for Howard’s jurisdictional appeals for intellectual standing (Smith, *On Beauty* 236, emphasis in original). On the subject of addressing a public, Collini makes the crucial qualification that “a public, as the term is used here, must have, in some form, the properties of being open, impersonal, and ‘non-specialist’” (55). The idea of a “non-specialist” public stressed by Collini inserts a complication between a broader public and Howard’s academic audience. Howard’s failure to develop intellectual status rests precisely on the root of the academic stereotype itself: the inability to make his academic work even somewhat comprehensible to non-specialists. This is evident in his relationship with his own immediate family. On Howard’s staunch opposition to representational art, Jerome can only say that “he won’t even let her [Kiki] have a painting she likes in the house. Because of some deranged theory in his head, everybody else has to suffer” (Smith, *On Beauty* 236). It is clear throughout the novel that Howard’s family does not understand his perspective on art; for someone whose profession carries enough weight in his life that it determines home decor, and whose profession also involves teaching, Howard is remarkably bad at explaining himself. Howard’s communicative shortcomings are also on display in a crucial section of the

novel focused on his teaching, which is shown to have alienated a promising student, and will be detailed below. I begin, though, by turning to two characters whose very different relationships to Wellington helps illuminate the novel's stance toward academics and intellectuals: Claire Malcolm, a professor who occupies her academic post with great unease, and Kiki, who stands outside the college yet remains connected to it by proximity and family.

### **Anti- and uncertain intellectuals**

*On Beauty* is not just populated by university faculty who seem to have comfortably bought into the university way of life; a number of characters in the novel take ambivalent and sometimes even hostile stances toward Wellington; Claire Malcolm, a professor of creative writing, is the former. Claire has a complex relationship with the Wellington campus, which often takes the form of her appreciation for the people of Wellington but animus toward the institution.<sup>5</sup> As Gemma Lopez notes, “when Claire’s poetic production is evidenced not to be in tune with her youngest readers anymore, neither poetry nor readers but the institution alone is seen to blame” (Lopez 360). Lopez references here a salient passage from *On Beauty* in which Claire and Zora are, while dining before performances begin at the Bus Stop, having a discussion about nature and the pastoral as a poetic theme, an omnipresent subject in Claire’s own recent poetry. Zora, frustrated that Claire, her creative writing professor, “didn’t know anything about theorists, or ideas, or the latest thinking,” makes a vague reference to Foucault, at which point Claire “felt very tired. She was a poet. How had she ever ended up here, in one of

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<sup>5</sup> Though it is tempting to identify Smith with her fellow creative writing professor counterpart, I find that her own view seems to be closer to the opposite of Claire’s, as I detail below.



these institutions, these universities, where one must make an argument for everything, even an argument for wanting to write about a chestnut tree?” (Smith, *On Beauty* 218-9). Most damningly, Zora “suspected her of being barely intellectual” (Smith, *On Beauty* 219). And indeed, Claire’s sudden fatigue is prefaced by her recognition that she and Zora are “having an intellectual argument” (Smith, *On Beauty* 219). She is only saved from the unwelcome foray into theory by the entrance of Zora’s younger brother Levi, whose appearance cuts the academic conversation short. The diversion of Levi (welcomed by Claire, who takes the opportunity to change the subject by complimenting his physique) both gives Claire an out from the drudgery of academic argument and returns the conversation to the performers at the venue, one of whom ends up being Levi himself. Aligning himself with a group of Haitian immigrants, Levi works as a hype man during their injustice-themed performance. Levi, who has the “judicious ability to see both sides of a thing,” may offer a clue to understanding why Claire is drawn to these performances (Smith, *On Beauty* 219).

As a character, Claire Malcolm both invites and complicates the idea of Wellington the campus encroaching on the surrounding city or wider world. On one hand, Claire is one of the most direct representatives of a Wellington (the institution) aggressively seeking to incorporate elements of the world outside: her trip to the Bus Stop results in Carl being directly enfolded into the university campus. Lopez argues that Claire is looking for “a place where academia might be connected to life at large,” and that “this is one of the reasons why she takes all her poetry students to rap events at . . . The Bus Stop” (361). I find this a reasonable hypothesis, but it is questionable that there is much textual evidence of this being a motivation for Claire, particularly given her

fatigue of academic arguments discussed above. If anything, Claire tires of the university students themselves—students like Zora—and is looking for a different sort of population, with Carl as archetype. Her students mostly trash the performances: “In the spirit of pedagogy she tried to encourage them to be less abusive, more specific. She was only partly successful in this” (Smith, *On Beauty* 220). But Carl gets a different reaction from both the students and Claire herself. One of the students likens him to “Keats with a knapsack,” and his performance is impressive enough that Claire looks to bring him directly into her Wellington class, asking ““Are you interested in refining what you have?”” (Smith, *On Beauty* 230, 232). Lopez, in acknowledging this exchange, more or less reverses course on Claire as searching for an ideal location of connection between the college and the city: it “makes one wonder whether his assimilation into the poetry class may be an honest gesture to bring the institution into direct contact with the ‘real world’ or, rather, as Claire herself states, an opportunity for the young man to refine ‘what [he] has.’ The use of the term ‘refining’ here remains disturbingly problematic” (Lopez 361). The latter certainly seems more accurate: Claire is really scouting for talent. In other words, Claire is not looking to connect the campus with the city, but to take elements of the city into the campus, to slot a new kind of student into place. As Lopez implies, Claire’s refinement of Carl’s material (and one might reasonably ask if this is also a refinement of Carl himself) carries patronizing undertones. When Claire recruits Zora to speak at a faculty meeting in support of Carl and other technically unregistered students attending her class, she says: ““when I think of Carl, I think of *someone who doesn’t have a voice* and who needs someone like you . . . to speak *for him*”” (263, my emphasis). The irony of Carl, whose spoken-word performance powerfully arrested the

attention of Claire and all of her students, as voiceless undercuts Claire's perspective here. The implication is really not that Carl doesn't have a voice; rather, Carl doesn't have a voice that fits within the strict discursive conventions of Wellington the institution: the voice of an academic professional with a jurisdictional claim. This issue has been of enduring concern in Smith's fiction: in her 2013 novella *The Embassy of Cambodia*, it takes the form of a narrative question when the narrator remarks that they "have been chosen to speak for" the people of Willesden, "though they did not choose me and must wonder what gives me the right" (40).<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, if one of the running motifs of this dissertation is ambivalence toward institutions of expertise, then certainly Claire can be read as having an ambivalent relationship with Wellington; in this case, the issue can be clarified by considering her unease alongside professional jurisdiction. If "the academics use their intellects to avoid the power of art," then Claire seems to occupy an unstable position, with one foot in each camp (Mullan). In an early scene, just before Kiki discovers Howard's infidelity with Claire, a somewhat tipsy Claire admits at the Belsey anniversary party that she thinks all of Howard and Monty's "silly ideological battles. . . . don't really matter. The country's got bigger fish to fry now. Bigger ideas . . . are *afoot*. . . . Sometimes I don't even know why I stay here" (Smith, *On Beauty* 120, emphasis in original). She goes on to say that "there's just no point" (120). When Howard makes the case for the professoriate as intellectual vanguard ("We produce new ways of thinking, then other people think it"),

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<sup>6</sup> *The Embassy of Cambodia* is also in large part concerned with knowledge. For example, Andrew, friend of protagonist Fatou, places himself as a center of knowledge that she might access (but only through him): "I told you before, anything you want to know about, ask me—I'll look it up, I'll do the research. I have access. Then I'll bring it to you" (*Embassy* 31).

Claire responds with “You don’t believe that” (120).<sup>7</sup> Claire is an interesting counterpoint to Henry Perowne of McEwan’s *Saturday*. “Small-scale politics bored” Claire; “she detested committees and meetings” and instead “liked to go on marches and to sign petitions” (Smith, *On Beauty* 121). In contrast, Perowne takes a skeptical stance toward protesters in London, doubting that “big ideas” hold any cachet, and declares that “the world must improve, if at all, by tiny steps” (McEwan, *Saturday* 74). It is not apparent whether the bigger ideas Claire is concerned with are those of the United States government or of the populace at large; her followup implies, however, that it is the latter, and that university faculty are in no position to make the large-scale maneuvers and effect the major changes she sees as desirable—hence her proclivity for protest movements. Perhaps unexpectedly, then, when it comes to political outlook, Howard, the radical academic, has more in common with Perowne, the scientist, consummate professional, and occupant of the political middle ground, than his own humanities colleague. The similarities between Perowne and Howard have not gone unnoticed, as both characters’ “inability to connect with beauty and its representative in the social world—art—is implicated in their inattention to the humanity of others and their limited view of the world” (Wall 758).<sup>8</sup> This is jurisdiction coming into play, recalling again Abbott’s casting of academic professionals as legitimizing their work through demonstrations of rigor and scientific logic, even outside strictly scientific disciplines, as “this task exists even in professions where the central values are not of efficiency but,

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, Howard replies with a flaccid postmodern rebuttal (“Define *believe*.”), precisely the sort of dialogue Claire is so weary of in the first place (Smith, *On Beauty* 120, emphasis original).

<sup>8</sup> This should be qualified by noting that each does connect with beauty in a limited sort of way: Howard with physical, carnal beauty and Henry with music.

say, of beauty” (Abbott 54). Claire’s frustration can be clarified as difficulty in reconciling the jurisdictional boundaries of her professional life.

Claire and Howard’s jurisdictional argument over what Wellington’s and its faculty’s role in the wider world (and how the wider world or culture views and reacts to them) highlights their very different levels of comfort in academia. Claire pines for direct action with results, while Howard is at home with the “small-scale politics” Claire has had enough of.<sup>9</sup> It also has implications for the battle between Howard and Kipps: Howard wants the identity of the college, one that is amenable to his own values and which he sees Kipps as threatening, to be retained. As he asks exasperatedly in a faculty meeting, ““Is there anything in this university that Professor Kipps is *not* on a crusade against?”” (329, emphasis in original). If Howard is part of the intellectual vanguard, he does not want it tainted by Kipps’s conservatism muddying the waters. Howard wants to “change the culture” only outside the university, and it is clear that his thinking on this point is only at the level of abstraction; he is at home with the culture of Wellington the institution, and he is staking a claim on professional identity for himself within it just as Claire moves to reinvent the university through her class’s outreach to the community and enrollment of unregistered students. When it comes to Wellington, then, it is Howard who is conservative. However, changing the culture rests on having some kind of relationship with a public; in order to stymie Kipps’s influence, he enters a jurisdictional squabble with him over the lecture series, a disagreement that has as its stakes the identity of the college, but also Howard’s authority in the field. If he is able to access and approve

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, direct action is precisely what Howard recommends to Levi when it comes to changing his work environment; this can be read as part of Howard’s devil’s advocate inconsistency, but I think it instead reflects his satisfaction with Wellington/campus culture - he sees no need for change in that arena (Smith, *On Beauty* 181).

them (no doubt with major revisions), Howard will have placed himself in a position of superiority over Kipps even if it ends up going no further than the academic sphere. It is just these kind of arguments that Claire sees as petty and disconnected from the world outside the university.

As implied by her weariness with stultifying academic discourse, part of Claire longs for the more direct appreciation of art, poetry, and beauty embodied (literally) by Kiki, whose appearance Claire compliments at seemingly every opportunity. There are several reasons Claire might compliment Kiki in this way, most obviously that after her affair with Howard, she might flatter Kiki out of a sense of guilt. But Claire's motives are not so simple, nor so cynical, something which is clarified by her recollection of early encounters with Kiki. As an old friend of Howard's Claire remembers what Kiki was like when the two began dating, and "at that time her beauty was awesome, almost unspeakable, but more than this she radiated an essential female nature Claire had already imagined in her poetry—natural, honest, powerful, unmediated, full of something like genuine desire. A goddess of the everyday" (Smith, *On Beauty* 227). More than that, "for Claire, Kiki was not only evidence of Howard's humanity but proof that a new kind of woman had come into the world as promised, as advertised" (Smith, *On Beauty* 227). Here, Kiki not only represents femaleness, she does so in a way so powerful to Claire that it also proves Howard's humanity; Howard, the otherwise pure academic, is brought back to earth in this imagining by Kiki's everyday goodness. Claire's admiration of Kiki, then, long precedes any real or imaginative affair with Howard, and though I examine Kiki's views of art, it is also significant that Kiki herself embodies for Claire a particular beauty—"almost unspeakable"—that connects with Claire's own poetry and views of art.

Kiki's position outside of the campus world also divorces her from the jurisdictional arguments about the university's relationship to culture; Kiki *is* the culture for Claire.

Both Claire and Howard have a way of reading and interpreting Kiki visually, as an object of study. Claire has a tendency to enthusiastically comment on the physical attributes of those who seem to stand outside the campus in general. She uses Levi's entrance at the Bus Stop to compliment his physique—"My *God*. Look at you! So *that's* what all that swimming is for. You're *huge!*"—and divert the conversation from academic debate (219, emphasis in original). Claire's commentary on Kiki's appearance comes with a twist: an apparently unconscious association with the natural world, the beloved subject of Claire's recent poetry. When the two women first encounter each other in the novel, Claire observes that "the sun is a *lemon* today, it *is*. It's like a huge lemon-drop. *God*, it's incredible" (Smith, *On Beauty* 52, emphasis in original). Almost in the same breath, Claire tells Kiki that she looks "marvellous": "What an outfit! It's like a sunset - the red, the yellow, the orangey-brown - Keeks, you're *setting*" (52, emphasis in original). The association is apparently unnoticed by both parties, though is unsurprising in the context of Claire's recollection of her first meetings with Kiki, when she "radiated," sun-like, an "essential female *nature*" (227, my emphasis). Claire's fascinated view of Kiki is strangely reminiscent of Londoners' views of Sara Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus," at the turn of the nineteenth century: an "extraordinary object of nature," one who appeared "at once so sexual with her large breasts and bottom, yet so different" from contemporary "feminine standards" (Crais and Scully 80). If we take Claire's view as corollary, Kiki's "proving" of Howard's humanity would be by racist juxtaposition. It seems less facile to me, however, to read Claire's professional work as a

poet as interfacing with her relationships while being conditioned by the sort of unconscious racial bias that affects her view of Carl; the subject matter of her poetry is a common topic of conversation with Claire, whether she is talking to Kiki or not. This leaking of professional standards into views of Kiki occurs with Howard as well, but in a different form. Kiki, in possession of some kind of bodily excess, as though a representative of eros in Claire's poetic imagination—or a work of art subject to differing interpretations—is seen rather differently by Howard; the reader is given a clue to how Howard's own scholarly work is embedded in his perceptions when Kiki “turned to her husband with a thesis for a face, of which only Howard could know every line and reference” (Smith, *On Beauty* 14).<sup>10</sup>

These different views of Kiki from two different academics, of course, share the subject of their gaze. There is something about Kiki that seems to invite other characters to read things *onto* her. As Kathleen Wall astutely points out, even the narrator is not exempt, as in the opening exposition that casts “our first vision of Kiki” as a painting: “Light struck the double glass doors that led to the garden, filtering through the arch that split the kitchen. It rested softly upon the still life of Kiki at the breakfast table, motionless, reading” (Wall 771, Smith 8). When it comes to characters looking at Kiki, there is a racial component to the phenomenon as well, a component Kiki is well aware of.<sup>11</sup> When Claire's husband Warren bumps into her just before the meeting with Claire, Kiki reflects on his perception of her:

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<sup>10</sup> The well-endowed Howard can also be read as being in possession of bodily excess, though it is only a minor note in the novel in comparison to the numerous detailed descriptions of Kiki's body (which is perhaps the point).

<sup>11</sup> Carl may also be subjected to Claire's gaze, along with that of her students, during his performance. For a “Keats with a knapsack,” the lyrics Smith gives Carl seem decidedly unimpressive. A sample couplet: “But you already spoke with yo' girls at work / And done decided I'm a jerk” (230). The song, about a girlfriend who decided to have an abortion without consulting him, seems at least as much defined by the



When you are no longer in the sexual universe - when you are supposedly too old, or too big, or simply no longer thought of in that way - apparently a whole new range of male reactions to you come into play. One of them is humour. They find you funny. But then, thought Kiki, they were brought up that way, these white American boys: I'm the Aunt Jemima on the cookie boxes of their childhoods, the pair of thick ankles Tom and Jerry played around. (51)

Kiki's cultural reading of Warren's gaze suggests a sophistication she is unwilling or unable to take credit for elsewhere in the novel; both in conversations and in her own thoughts, Kiki identifies herself definitively as non-academic and non-intellectual.<sup>12</sup>

However, it is clear that Kiki possesses a complex understanding of the interplay of race, gender, and age as shaping the perceptions of people like Warren and Claire. Kiki is empathetic, then, but not blindly or simply on principle; her knowledge is not institutionalized like Howard's, Claire's or Warren's, but she is able to perceptively read, at a minimum, the views and reactions of those around her, and from an identity politics framework which would no doubt be championed by the Wellington professoriate (if they were not the target of the critique).

Kiki's interpersonal understanding also supports a reading of *On Beauty* as concerned with separate spheres demarcated by fields, with Kiki's social and real-world knowledge clashing with Howard's and Wellington's field-oriented theoretical expertise. This is perhaps best illustrated by she and Howard's contrasting stances toward art. Kiki

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performance—the rhymes are “completed without obvious pause for breath, and at incredible speed”—as by its content (230). A performer dropped back “in the plebeian world of his public,” his potential in Claire's eye may be as much the result of his embodied charisma as his words; the refinement Claire offers might then be read as a way to clean up his language in order for it to catch up with a kind of “it” factor seen in his physicality and delivery (Smith, *On Beauty* 232). Less charitably, we might read Claire and her students as casting Carl in the racist role of surprisingly eloquent black man and member of the lower classes. . .

<sup>12</sup> Kiki's discovery of Howard's infidelity with Claire is also relevant here, when her modesty belies an adept interpersonal understanding. The first time Kiki sees the pair talking together after the affair, her judgment is “so quick and yet so absolute - the deception was over” without so much as a word being exchanged (Smith, *On Beauty* 121).

certainly enjoys art, marveling when she learns that the Kippses have Edward Hopper paintings in one of their homes: “Oh, my God - I love Edward Hopper. I can’t believe that! he floors me. Imagine having things like that in your own private home” (Smith, *On Beauty* 266, emphasis in original). Kiki’s enthusiasm belies the fact that she is married to an art history professor; it is easy to imagine a Hopper painting on a wall in the Belsey home were it not for Howard’s intractable views. While Kiki admires Hopper’s *Road in Maine* for the way it massages her imagination—“I was moseying along counting those posts. With no idea where I was going. No family. No responsibilities. Wouldn’t that be fine?”—Howard views art only as an object of critical study (268). Kiki’s perception is experiential, much like Gerald Fedden’s in *The Line of Beauty*, as discussed in this chapter’s opening paragraph. Howard, though, according to Zora, is “into the whole evisceration theory . . . like art should rip your fucking guts out”; art is a “Western myth” (*On Beauty* 114, 155). The seemingly irreconcilable differences between these Kiki and Howard’s reactions to art offer a fairly clear example of what Bourdieu has called “the distortions linked to membership of a field” (*Pascalian* 11). “Entry into a scholastic universe,” Bourdieu argues, “presupposes a suspension of the presuppositions of common sense and a *para-doxal* commitment to a more or less radically new set of presuppositions, linked to the discovery of stakes and demands neither known nor understood by ordinary experience” (*Pascalian* 11). Kiki’s view is emblematic of ordinary experience, both as an immediate experience of art and the way it draws on lived experience—an aimless and relaxing walk—as its own appeal. Howard’s on the other hand, is significantly more opaque to the layperson; we might take as evidence for its

irreconcilability with ordinary experience the dwindling enrollment in his Rembrandt class.<sup>13</sup>

### **Howard, race, and Wellington culture**

Howard's lack of engagement with the world outside Wellington is represented in one sense by his relationship with race; in the novel, race and various political stances toward it serves a stumbling block that brings even those characters dedicated to the same field into conflict. *On Beauty* portrays a great deal of conflict between experts in various fields, but race is a pressure cooker even within them. Crucially, the racial component of Howard's affair with Claire is lost on him, while Kiki points out that Claire is a "tiny little white woman I could fit in my *pocket*" (Smith, *On Beauty* 206). Kiki's frustration with life in Wellington boils over during this argument:

'You don't even notice it - you *never* notice. You think it's normal. Everywhere we go, I'm alone in this . . . this *sea* of white. I don't see any black folk unless they be cleaning under my feet in the fucking café in your *fucking* college. Or pushing a fucking hospital bed through a corridor. I *staked my whole life* on you.' (206, emphasis original).

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<sup>13</sup> Levi, Howard and Kiki's youngest son, is another character who is on rather uncertain terms with Wellington, and as a result seems to struggle with himself over the best avenues to gain access to knowledge: traditional learning or "street" experience. Levi is a "fair-weather friend" when it comes to a book on his friend's native Haiti, and he "need only leave the book . . . in a forgotten knapsack in his closet for a week, and the whole island and its history grew obscure to him once more" (Smith, *On Beauty* 355). This is reminiscent of Max Weber's statement that the "difference between an amateur and an expert is . . . that the amateur lacks a tried and tested method of working" (8-9). But Levi's views rest largely on valuing authenticity. When Carl explains that he has not been making music much since being hired, and rarely visits the bus stop, Levi thinks that "feckless brothers like Carl just didn't impress him any more. Levi Belsey has moved on to the next level" (Smith, *On Beauty* 389). In Levi's eyes, Carl has gone from street performer, an authentic expresser of culture, to a curator of a library section nobody really even visits. Levi's encounter with Carl and his recognition that Carl is no longer an actor in the culture of the bus stop and its surroundings precipitates his own decision to act by stealing a Haitian painting from Monty Kipps's office. Unintended consequences aside, Levi makes things happen, and this is a direct result of his repudiation of Wellington's campus culture: academic professionalization of knowledge is here taken as a blocking mechanism to inciting change, because it erects barriers between that knowledge and the outside world, to the beautiful and the thrilling.

Howard's obliviousness to Kiki's anxieties as a black woman in a very white college town—"I can't understand you. . . . You're not making any sense to me," is his response to Kiki's outburst—is of course revealing of his own privileged position (206). Just as "the fish does not see the water," Howard is a white person who does not "see the racial nature of a white polity because it is natural to them, the element in which they move" (Mills 76). Kiki's racial awareness, then, is heightened by her minority status in America (and particularly in Wellington), while we might observe that Howard's is dampened by his majority identity. In one sense, Howard's lack of racial awareness fits comfortably into a campus novel schema which casts Kiki as a worldly and practical individual and Howard as Ivory Tower abstractionist. On the other hand, this is precisely the kind of identity-politics inflected, critical cultural thought that a progressively-minded humanities academic like Howard would be expected to have fluency in.

Howard does indeed consider himself to be a progressive, particularly in terms of race, which is the focal point of his antagonistic stance toward both Monty Kipps's proposed lecture series and his own father. On the face of it, Howard's presentation of himself as a racially inclusive progressive seems accurate. His wife is a black Floridian, and their marriage took place amid apparent skepticism on the part of Howard's family. His best friend is, as Howard relays, "Dr Erskine Jegede, Soyinka Professor of African Literature and Assistant Director of the Black Studies Department," a description which both subtly supports Howard's tolerant ethos and his tendency to hone in on the academic credentials of his peers (Erskine's being well beyond his own). The question of Howard, who also opposes Monty Kipps on the grounds of Kipps's allegedly racist proposed lecture series, having the capacity for a satisfactory level of empathy for Kiki's racial

anxieties is open. Paul Gilroy flatly states that “racial difference obstructs empathy and makes ethnocentrism inescapable. It becomes impossible even to imagine what it is like to be somebody else” (Gilroy, *Postcolonial* 63). If this is the case, perhaps it is little surprise that Howard “can’t understand” what Kiki is trying to tell him about her life in Wellington. However, Gilroy’s statement is directly opposed to one of the central tenets of the liberal arts. Martha Nussbaum writes in *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* that key abilities fostered by the humanities include “the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a ‘citizen of the world’” and “the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person,” sentiments echoed by any number of mission statements from liberal arts colleges like Wellington (7). If we take these two ideas—that the liberally educated individual should take a broad stance toward the world and also imaginatively empathize with the plights of others—and apply them to the campus community of *On Beauty*, Howard becomes a kind of paradox. He should be—*by both his training and his professional status as liberal arts faculty*—better able to empathize than most, yet he is arguably the worst of all characters in the novel at doing so. Humanistic values also highlight a tension in Smith’s depiction of the campus; the liberal arts, taken at face value, want precisely to avoid the separate spheres that field-specific professionals occupy in the book.

Gilroy’s statement on race as a barrier to mutual understanding might be taken then, in the context of Smith’s novel, as highlighting a difference between *On Beauty* and other campus novels: in addition to the divide between elitist, out of touch academics and the earthy, practical outside community, *On Beauty* introduces the additional and crucial stumbling block of racial difference. When Claire describes Carl as a voiceless being who

needs someone to speak for him, she casts him racially, using the all-too-familiar lens of black people as “forever victims, objects rather than subjects” (Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black’* 11). However, it cannot be overlooked that in this scene Claire is speaking to Zora, herself the child of a black and white couple; as is typically understood, Zora would likely be considered black herself in both the United States and the United Kingdom (as is Smith herself). The significance of Claire, a white professional, directing Zora, a well-to-do young black woman, to speak for a black man of lower economic standing should not be understated. As Adolph Reed observes, there are “longstanding” presumptions in America that “black people naturally speak with a single voice as a racial group” through “leaders” seen as emerging “organically from the population, and that the objectives and interests of those organic leaders are identical with those of the general racial constituency” (*Class Notes* 54). More insidious than this presumption on its face is that it simplifies “the management of racial subordination by allowing white elites to pick and choose among pretenders to race leadership and, at their own discretion, to confer ‘authenticity’” (Reed, *Class Notes* 54). Claire’s fear of the “general conservative trend sweeping” Wellington belies her strategic use of Zora, a black student with “a very powerful voice” who speaks “Wellington language” to support Claire’s own agenda (Smith, *On Beauty* 262, 263).<sup>14</sup> The parallels between Reed’s description of picking race leadership and Claire’s conversation with Zora are striking: certainly she is empowering and directing Zora via her own cultural authority, authenticating the student whose views she sees as most similar to her own, as spokesperson for disadvantaged students like Carl and Chantelle (another unregistered black student Claire recruited from the surrounding

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<sup>14</sup> Claire’s awareness of this “general conservative trend” further supports reading Wellington as a kind of “post welfare-state” campus.

area). These are students who, judging by the graduate school-motivated Zora, who is “unable to distinguish her own mechanically produced writing from true artistic creativity” and only “wants to be a part of the selective class because she believes that it will look good on her transcript” has little in common with beyond skin color, as evidenced by her bewildered early encounters with Carl (Adams 385). It is a striking demonstration of the inextricable ties and misrecognitions between race and class that Claire, a white professor, implicitly realizes the rhetorical advantages of having a well-to-do black student serve as a mediating agent between the mostly white professoriate and the economically impoverished, “unregistered” black students she is attempting to bring into the college fold.

In Howard’s case, his lip service to issues of race but practical failure to see what Kiki sees highlights a failure to engage with the world outside of Wellington; that is, it is symptomatic of his failure as an intellectual in Collini’s sense. If, as Howard himself argues, the task of the professoriate is to change people’s ways of thinking, one of the chief opportunities to do so is during his visit with his father, Harry, a painful scene which is again punctuated by issues of race and class. Harry may strike a familiar chord for readers of Smith: a tuned-out, older man who plants himself in front of the TV for the bulk of his day, he resembles Darcus Bowden from *White Teeth*, who develops “an illness that no doctor could find any physical symptom of, but which manifested itself in the most incredible lethargy, creating in Darcus—admittedly, never the most vibrant of men—a lifelong affection for the dole, the armchair, and British television” (Smith, *White Teeth* 26). The chief difference between Darcus and Harry derives from the former’s immigrant status; in the case of Darcus, his lethargy develops upon the arrival of

his wife and daughter in England, whereas the impression given of Harry is that his own sedentary habits grow out of the death of his wife and Howard's departure through marriage and relocation to the US. Harry is someone who has been left behind in a kind of stasis—Howard imagines them as “two Englishmen stranded together” as he sits down—a working-class white Englishman who is alternately fascinated, confused, and repulsed by the cosmopolitan England that has bloomed around him, and which he accesses only by proxy with his television (Smith, *On Beauty* 295). It “hurt [Howard's] heart to note the unchanging details” of the house when he arrives there almost automatically after fleeing Carlene Kipps's funeral in a rush of emotion (Smith, *On Beauty* 293). Another apparent unchanging detail is Harry's lack of a verbal filter. Howard has not been home in years, in part because of this trait. Either Howard, Harry, the narrator, or a confluence of the three notes that “four years ago, Harry surely hadn't meant to tell his only son that you couldn't expect black people to develop mentally like white people do. He had *meant* to say: I love you, I love my grandchildren, please stay another day” (296, emphasis in original). Only minutes into the visit, though, Harry meanders along in a lengthy rant about a game show he watches, punctuating it by his amusement at the host's apparent (perhaps imagined) perplexity at a same-sex couple, two women with “hair very short, dressed like blokes of course, like they do . . . and you could tell *he* didn't know what to say” (298-9, emphasis in original). As Howard begins to take offense, Harry tries to calm him down—“I ain't seen you in so long, just happy to see you . . . just trying to find something to say”—until Howard and Kiki's marital problems are revealed and Howard begins to cry (299). Harry does not skip a beat before responding: “She found a black fella, I spose. It was always going to happen, though.



It's in their nature'" (301). At this, Howard laughs "grimly" before exclaiming "'I never *fucking* learn'" and leaves, Harry protesting all the way (301, emphasis in original).

Howard's visit with Harry is a turning point for him as a character, one which sets in motion the bulk of the major events afterward. Wall makes a critical point that bears indirectly on Howard's meeting with his father, his treatment of knowledge, and the novel's denouement: "Part of Howard's turning away from beauty constitutes a rejection of the elitism of the Kantian project of judgment. Similarly, Howard's denial of the genius of Rembrandt is a reaction to Kant's notion that 'genius' is a natural quality that, in coming from nature . . . cannot be taught" (Wall 771). Wall makes this argument in the context of Howard's student Katie, who appears in a crucial scene I analyze below, but this interpretation also has bearing on a read of Howard's class background; one could argue that growing up in a working-class home might make Howard less receptive to what Wall outlines as Kantian essentialism.<sup>15</sup> However, it would be remiss to consider Howard's class background in this way without attending in detail to his interaction with Harry, who most defines his past. His unsurprised reaction to his father's predictable, prejudiced ramblings is followed directly by his arrival at the Kipps home and sex with Vee, his student and Monty's daughter. It is important to keep in mind the irony of Harry's assumption that Kiki cheated on Howard with a black man, when in reality it was Howard who had an affair with a white woman (and who goes on to have another affair immediately upon leaving his house). This encounter also has bearing, though, on the

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<sup>15</sup> Carrying a Belseyian rejection of Kant to its conclusion would also support Howard's expressed opposition to racism, Kant being one of the more well-known and outspoken racists of the Enlightenment: he wrote both that "humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race," and that a "fellow [being] quite black from head to foot" was "clear proof that what he said was stupid" (qtd in Coetzee and Roux 515).

perception, commented upon at a number of points in the novel, of academics—Howard in particular—as being not quite human. It is perhaps oddly appropriate, given these views of Howard as being so bound up in his work that he is at some level not a full-blooded human being, that Harry’s assumption is that Kiki, not Howard, had the affair. Explicitly racist and drawing on racist views of blacks as hypersexual beings, Harry’s conclusion also carries with it the buried assumption that academics like Howard lack human sexuality.

Claire sees Kiki as changing Howard, or providing evidence of his humanity, something Claire sees as a need because of Howard’s focus on his work. Kiki herself is a major character (arguably the character presented as most important outside of Howard) with many pages devoted to her perceptions, but her own profession almost never comes up. Howard’s work, though, is always front and center, whether in his own thoughts or in conversation - and often even in conversations *about* Howard that he is uninvolved in. Where Kiki’s essence is what shines through for Claire, Howard is all performance; Kiki’s essential humanity thus redeems her husband—who might otherwise appear to be a kind of academic automaton—by proxy. Howard isn’t much interested in Kiki’s work, nor is the narrator, and neither, perhaps, is Kiki, as it rarely comes up during sections of the novel that are centered on her as anything other than an afterthought. When references to her profession do appear, such as at the anniversary party, it is merely to point out its existence: “Friends of Kiki from the hospital talking amongst themselves” (Smith, *On Beauty* 108). The question of Howard’s humanity is written humorously, but it is important to note that Howard is not the only academic characterized as lacking humanity in some way. Rather, the entire Wellington faculty, it is implied, is something

somehow other, the Black Studies Department representing “by far the most socialized people at Wellington, priding themselves on their reputation for being the closest replicas on campus to normal human beings,” a comment that in the context of its paragraph seems to come from Howard’s own perspective (Smith, *On Beauty* 107). On Howard specifically, Claire’s “old joke” is that “Howard was only human in the theoretical sense” (Smith, *On Beauty* 225). More seriously, Claire know that “he did love, and intensely, but she also saw that it was not articulated in him in the normal way” (225). However, Howard’s academic life is not static, despite images of its arrested development like his faltering book project. Howard’s love life reciprocally changes his professional life: his academic life also changed his love life (*On Beauty* 225). At the same party at which Claire laments the separation between the university and the “bigger ideas” in play in world politics, Howard’s thoughts sometimes seem more akin to surveying a departmental meeting than a celebration of he and his wife’s commitment to each other. “The Black Studies Department’s graduate crowd were out in force,” he observes, though “the English department was less well represented tonight” (107). However, as the narrative comment—which I am reading contextually to be from Howard—implies, it should be kept in mind that Howard is not just a one-note caricature of an academic. He has a sophisticated, almost sociological grasp of academics as a group. For example, he observes that Zora “had the strangest ideas about academics—she found it extraordinary that they should be capable of gossip or venal thoughts. She was hopelessly naive about them. She had not noticed, for example, that philosophy graduate number two was involved in a study of her chest” (111). Howard, throughout the pages depicting the party, sprinkles a loose sociological theory: as a participant observer in this scene, and

considering his own infidelity, he knows all too well how human academics are. Howard's observations on academics as something other than quite human, then, actually form a reactive commentary addressing common concerns from a non-academic public. It is this non-academic public that Howard, comfortable among academics, is unsure how to interact with. A short time after giving a brief speech at the party, he wonders about his performance, asking himself "how his speech had gone down with women like this"—Kiki's coworkers—"non-academic, solid, opinionated" (Smith, *On Beauty* 108). This is a rare moment of inquisitiveness about the "world outside" the college for Howard, a moment that quickly dissipates.

### **Howard, Katie, and Zadie: teaching and fields in the post welfare-state university**

Significantly, what Howard is looking to teach is not what characters like Levi and Carl envision when they think of imparting their knowledge, and it also differs from Monty Kipps's methods. Carl and Levi see education in terms of both knowledge and appreciation, and so when Levi thinks of teaching customers about rap, his knowledge comes from a genuine love of the subject matter coupled with intense exposure to it. Likewise, Carl's work at the library induces something like a "typing disease," with his knowledge and enthusiasm feeding off each other in massive productivity (Smith, *On Beauty* 375). Howard utilizes, by contrast, a postmodern form of Marxism, which he deploys mainly to critique his subjects in a negative manner: Howard's interrogation of art and genius as different forms of mythmaking has as its logical conclusion the denial of these very categories as anything but empty constructions. As we will see, though, Howard's mode of criticism is also incomplete and alienating to the majority of

audiences he encounters, a direct contrast to Monty Kipps, whose “work is much more than just the academic stuff,” as reported by Jerome (*On Beauty* 3). Monty’s comparatively broad appeal troubles Howard: Kiki notes that “because of the stringency of his theories and his dislike of his colleagues, Howard was nowhere near as successful or as popular or as well paid as his peers in Wellington” (98). Kipps has popular appeal as well as professional rigor: he humiliates Howard in published arguments and publishes his own research with great success. His politics, though, are also troubling to Howard. Monty is a conservative who resembles in some ways a kind of intellectual Bill Cosby: “the irony of a black intellectual who has nothing but disdain for affirmative action, combined with Kipps’s all-too-evident self-satisfaction suggest that this opposition is partly a way of confirming his own merit. His success and taste have proven he is one of the deserving” (Wall 764). While Monty’s political views enrage Howard, it is worth considering that he and Kipps’s views, while differing in content, are not structurally dissimilar: Monty’s proving of himself is adjacent to Howard’s view of genius. It is also probably a blunt and not very successful “effort made to lift the burden of being a group representative or exemplar. To escape the pressure to conform to the familiar and recognizable, to stereotypes, is to be free to delete the first word or to accent the second in the phrase *black intellectual*” (Posnock 5, emphasis in original). Both Monty and Howard attempt to assert cultural authority partly by denigrating a subject: for Monty, it is unsuccessful blacks, while for Howard it is the great geniuses of the arts. Structurally, then, Howard and Monty are at opposing ends of a schema: Monty proves his success by attacking the unsuccessful (perhaps including Howard), while Howard promotes his own

attempt at success by attacking successful and culturally recognized figures (both his art subjects and intellectuals like Monty).

Howard's lack of admiration for major figures in his field of study like Rembrandt, and perhaps even Kipps in his own profession, is tied to his own lack of status in his field. He is primarily interested, the reader is told, in redefining "genius," a word that induces groans from Howard when used in what he sees as an uncritical manner, such as Kiki's reference to Mozart (Smith, *On Beauty* 71). We might say that he is attempting to reorient jurisdiction in the art history field, in a way that elevates himself and his own work while downgrading the work of Kipps. Ultimately, he also wants to downgrade the status of Rembrandt himself through his criticism, in contrast to the presumably more belletristic mode that Monty works in. That is, Howard wants to elevate the critic above the artist, and he has a vested interest in doing so. Thus Howard's redefining of genius becomes by proxy a way of redefining himself within his field and culture. Howard wants to emphasize a triple opposition between producer, consumer, and critic: Monty and artists produce, most people (including his family) consume, and Howard is the rare avatar of critique. In other words, Howard's elevation of the critic—of his specific style of criticism—is an attempt to stake his claim as possessor of cultural capital. This development of his critical identity even comes at the cost even of his own past, which now exists in "edited versions" that Kiki, in conversations, allows him to "reinvent, retouch" in order to erase memories of pleasurable consumption of film and art (Smith, *On Beauty* 174).

Howard's critical mode, summed up by Vee in describing the student body's "tomato" theory—the "tomato" is a stand-in for any given course subject, and Howard's

class is “all about never *ever* saying *I like the tomato*”—is part of what leads to his dramatic failure as an educator when it comes to a thoughtful and talented student named Katie in perhaps the most striking scene in the novel (*On Beauty* 312, emphasis in original). Katie, a sixteen-year-old freshman who the previous summer was debating between an English or an Art History major, is introduced midway through the novel in a section written from her point of view. “The brightest student in her high school,” Katie comes from “relative poverty,” and it is insinuated that she would have had a realistic shot at attending medical school or Harvard Law (Smith, *On Beauty* 249). Despite this, Katie’s heart is in the liberal arts, and her parents, “generous, loving people,” support her choice to attend a liberal arts college instead (249). All signs—her genuine enthusiasm, support from her parents, volunteer activities on campus, and intellectual potential—point to a success story for this young woman at Wellington. Her stumbling block, though, is twofold: her shyness, and Howard’s class, which “above all terrifies her” (249). Mostly centered around Rembrandt, who is “the second most amazing human being Katie has ever come across” (after Picasso), Katie finds to her alarm that “she didn’t understand much” of the class (249-50). The descriptions of her experiences in the class are devastating. Katie “used to dream about one day attending a college class about Rembrandt with other intelligent people who loved Rembrandt”; instead, in Howard’s class “a lot of the time she felt the professor to be speaking a different language from the one she has spent sixteen years refining. After the third class she went back to her dorm and cried” (250). When she tries to look up Howard’s “mysterious” vocabulary in *Webster’s*, she can only find the word “liminality,” and even that definition does not offer a clear explanation of how Howard is using it (250).

It is important to note that Katie's failure to come to terms with Howard's class is not the result of either a lack of intelligence, lack of a willingness to prepare, or a dogmatic commitment to a belletristic mode of criticism (which might initially be implied by her desire to be with others who love Rembrandt). She spends a full week "staring" and "thinking deeply about" the two paintings up for discussion in the fourth class period.<sup>16</sup> The narrative description of her findings represent the thoughts of quite a bright and indeed learned sixteen-year old: she compares the paintings to the work of antecedent figures like Caravaggio, includes detailed notes on composition—"on the angel's resemblance to Rembrandt's pretty son, Titus; on the perspective lines that create the illusion of frozen movement . . ."—and crucially, on aspects that are implied but not explicit (250). For example, looking at *Seated Female Nude*, Katie is "moved by the crenulated marks of absent stockings on her legs, the muscles in her arms suggestive of manual labor" (251). These are all observations that would seemingly be welcome in a classroom, particularly from a first-year student; what Katie is really doing is a series of skillful close readings. Unfortunately, the class itself is far from a model liberal arts classroom. Only "three or four" of the fourteen "dare to speak" during discussions (252). When Howard begins, it is clear why Katie has been having such difficulty adapting to the class:

'What we're trying to . . . *interrogate* here,' he says, 'is the mytheme of the artist as autonomous individual with privileged insight into the human. What is it about these texts - these images as narration - that is implicitly applying for the quasi-mystical notion of genius?' An awful long silence follows this. (252, emphasis in original)

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<sup>16</sup> *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1658, and *Seated Female Nude*, 1631.



This intimidating opener, is, for one, clearly only interested in pursuing Howard's specific line of inquiry, which is no doubt one of the hurdles for Katie: it leaves no room for other other interpretive approaches or ideas. These questions are also ones that Howard may not have answered himself, as evidenced by his incomplete monograph; he is more interested in working through his own research questions—while simultaneously expecting his students to do the same—than by using them as a supplement to the already vast repertoire of art history knowledge he no doubt has to offer to students. Even when Katie does attempt to speak, however, when her “tongue is at her teeth,” she is beaten to the punch by Vee, who “as ever,” seems to have “a way of monopolizing Dr. Belsey's attention, even when Katie is almost certain that what she is saying is not terribly interesting” (252-3). After a back and forth between Vee and two other students, “now the class escapes Katie; it streams through her toes as the sea and sand when she stands at the edge of the ocean and dozily, *stupidly*, allows the tide to draw out and the world to pull away” (253, emphasis in original).

Howard's worst offense during this short section of the novel is his own ignorance of what is happening in his classroom, and subsequent failure to address Katie's needs. After class, “he felt this had been the most successful session to date” (252). However, as he is packing up his materials, Howard “got the nasty sensation that someone or another was lingering. Lingering always signalled a cry for pastoral care” (255). The lingerer is, of course, Katie, who was “making a performance of packing away her one notebook and pen,” before inserting herself into the doorway “leaving Howard no choice but to squeeze by her” (255). His response is to ask, “very loudly,” calling her “Kathy,” whether everything is good, at which Katie stammers before simply asking

whether class meets again at the same time the following week (255). Howard answers in the affirmative before hurrying off, making no other offer or inquiry. This is willful ignorance on the part of Howard, who recognizes the cry for help but simply does not want to deal with a struggling student. When Howard immediately stops outside the building to have a conversation with Vee, who he is attracted to, it becomes clear that his encounter with Katie is symptomatic of professional failure, particularly in terms of his personal life and desires taking priority over his academic work. It is also symptomatic of Howard's failure to develop as an intellectual: the almost pure nonexistence of any communication between he and Katie, a new student and thus representative of the world outside the university, reinforces Howard's position as the sort of closed-off academic who fails to develop any relationship with a public. Put simply, Howard does not care to speak with Katie about academic ideas, and Katie is too intimidated by Howard to speak with him.

The class escaping from Katie marks not only what can only be assumed to be her impending failure of the course, but her formal disappearance from the novel as well; after fewer than five pages, Katie is never heard from again. This is rather jarring, as Katie is one of the few privileged characters who is offered a section written from her own point of view, something that is denied much more prominent characters such as Vee and Monty Kipps. Having the opportunity to offer her own perspective within the novel is something shared by others who struggle with Howard, like Kiki, whose "gut response to Hopper is not unlike Katie's initial relationship with Rembrandt, subsequently shattered to pieces by the uncomfortable intervention of academic jargon" (Lopez 359). This is an apt comparison, and the two even share a phonetic similarity in

name—Kiki/Katie—to emphasize the juxtaposition. But there is another character Katie has something common with as well: Howard’s father Harry. By the end of her short section, Katie is another who has been left behind, another who is unteachable: she is abandoned by Howard, the class, and the novel. The formal implication of Katie’s dropping away from the class and the novel as she loses her narrative voice raises the question of who gets privileged access to the reader in *On Beauty*. James English writes that “every field may be understood as part of a general economy of practices, a broad social logic that involves interested participants, with their varying mixtures or portfolios of capital, in the struggle for power to produce value, which means power to confer value on that which does not intrinsically possess it” (*Economy of Prestige* 9). In *On Beauty*, the structure of the novel itself reinforces this social logic: Katie’s brief appearance in the structural center further solidifies that *On Beauty* is not only a novel about the title subject, which is well-covered ground in critical writing on it, but also about who is permitted to gain and express knowledge. In this context, Monty and Howard both stand in a privileged position not only by their professional appointments, institutional status, and attendant cultural capital, but by their positioning in the novel itself: in the world of Wellington—and perhaps by extension, Smith implies, the college and university system itself—even obviously poor teachers and scholars like Howard possess the cultural authority to serve as a roadblock to earnest and aspiring students like Katie.

Late in the novel, Smith is deliberate and obvious in pointing out Howard’s latent similarities to his father. After a new affair—this time with Vee—is revealed and Kiki moves out, Howard begins to sound suspiciously like Harry, especially in his invocation of Kiki’s “girlfriends,” like Linda, ““the lesbian one”” (Smith, *On Beauty* 435-6). It seems

that by this point, after his second affair is revealed and the trust of his family is more completely shattered, Howard reveals a significantly more cynical view of women and sexuality than a charitable reader might take from his earlier messages of racial inclusion: ““Yes, the lesbian one - she’s *still* squeezing half of Mark’s money out of him, five years later, which seems a bit rich, really, what with their children being grown, Linda a lesbian . . . marriage having been just a small blip in her lesbian career”” (436, emphasis in original). In case the reader fails to see Harry in Howard’s sudden outburst against Linda, Smith draws an explicit line. When Jerome reads Kiki’s moving out, as opposed to making Howard move out, as part of a sophisticated strategy—““she doesn’t go the way you think she’s going to go””—Howard is quick to show his expectation of a more obvious and simple reprisal from Kiki: ““Don’t you believe it,’ contributed Howard, and with exactly the morose intonation of his father. ‘She’ll probably sell this *house* from under us an’ all”” (436, emphasis in original). Howard’s paranoia in this moment is analogous to Harry’s own racism, only shifted to the side to target women instead of women and black people. Where Harry assumes the Belsey’s marital problems are the result of Kiki finding a black man, he operates under the same purview of racial and gender stereotyping Howard does—minus the racial with Howard—when he fails to imagine Kiki responding with anything other than petty and predictable revenge. Howard cannot picture Kiki in her complex personhood. To his horror he is becoming his father: left behind, ranting about homosexuality from the comfort of his own simplified view of the world - a far cry from the image of Wellington’s humanistic inquiries serving as a shining light of knowledge for the wider community. It is notable that this change in Howard’s proffered outlook occurs after Zora loses faith in him, treating him in much the

same way he treated his own father when he left his house: she laughs “miserably” before exclaiming “IT’S SO BORING, DAD. IT’S SO FUCKING *OBVIOUS*” (433, emphasis in original). This experience apparently brings about a shift in how Howard sees his own knowledge: he has moved from “not understanding” Kiki to now claiming a privileged (and biased to his own perspective) access to her motivations as well as those of her friends.

Howard’s outbursts are not only significant as echoing of his father, however. The additional, less obvious layer of irony in this sequence has to do with Howard’s perspective on genius; after his repeated failures with his family and his uncertain future as an academic, Howard’s critical elevation of himself comes full circle, as though he now possesses the very capacity for privileged understanding of human thought, intention, and motivation that he denies Rembrandt. With his family life crumbling, and a disastrous tenure presentation imminent, Howard has suffered a final psychological break: unable to take on the compartmentalizing operations avowed by Zora, Howard reverts to a distorted reverberation of his own father, supplemented by a warped version of his academic theorizing. At his tenure lecture, he is speechless, able only to gaze stupefied at the Rembrandt paintings on his Powerpoint slides. It is only after the thorough destruction of his family life, amid the disastrous (and true) rumors that he has slept with a student, that Howard is able to begin again by relinquishing his own voice and surrendering to “the intimation of what is to come”—apparently in newly-found appreciation for his object of study (Smith, *On Beauty* 443).

The end of the novel seems to indicate a turning point in Howard’s life, and one that can be read simply: Howard’s gaze is no longer turned inward to his own struggles

with desire, status in his field, and so on, but instead is directed outward to appreciate for the first time the beauty all around him. *On Beauty*'s conclusion strikes me as curiously moralizing, particularly when taking into account not only the rest of the novel—during which Howard is frequently humiliated and never seems to be in a secure position of power and control outside of the classroom—but Zadie Smith's own expressed and implied views of writing and universities.

Smith acknowledges that *On Beauty* is both inspired in subject matter by Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) and is in part a homage to E.M. Forster. Lopez comments on the structure of the novel when noting that *On Beauty* is not simply an "updating" of Forster: "The tribute to the Edwardian novelist is, rather, used by the younger writer as a scaffolding, at least in the early stages of plot development. From then on, the novel takes off on its own autonomous flight through social critique, comedy, morality and, of course, irony" (Lopez 352).<sup>17</sup> Recalling what I take to be Smith's stance toward Howard, it is worth noting as well that the Forster influence also marks the title, *Howards End*, as a double entendre when placed alongside Howard Belsey's downfall in *On Beauty*. Lopez's statement, though, might just as easily have come from Smith herself, who also uses the term "scaffolding" in an essay on writing: "the majority of it is only there to make you feel secure, and in fact the building will stand without it" ("That Crafty Feeling" 105).<sup>18</sup> The debts to both Forster and Scarry have been detailed effectively and at length by other critics, but both Lopez and Smith in

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<sup>17</sup> In the acknowledgements, Smith writes that "I wanted to repay the debt [to Forster] with *hommage*." The first line of the novel, "One may as well begin with Jerome's e-mails to his father" (Smith 3), as Lopez points out, is "almost a word-to-word transcription of the opening of *Howards End*, which reads: 'One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister'" (Lopez 351).

<sup>18</sup> That this is also from the title essay of Smith's essay collection reinforces its importance in her thinking.

the above quotes gesture toward the work of the novel *beyond* the “scaffolding” those influences represent as being crucial. The question of who is permitted to speak with authoritative knowledge within the structure of the novel—and indeed, within the structure of Wellington versus its surroundings—dovetails with a number of moments in the novel, such as Claire’s patronizing statement about Carl’s voicelessness, which is followed up on by the much later section detailing Carl’s work in the library. Like Katie, Carl is granted literal authority through his own section, from his own point of view, but significantly, this comes only does after he is thoroughly embedded in Wellington with a formal position as Hip-Hop Archivist. Zora notes that navigating the rocky landscape between personal and academic issues is ““all about compartmentalization”” (Smith, *On Beauty* 229). Compartmentalization is carried out not only by characters in the novel, but by institutions like Wellington, which in *On Beauty* gives the outlet, even the right, for someone to relay their knowledge: but only within the confines of the university, and never as the kind of traffic-stopping movement Levi pines for.<sup>19</sup> The college itself is further compartmentalized by field and jurisdiction, leaving characters like Department Administrator Lydia flummoxed by some of the academics around her: “To women like Lydia, women like Claire made no sense at all. Everything Lydia had achieved in her life had come as a result of her prodigious organizational abilities and professionalism. . . . Lydia knew how she got where she was today. . . . What she didn’t know what how Claire got where she was today” (150).

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<sup>19</sup> After befriending a Haitian immigrant and reading a history of the country, Levi feels the urge to “make it better” somehow for the Haitian immigrants in Wellington, who are often employed as custodial workers at the university, and to “stop the American traffic, stand in front of the American cars, and demand that somebody do *something* about this wretched, blood-stained little island a mere hour’s boat trip from Florida” (*On Beauty* 355).

It is significant that Lydia's perplexity is centered on Claire, who is professionally the closest character in the novel to a surrogate for Smith herself, who taught at Harvard and Columbia before accepting a tenured professorship at New York University ("Zadie Smith Joins Faculty"). Claire's experience at Wellington is perhaps symptomatic of "the fact that historically . . . a teaching job for writers has been an add-on to what they *really* do, which is write"—an issue not unfamiliar to Smith herself (McGurl 35, emphasis in original). It is worth noting, though, that despite both being prominent creative writers who teach, the two do not see their teaching the same way. Claire teaches a workshop-based creative writing seminar, yet Smith describes her teaching role as follows:

I teach in the Creative Writing department, but I actually teach literature. I teach novels, and my students write me essays. I'm aware that they want to write fiction, but we don't really discuss that or go into it. I don't read their fiction, and they'd never give it to me—only because that's the way I was taught. I never took a creative writing course, I took an English degree. So as far as I'm concerned, that's the most useful route to writing. I can only teach what I know. I don't know how to do a workshop. ("10 Questions")

Smith's appeal to her own university background implies a degree of separation. Rather than attempting to teach students how to do what she does, she instead provides a similar education to her own literary one. It is interesting that Smith says she can only teach what she "knows"; in any other academic field, this would be a very unusual statement considering her public persona as internationally best-selling author. Disciplines also tend to rely on apprenticeship models that socialize students into tasks similar to what their professors do; literature students write critical essays, students in the sciences work through experiments, and so on. In other words, in any other field Smith teaching what she "knows" (or is known for) would be the craft of writing - and essays like "That Crafty Feeling" show her ability to communicate it. But as Mark McGurl expertly



demonstrates in the introduction to *The Program Era*, whether or not creative writing can or even should be taught is sometimes contested ground: arguments that “the collective pursuit of perfectly crafted, workshopped prose has the effect of eliminating the salutary unpredictability of the [creative writing] students” have been made, causing programs like Iowa’s to respond with “cannily argued” statements that till “the symbolic ground between teaching and development” (26-7).

Smith herself is, perhaps uneasily, perhaps like Claire, a part of the “program era” McGurl identifies; yet while being a part of the U.S. creative writing program at large, Smith has nonetheless found ways to differentiate herself. Unlike other contemporary authors like McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro, Smith did not herself go through a creative writing program during her own education—a fact which given her younger age works against the rising trend of creative writing programs and their influence on literary production.<sup>20</sup> Smith’s public persona also works against the academic world in interesting ways. Readers who see in Claire (as I do) a partial analogue for Smith may see a countervailing presence in characters like Howard as well as his daughter Zora, whose wholesale buy-in of Wellington College’s norms and social conventions as well as the latest in theoretical trends marks her as his intellectual protege. Like another Zora, Zora Neal Hurston, who “believed professional methodology and expertise were necessary in order to accurately record black folklore” but “also understood that disciplinary compartmentalization and specialization resulted in professionals who were hubristic and unable to connect with the wider public,” Smith seems to grapple with the value and

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<sup>20</sup> McEwan and Ishiguro are both MA graduates of the University of East Anglia creative writing program—the first in the United Kingdom—alongside fellow Booker Prize winner Anne Enright (“Creative Writing”).

shortcomings of academia (Harney 474). It is perhaps no coincidence that David Foster Wallace, who had been Smith's "favorite living writer," spoke of the dangers of academic life (Smith, "Brief Interviews" 260).<sup>21</sup> In a commencement address at Kenyon College (like Wellington, a small liberal arts college), Wallace said that "probably the most dangerous thing about an academic education—at least in my own case—is that it enables my tendency to over-intellectualize stuff, to get lost in abstract arguments inside my head instead of simply paying attention to what's going on right in front of me, paying attention to what's going on inside me" ("Transcription" 4). The tendency Wallace describes may as well be a word-for-word description of Howard, but Claire is different. In terms of the kind of "teaching and development" mentioned in the Iowa statement, it seems notable that Smith portrays Claire as uninterested in traditional, lecture-based teaching. She values personal experience: expeditions to the decidedly non-academic environment of the "bus stop"—a venue for local performances—is as much a part of her pedagogical practice as work in the classroom. Of course, it is also here that Carl encounters the creative writing class, which he is summarily enfolded in after Claire approaches him to ask if he is "interested in refining" what he has (Smith, *On Beauty* 232). Here also, note that, unlike Smith, Claire uses the language of development rather than teaching: refining what Carl already "has" rather than teaching him what Claire "knows."<sup>22</sup>

In the opening case study of *The Program Era*, McGurl argues that work at the university would have been easier for Nabokov "if his fiction writing had been defined,

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<sup>21</sup> Smith has also taught Wallace, assigning his *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* while teaching at Columbia (Jones).

<sup>22</sup> Though Claire's treatment of Carl here in the context of the rest of the novel carries a more negative undertone, as I detail above.

as it is for the tenured creative writing professor of the present day, as a kind of ‘research’ for which he needed, like the scholar, paid time away from the classroom” (5-6). Indeed, with the obvious caveat of my not knowing the financial arrangements between NYU and Smith, she teaches “only for one semester a year” so that the bulk of her time is devoted to writing (“10 Questions”). For Smith, though, this time for writing does not amount to anything she refers to as “research.” In an intriguing interview, she offers a description of her own writing process which sets her apart from authors like McEwan, which I have argued in my chapter on *Saturday* uses research as a major component of his authorial expertise.<sup>23</sup> Smith says: “I don’t do a lot of research, and I don’t enjoy doing research, because I like writing fiction” (Interview with Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina 268).

McEwan, Smith later says, “is rather an artisan, always hard at work; refining, improving, engaged by and interested in every step in the process, like a scientist setting up a lab experiment” (McEwan, “Zadie Smith Talks With”). For Smith, not a daily writer—“I don’t write that much. . . . I go for months, and recently years, without writing fiction”—general reading seems to be take the place of more explicit research: “If I don’t read every day I’m just completely doomed. . . . it’s reading that I am really addicted to. Writing is a kind of outgrowth of that passion” (Smith, “In Conversation”). Teaching carries with it in her interviews the air of a valued but tertiary part-time role. In this way, Smith is able to, without “official” university-sanctioned creative writing credentials, attach herself to the creative writing program at large while still keeping it somewhat at arm’s length. Simultaneously, Smith positions herself as working against the field-

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<sup>23</sup> I must note, though, that this interview was conducted not long after the publication of *White Teeth*, and so before Smith began to teach; I acknowledge the possibility that this view has changed in the intervening years, though I have not encountered any words from Smith that suggest it.

defining trends outlined by McGurl; like McEwan, Smith straddles a boundary between professions and sets of knowledge—and it is this factor, with Smith as a particular sort of public intellectual who is at once novelist and critic of literature and culture, that sets her apart from the failures of Howard.

It would be easy for a reader of *On Beauty* to conclude that Smith wholly derides the professoriate. The novel's denigration of academics is in varying places funny, sad, and even a bit brutal: "Like many academics, Howard was innocent of the world"; "Academics lack range"; Howard "felt very sad, retracing these arguments that had made him slightly notable in the tiny circle in which he moved" (33, 108, 118). This is an uninspiring view of academic life, to say the least. But on the contrary, according to Smith, from an interview before she began working regular teaching assignments: "it drives me crazy when people dismiss the idea of a university. To me university is the finest thing, the finest creation of humanity. It's just that usually it goes slightly pear-shaped" ("Zadie, Take Three"). In short, if we extrapolate these comments to *On Beauty*, Smith has written characters who fail to live up to her own ideal of higher education. This would no doubt ring true for the young characters in *On Beauty* whose initially idealistic image of the university is cut down over the course of the novel. Interestingly, though, Smith even in the year of the novel's publication both foresees an academic career in her future while subtly undercutting the possibility: "I would love to be an academic. But I'd need to get a Ph.D., so that's what I'm *half working on* at the moment. I'm writing a book of essays that I'd like to submit to my old college" ("Zadie, Take Three," my emphasis). Only "half working on" the project: like the later interview about teaching only one class a year at NYU, Smith makes clear that her primary focus is and will be as a novelist: not

an academic, not a researcher.<sup>24</sup> Beginning with *On Beauty*'s skepticism of academics to Smith's own highly qualified appraisal of academia even after years embedded in it, Smith's arms-length approach to higher education has by this point become a consistent, yet largely unnoticed hallmark of her authorial persona. By defying field-specific expectations that are increasingly common in creative writing—even as she participates in its institutionalization—and through her critique of academic life and intellectuals in *On Beauty*, Smith quite literally writes herself out of being defined as either an academic or an easy example of the rising program era; Smith's probing of the boundary between campus culture and the world outside higher education frees her from its grasp just as it ensnares the characters she writes.

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<sup>24</sup> I found unexpected support in these readings of public authorial personas from Smith in this same interview: on not often giving interviews in the UK, she remarks that "If I were a Ph.D. student studying contemporary novelists I would only look at their foreign interviews, because they say so much more. When writers are in their home country they're cagey, terrified—but when they're in, you know, Belgium, they'll tell you everything. They'll tell you about their mother's underwear. It's much more interesting" ("Zadie, Take Three").

### 3. The Limits of Knowledge in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*

*'Learn who they are, then. What do you know about them apart from these stories about snakes and men eating metal? Do you know their language, their stories? So then how can you learn to cope with them?'*  
(Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Paradise* 87).

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001) is one of the Zanzibar-born novelist's most celebrated novels. A reviewer for *The Observer* calls it "an epic unravelling of delicately intertwined stories, lush strands of finely wrought narratives that criss-cross the globe" (Clark). Indeed, the narrative touches on East Africa, the Middle East, and Europe directly and indirectly, a common feature of Gurnah's fiction. *By the Sea* also explores some issues that, if not unique in Gurnah's writing, are less prominent in his other novels. While Gurnah's consistent engagement with life as a refugee is well-recognized by critics, as is *By the Sea*'s critique of bureaucracy—particularly protagonist Saleh Omar's encounters with Kevin Edelman, the immigration official who takes him aside upon his arrival in England—I want to make the case that there is much to be gained from looking at these issues in the context of expertise and knowledge. The connection between refugee status, bureaucracy, and expert knowledge and the role they play in the transnational, postcolonial conditions of living portrayed in Gurnah's novel has not been sufficiently explored.

Recounting the novel's complex and multi-layered plot is an imposing task, but having an outline of its major events on hand is important in order to understand both the statement I take Gurnah's novel to be making about narratives of lives and its narrative form itself; the latter's importance will become clear by the chapter's conclusion, which analyzes Gurnah's output as a literary scholar alongside his fiction. Narrator Saleh Omar,

an elderly refugee from Zanzibar, arrives in England under the name Rajaab Shabaan Mahmud, under advice to feign an inability to speak English. Detained and interrogated by an immigration official named Kevin Edelman, Saleh is transported to shared temporary housing after uttering the word “refugee.” Rachel, a legal adviser for a refugee organization, eventually finds a flat for Saleh and also attempts to get him in contact with an area expert in London before learning that he can indeed speak English. Saleh appears hostile to the idea of being contacted by this “expert” until he learns he knows the man, Latif, from his life in Zanzibar. Indeed, the two have a storied past, one which has even led Saleh to use the name of Latif’s father when he travels to England.

A bitter, cross-generational family dispute is at the heart of the narrative’s history. Saleh, a furniture maker and seller, befriends Hussein, an Omani merchant who is living at Rajaab Shaaban Mahmud’s (Latif’s father’s) house while he doing business in Zanzibar. While there, Hussein takes on a kind of avuncular role in Latif’s life, and also becomes a lover of both Latif’s brother and mother. At one point, Hussein asks Saleh for a loan, which Saleh grants. The loan takes an unusual form: Hussein gives Latif a promissory note for Mahmud’s home, signed by Mahmud, as security in the event the loan is not repaid by Hussein. When Hussein departs (along with Latif’s brother) and never returns with repayment, Saleh is forced to take Mahmud’s home. It is at this point that Saleh’s and Latif’s perspective on the situation separate entirely. Latif’s view, fostered by his mother and father, is of Saleh as a cruel exploiter who delighted in victimizing his family. The full story, however—and the history behind it—is more complicated.

Years earlier, Saleh and Mahmud were at the center of another property entanglement. Saleh’s father had married Mahmud’s aunt, the widowed Bi Maryam. By

an Islamic tradition the family followed, it was expected that her late husband's home and business would pass to her closest male relative, Mahmud. Unwilling to follow through on this expectation due to Mahmud's irresponsibility and alcoholism, Bi Maryam instead leaves the property to Saleh. Mahmud's response was to cast himself as the victim of Saleh's and Saleh's father's swindling of Bi Maryam, and took on a newfound piety, presumably in part to support his case in public as an innocent. This action is repeated when Saleh collects on the loan agreement during Latif's childhood, taking their home. After a campaign of slander by Latif's parents, Saleh is embittered by the situation and refuses to return a table which Hussein had previously given to Latif's brother, and which Latif's mother sent him to ask for as her only material memory of her estranged son. This act takes on the meaning of a final straw in the feud: Latif's mother uses an affair with a post-revolution state official to arrange for Saleh's arrest and 11-year detention. Especially devastating is that Saleh chooses to remain in detention rather than take an early offer to be deported along with Omani prisoners, because he hoped to be reunited with his family; upon his release, he learns that his wife and daughter both died within a year of his imprisonment. When Latif's brother Hassan unexpectedly returns to Zanzibar flush with inherited wealth from Hussein and aiming to reclaim the family home, Saleh decides it is time to go before facing further danger. It is at this time that he uses his only viable means out of the country: he takes the deceased Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's passport from among the possessions in Latif's family home and shortly after arrives in England, where he meets Latif, who himself arrived there by way of the German Democratic Republic, where he received his university education years earlier. Only after extended retellings, the content of which I have summarized here, do the two



arrive at an understanding and reconciliation which by the end of the novel seems to establish the two as a connected, borderline familial pairing. An implied forthcoming romance between Latif and Rachel seems to open a path to a postcolonial citizenship for Latif that stretches both forward to a future settlement in English society while also stretching backward to he and Saleh's shared Zanzibari past.

In the wake of the recent conflict in Syria and the ongoing, much-publicized refugee crisis it has accelerated, *By the Sea*—and other literature substantively engaging with the plights of refugees—has acquired renewed, global significance.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Nail argues that “the twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant” (187). Public intellectuals ranging from Peter Singer to Jürgen Habermas have weighed in on the crisis, with the latter arguing bluntly that “the right to asylum is a human right” (“Jürgen Habermas”). Singer advocates for more aid from affluent countries, partly channeled into refugee camps in nearby countries that would be used as staging areas for possible European immigration (Singer). Singer's argument also makes implicit reference to a subtextual contradiction running through these debates, which is that the refugee crisis is typically framed as a “crisis” principally for Europe; meanwhile, nearby and less affluent countries are taking in the bulk of refugees, such as Lebanon, a nation of little more than four million whose population has expanded dramatically with the inclusion of well over one million refugees from Syria alone (“Syria Regional Refugee Response”).<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, the most interesting of these public intellectuals' opinion pieces in light of

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<sup>1</sup> Considered part of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, Syrians demonstrating against the government of President Bashar al-Assad were met with violent repression, leading to an extended conflict resulting in at least 250,000 deaths by August 2015 (“Alarmed by Continuing Syria Crisis”). The scale of the conflict, including attendant torture, sexual assault, and “indiscriminate bombardment” has resulted in a mass exodus of refugees, many to neighboring countries such as Lebanon and many others to Europe (Pinheiro).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this framing also tends to belie the emergency conditions in the Middle East itself that gave way to the steep rise in refugees seeking asylum.

Gurnah's novel belongs to Slavoj Žižek. In a recently published article, Žižek (unsurprisingly, and in typically provocative form) puts the crisis in the context of global capitalism, in order to make the case that "new forms of apartheid are emerging." "In our global world," Žižek writes, "commodities circulate freely but not people" ("In the Wake of Paris Attacks"). This reading of the refugee crisis and its placement as a contingency of global capitalism puts Žižek at odds with theorists of globalization like Aihwa Ong, whose concept of "flexible citizenship" among modern professionals finds its opposing pole on a continuum of national boundary crossers in the figure of the refugee.

In the above formulation, the refugee might be seen as the Real of the flexible citizen, a conflict at the heart of the meeting between Saleh and Kevin Edelman. Edelman's immediate hostility when Saleh utters the word "refugee," I argue, is symptomatic of the distinction—made by citizens and states alike—between the figure of the foreign refugee seeking aid and asylum and the transnational professional worker. This chapter is an exploration of the uncertainties of knowledge as mediated, covered over, and sometimes revealed by officialdom, mapping, and contested narratives. To that end, I first explore Saleh's (and Latif's) experiences as refugees while highlighting the ways in which officialdom and bureaucracy circumscribe them. Next, I analyze more explicitly the role of knowledge and expertise itself in the novel, particularly as Saleh experiences both during his colonial education and through his love of maps, which ironically serve to circumscribe and summarize in much the way he critiques bureaucracy and what he sees as inauthentic experts for; I also analyze Latif's perspective on expertise as a professional knowledge worker in his own career. Finally, I turn to Gurnah himself and an analysis of his public identity as both an author of literary fiction and a scholar of

literature, tying this self-presentation to the portrayal of expert knowledge in *By the Sea*. This chapter argues that *By the Sea* is at heart a novel about the limits of knowledge. This has much to do with Latif's relatively loosely defined expertise: his training gives him the cultural cache to speak on literature, but it is his firsthand, lived experience that makes him seen as an expert on Saleh's "area." Saleh's interactions with Kevin Edelman and with Latif reveal a skepticism about official, authoritative, and expert knowledge, dovetailing with the novel's shifting narrative to form an unsettled account of postcolonial life that ties a connecting strand between the past, present, and future. Gurnah's scholarship pairs with his fiction to reinforce the point that his combined output comes to: an inherent instability of knowledge that can be illuminated only over time through narrative, which breaks down these boundaries between individuals and cultures.

### **Saleh as refugee: officials, resistance, and Bartleby**

*By the Sea* quickly establishes a narrative that emphasizes everyday lived experience. "I don't know a great truth which I ache to impart," narrator Saleh Omar relays in the opening pages, "nor have I lived an exemplary experience which will illuminate our conditions and our times. Though I have lived, I have lived" (2). While at Saleh's urging I resist classifying him as any one emblematic being, he can nonetheless—like every individual and every fictional character—fit within certain constructed classifications: Saleh is perceived as black, is a particular kind of immigrant (refugee), subscribes to the Islamic faith, and is an elderly male. Further, and less simply, he is absorbed by a number of welfare and social services in the novel which set the boundaries of his actions, movement, and living arrangements. In this sense, Saleh serves as a counterpoint to Aihwa Ong's notion of "flexible citizenship." Ong observes that the

“multiple-passport holder is an apt contemporary figure; he or she embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets” (*Flexible* 2). The causes Ong identifies—“political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets”—are all operative in *By the Sea*, but the result for Saleh (as well as Latif, as I discuss below) is quite different. Saleh has a passport, but obtains it by using another’s birth certificate. He travels, but to escape, not for business or pleasure. Unlike the flexible citizens Ong theorizes, whose objective is “to accumulate capital and social prestige,” Saleh’s emigration from Zanzibar is framed in the negative: not a quest for prestige, but a flight from very real danger and a past darkened by state repression (*Flexible* 6). Homi Bhabha’s characterization of postmodernity from a postcolonial perspective speaks much more readily to Saleh’s plight:

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological ‘limits’ of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora . . . the grim prose of political and economic refugees. (Bhabha 4-5)

Bhabha’s argument exposes a component of globalization and internationalism left out of accounts that focus perhaps too exclusively on interpretations or extensions of the professional managerial class famously conceptualized by Barbara and John Ehrenreich<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In the late 1970s, Barbara and John Ehrenreich argued that “the ‘middle class’ category of workers . . . the technical workers, managerial workers, ‘culture’ producers . . . must be understood as comprising a distinct class in monopoly capitalist society,” the “Professional-Managerial Class,” or PMC, which became a highly influential concept in the social sciences and Western academic discourse (9). The Ehrenreichs defined the PMC as “consisting of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations” (12). This wide ranging class is demarcated, they write, by “fuzzy” boundaries between the ruling and working classes; the technocratic vision of the PMC that

As Saleh notes during his meeting with an immigration official, “his options were many and I had only one” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 9). Indeed, in the early pages of the novel which outline Saleh’s arrival in England, Saleh’s citizenship is not flexible, but strictly regulated and documented.

Saleh’s expressed inability to show the reader an emblematic life—whether to reveal the general “conditions,” “times,” or the immigrant or refugee experience in England—implies that he is uninterested in serving as a special case or an illuminating example of any kind. Instead, Saleh privileges a certain kind of authentic experience: he has lived and lived without absorbing any singular lesson (beyond an accumulation of experience, perhaps). In one sense, this is a fairly typical postmodern statement: there is no grand or metanarrative to be found here, Saleh alerts us, and so readers may feel discouraged from considering his story as a representative one at all. However, Saleh is a savvy narrator, indeed one who takes on more than one guise throughout the pages of the novel, and it is worthwhile to avoid only taking him at face value. Take, for example, his early description of the upper, middle, and lower “air”:

The upper air is always full of agitation because God and his angels live there and debate high policy. . . . The middle air is the arena for contention, where the clerks and the anteroom afreets and the wordy jinns and flabby serpents writhe and flap and fume. . . . In the murk of the lower air is where you’ll find the venomless time-servers and the fantasists who’ll believe anything and defer to everything, the gullible and the spiritless throngs that crowd and pollute the narrowing spaces where they congregate, *and that is where you’ll find me.* (3, my emphasis)

This description places religious imagery atop mythical imagery such as jinns. Saleh makes sure to point out that we will find him in the lower air, the realm of the ordinary,

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developed beginning in the late nineteenth century saw as its role the mediation “of the basic class conflict of society” and to “create a ‘rational,’ reproducible social order” (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 13, 19). Characters ranging from Kevin Edelman to Rachel and even Latif fall under the umbrella of the PMC as it is conceptualized by the Ehrenreichs.

mundane, and the unclean and inactive. Crucially, though, the middle air, which is described as primarily mythic, also seems to be the realm of the professionals: clerks, for instance. Saleh places himself firmly among “gullible” crowds, which both foreshadows his later skepticism of Latif and implies a lack of first-hand knowledge: these “spiritless throngs” believe whatever they are told and merely occupy space. However, Saleh’s own obvious cleverness, along with his lack of faith in Latif’s expert knowledge when he is first referenced, marks this as a canny move by which Saleh ironically takes on the stereotypical qualities he envisions those in power as projecting onto him and other refugees.

Clerks, middle air or otherwise, are very much on Saleh’s mind during the first hours and days of his arrival in England. When he is first taken aside by Kevin Edelman, Saleh recalls earlier encounters with state officials and their contrast to the English clerk:

I was used to officials who glared and sputtered at you for the smallest mishap, who toyed with you and humiliated you. . . . So I expected the immigration hamal behind his little podium to register something, to snarl or shake his head. . . . But he looked up from leafing through my joke document with a look of suppressed joy in his eyes. (*Gurnah, By the Sea* 5)<sup>4</sup>

The “suppressed joy” in Edelman’s eyes might originate from a number of sources, but Saleh is quickly given one clue: “He told me his name was Kevin Edelman, pointing to the badge he wore on his jacket” (6). This introduction might be a reaction to Saleh’s apparent lack of utility with English, but Edelman’s gesture toward his badge, coupled with the twinkle in his eyes Saleh notes, hints at a pleasure in asserting authority - in this case, state-mandated authority. When Edelman looks through his possessions, Saleh perceptively considers another possible source of Edelman’s suppressed joy: subject

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<sup>4</sup> Hamal: porter.

expertise. Saleh reflects that “there would be pleasure too in having an assured grasp of the secret codes that reveal what people seek to hide, a hermeneutics of baggage that is like following an archaeological trail or examining lines on a shipping map” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 7).<sup>5</sup> Saleh’s imaginative projection in this passage highlights his interest in working through the perspectives of others, anticipating the extended conversations about the past he later has with Latif.

Edelman’s stance rests most prominently on appeals to officialdom; specifically, Edelman diverts his meeting with Saleh as quickly as possible to documentation. “Do you speak any English, sir?” he asks. “I am afraid your documents are not in order, sir, and I will have to refuse you permission to enter. . . . Do you have any documentation that might help me understand your circumstances? Papers, do you have any papers?” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 7). Edelman’s rapid turn to papers reveals his installment in a bureaucratic logic; in particular, Edelman immediately asks for simplicity from Saleh—some paper that will both make his job easier and will contain Saleh as a singular figure who can be apprehended and totalized. Here again Gurnah presents a case that seems to run counter to Ong, who writes that “in the era of globalization, individuals as well as governments develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power” (*Flexible* 6). Saleh, at least, does not seem to have this sort of flexibility at his disposal. Rather, Edelman’s authority, and by extension Saleh’s own status, rests on rigid, clearly-defined rules and regulations: “once I stamp your passport as having been refused entry, it means that next time you attempt to enter the United Kingdom you will automatically be turned away, unless your papers are in order, of course” he informs Saleh (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 9). Edelman’s statements are effectively

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<sup>5</sup> This is also the first mention of maps in the novel, an important feature analyzed in more detail below.

a value judgment on particular forms of knowledge. Thomas Richards argues that Victorian and early Twentieth-century imperial literature rested on a fantasy of knowledge, specifically “the fantasy of the imperial archive,” by which the state “actually succeeds in superintending all knowledge, particularly the great reams of knowledge coming in from all parts of the Empire” (6). In his encounter with Saleh, Edelman is animated by an extension of this imperial ideology: that if Saleh’s story has any validity, it will be documented, collated, and collected so that it might join others like it in a centralized, managed archive of knowledge curated by officials like himself.

Significantly, many of the Edelman passages are not contained by the dialogue-marking quotation marks Gurnah uses throughout the rest of the novel. The implication here seems to be the alienating effect of Edelman’s presence, which eventually causes Saleh to tune him out altogether: “He went on talking, frowning and shaking his head, but I stopped listening. It’s something I taught myself to do over the years, to win a little respite from the blaring lies I had to endure in my earlier life” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 13). There is a conflict between surface and reality in Saleh’s meeting with Edelman that Saleh seems well aware of, perhaps more so than Edelman himself; his view indeed is reminiscent of Herbert Marcuse’s argument that the organizational structure of bureaucracy tends to hide exploitation “behind the façade of objective rationality”—either Saleh has his papers or he doesn’t, and there is no interpretive wiggle room or alternative beyond the two possibilities (*One-Dimensional* 32). This is especially evident in the lengthy monologue Edelman uses to attempt to convince Saleh—or perhaps this is Edelman nakedly expressing his unfiltered views given that Saleh has not yet revealed his fluency in English:



‘Mr Shaaban, why do you want to do this, a man of your age? . . . No one will give you a job. You’ll be lonely and miserable and poor. . . . Why didn’t you stay in your own country, where you could grow old in peace? This is a young man’s game, this asylum business, because it is really just looking for jobs and prosperity in Europe and all that, isn’t it? There is nothing moral in it, just greed. No fear of life and safety, just greed.’  
(Gurnah, *By the Sea* 11)

While Saleh’s internal response immediately undercuts Edelman’s logic—“At what age are you supposed to not be afraid for your life?” he wonders—it is clear that Saleh’s presence itself exposes a contradiction in Edelman’s ideological assumption that asylum-seekers are really just greedy opportunists (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 11). Specifically, Saleh’s age—too old to be hired for a job, or perhaps to be an efficient worker, Edelman thinks—perplexes him. Žižek’s recent argument that “capitalism needs ‘free’ individuals as cheap labor forces, but it simultaneously needs to control their movement since it cannot afford the same freedoms and rights for all people” unexpectedly aligns here not just with race or country of origin, but with age (“In the Wake of Paris Attacks”). Already viewed with skepticism by way of his refugee status, he is too old to be seen as an effective laborer, too infirm to be a “productive” member of the society he hopes to access.

The conflict over both Saleh’s refugee status and his suitability for work is directly connected to the most explicit literary reference in *By the Sea*: Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener.” Saleh read the story back home in Zanzibar, and reports later in the novel that ““for some reason I was reminded of it when I arrived here, and I have been unable to get it out of my mind completely since then”” (*By the Sea* 158). Bartleby’s mild-mannered refusals in Melville’s story famously take the form of his repeatedly saying “I would prefer not to.” Intriguingly, Latif makes a connection between Bartleby and Saleh himself, in the section of the novel written from his point of view, before even meeting Saleh. Saleh is described to him as ““the old man. . . . A strange one,

it appeared he could speak English all along but he preferred not to.’ The way the man inflected *preferred* made it sound as if he was quoting. ‘Preferred. Like Bartleby,’ I said, always eager to show off, to confirm my credentials as a teacher of literature” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 74-5, emphasis in original). Latif’s reinforcement of his professional ethos aside, this moment takes on the quality of a connecting strand between the two characters even before their first meeting in England; quite literally, the form taken by Saleh’s “preference” not to speak English unknowingly sends a message to his fellow Zanzibari immigrant. These references to Bartleby become a source of connection and comfort for Saleh and Latif later in the novel, though one inextricably connected to the British imperial past in Zanzibar. ““Perhaps it’s inevitable that you should wish to quarrel with me,”” Saleh tells Latif, who responds ““I would prefer not to”” with a smile: “I stared at him a moment to make sure. ‘Bartleby,’ I said. I had not meant it to, but my voice came out in a hushed whisper” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 156). When Saleh goes on to tell Latif about the Melville story being left behind by the British among a number of books he had access to, Latif snidely responds that ““Yes, people said you were very fond of the British,”” causing Saleh to reflect on how Latif’s father was the one who began the rumors of his servitude to and collaboration with the colonial power (*By the Sea* 156-7). This is among the numerous examples of the give and take nature of Saleh and Latif’s conversations which eventually, by the end of the winding narrative, result in a form of mutual understanding.

Melville’s story, particularly the character Bartleby himself, serves as a source of comfort for Saleh and Latif, apparently due to the form of passive resistance he models, a resistance that while failing to improve his material circumstances nonetheless frustrates

authority figures around him to no end. Bartleby has been viewed as a figure of Marxian alienation by critics, as in a 1974 article by Louise K. Barnett which argues that “only Bartleby comes to understand the [alienating] situation and reject it” (379). This positing of Bartleby’s unique agency, though, undercuts the form his refusals take, a necessarily open-ended statement that he “prefers not to.” The lack of an explanation—including of understanding “the situation”—proffered by Bartleby is a defining characteristic of the story. “Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance,” the narrator of “Bartleby” reports (Melville 1117). This quote finds some parallel with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), a novel set during the Kenyan Mau Mau uprising which Gurnah published an introduction for in 2002 (one year after *By the Sea*’s publication). In it, Mugo, one of the novel’s two main characters, suffers the wrath of John Thompson, a concentration camp administrator. Thompson becomes enraged by prisoners who refuse to speak, and especially with Mugo, who never took a rebel oath and thus refuses to confess to it. It is Mugo’s silence in the face of physical torment and whipping that provokes Thompson’s greatest fury: “Thompson, like a tick, stuck to Mugo. He questioned him daily, perhaps because he seemed the likeliest to give in. He picked him up for punishment. . . . If Mugo had cried or asked for mercy Thompson might have relented. But now it seemed to him that all the detainees mocked and despised him for his failure to exhort a cry from Mugo” (Thiong’o 129).<sup>6</sup> These events eventually precipitate a representation of the Hola Massacre of 1959 in which 11 prisoners were beaten to death and dozens more severely injured (Biles). Bartleby, also, ends up imprisoned as a result of his passive and sustained resistance.

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<sup>6</sup> See also the final section of this chapter for a discussion of Gurnah’s interest in Thiong’o’s novel.

The “earnest” qualifier used by Melville’s narrator to describe those most infuriated by passive resistance has implications for how the story connects with Gurnah’s novel. David Farrier writes that “by invoking *Bartleby*, Saleh is identifying and indicting the liminal vocabulary that locates the refugee subject as unbelonging and unwelcome. He engages the devices of the state of exception, creating a vacuum in language in order to illuminate the place of the refugee within that vacuum” (133).<sup>7</sup> The creation of a vacuum, or hollowing out to create a space, is the passive resistance that causes the “*Bartleby*” narrator’s to burst out: ““What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?” (Melville 1126). *Bartleby*’s sustained occupation of space that the narrator argues he has no “right” to brings to mind Paul Virilio’s notion of “counter-habitation,” channeled by Edward Said as the act of living “as migrants do in habitually uninhabited but nevertheless public spaces” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 331).<sup>8</sup> Counter-habitation as a concept seems to be in some tension with analyses of citizenship through the lens of movement and migration; May Joseph, for example, writes that “movement as a conceptual tool resists easy notions of community or nation,” viewing movement as what Joseph, rather like Ong, views as “an increasingly democratic sphere of global citizenship” (Joseph 8). While Saleh has traveled *to* England, though, what both he and *Bartleby* have in common after his arrival is not that they move too much and thus disrupt notions of rights and citizenship, but that they *will not move*. *Bartleby* “prefers not” to leave the law office, and Saleh, on a larger scale, invokes his right to stay in England as a refugee; they instead

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<sup>7</sup> The state of exception has been written about most famously by Giorgio Agamben. See his *State of Exception* (2005), published by Chicago University Press and translated by Kevin Attell.

<sup>8</sup> Said draws here on Virilio’s book *L’Insécurité du Territoire*, published by Stock in 1976 and never translated to English.

both inhabit spaces they are discouraged from occupying on a regular or permanent basis. Saleh's advantage, of course, is that his refugee rights trump Edelman's desire to send him away. The "earnest" narrator of "Bartleby" seems to sincerely wish Bartleby well, but Bartleby's refusal to move on or accept any offers of help leads to the above outburst and eventually his starvation in jail. Edelman's earnestness, however, is more in line with the outburst about rights and property than a desire to help—and of course, his most earnest statements come when he believes Saleh cannot understand his words.

Saleh does encounter one person with a seemingly earnest desire to help him: Rachel, a legal advisor for an unnamed refugee organization. Edelman is no sincere well-wisher; Rachel is, it seems, despite Saleh at first feeling that "she had not really seen" him, and remains an active participant in the story long after Edelman disappears from Saleh's narrative (*By the Sea* 46). Saleh also offers an early comparison between colonials he dealt with in Zanzibar and contemporary Britons: "many of the people I met in those early months surprised me in appearance. They seemed so unlike the straight-backed, unsmiling variety I remembered from years ago" (*By the Sea* 43). In Rachel's case, Saleh "liked that she had made [him] think of [his] daughter, and that the thought had not come as a recollection of blame or pain but as a small pleasure amidst so much that was exotic and strange" (*By the Sea* 47). Later, he asks for her directly during a temporary stay at a group home for refugees she arranges for him to stay at (*By the Sea* 60). Despite the early affection Saleh seems to have for Rachel, however, he does not have any naive optimism about her involvement in his life. When he is transferred to the group home, Saleh notes that access to shelter is not paired with any authentic care:

"No one was concerned whether I ate or not, whether I was well or ill, whether I rejoiced or grieved. . . . Those two young champions of justice

and human rights [Rachel and her coworker Jeff] had delivered me to a zoo and then gone . . . to boast about how many ministers they had outwitted to get an old man out of the nasty detention centre and the fascist clutches of the state” (*By the Sea* 59).

Saleh’s sarcastic labeling of these two immigration officials rests on a critique of ideology: a satisfaction he imagines to be derived from moving a case along and casting his narrative as a simple binary of state oppression and victimhood. It also implies that Rachel and Jeff are more concerned with their own accomplishments and the attendant psychological rewards than with Saleh’s quality of life; the emphasis is on shuttling him through the bureaucracy represented in the novel by Edelman. It is noteworthy that Saleh himself wryly compares the group home to a detention center—precisely what he imagines Rachel to think she freed him from by sending him there: “To call it a detention center is to be melodramatic. There were no locked gates or armed guards, not even a uniform in sight. It was an encampment in the countryside, which was run by a private company” (*By the Sea* 42). Saleh’s description implies not that he is abused—and he has firsthand experience with state-sanctioned violence in detention camps—but that the group home is missing something.

The temporary group housing where Rachel places Saleh is symptomatic of his feeling like a part of a system rather than a humanizing process of accommodation. As Latif later recalls a past visit to his childhood home, occupied by Saleh, he notes that the old belongings of his family were all “objects which had beauty and purpose, but which stood like refugees in that room, standing still because pride and dignity demanded it but none the less as if they had a fuller life elsewhere” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 102). Later, in the narrative present, Saleh, now a literal refugee, experiences a dehumanizing, perhaps even objectifying process himself: “I suppose I was no longer the prized refugee rescued from

the jaws of the state. I was now a case” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 63). Saleh’s journey from being defined as a refugee to becoming a “case” is coupled with an attendant affection; his good will toward Rachel is quickly frustrated as he navigates the residency process. In particular, Rachel’s reaction when Saleh reveals that he is in fact a fluent English speaker disturbs him. Rachel responds with exasperation when Saleh echoes Bartleby once more, saying that he had “preferred not to” reveal his fluency earlier; she does not catch the reference (*By the Sea* 65). Saleh is “concerned” by the near contempt Rachel displays in this exchange, not for himself but for her: “that she was so mortified over such a small matter, such a petty ruse, what to her should have appeared as little more than a pointless deception. She did not have to listen in silence while stories were told about her” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 66). For Saleh, Rachel’s reaction belies a certain self-centeredness: her anger over what is to him an inconsequential deception reveals her inability to see the matter from his perspective. Saleh does not feel in control of his own narrative in that stories are being told about him—perhaps an ironic point given his narration to the reader—while Rachel’s focus on the inefficiency he has introduced to her work makes her, if anything, part of the problem.

Rachel’s arc in the novel reveals how despite her apparent earnestness—and Saleh’s overall fondness for her—a particular form of professional ethos among aid or service workers reaches its limit, a phenomenon not confined to Gurnah’s fiction. Consider the parallels, for example, between Rachel and Saleh’s relationship and that of an unnamed doctor and the title character in J.M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K.* (1983), set in South Africa. Michael K., homeless and emaciated nearly to point of fatal starvation after fleeing into the countryside to avoid civil war, is captured and placed into

an internment camp on suspicion of collaborating with rebels. In a narrative shift, the novel transitions into a first-person narrative from the perspective of a doctor at the camp. Greeted alternately with silence and with vocal refusal of care, he quickly finds Michael (noted down as “Michaels”) to be a resistant patient: “This morning when I tried to be friendly he shook me off. ‘Do you think if you leave me alone I am going to die?’ he said. ‘Why do you want to make me fat? Why fuss over me, why am I so important?’ I was in no mood to argue. I tried to take his wrist; he pulled away with surprising strength, waving an arm like an insect’s claw” (Coetzee, *Life & Times* 135). This surprising rebuff of the doctor’s attempts to improve Michael’s health becomes a consistent feature of that section of the novel. His insect claw of an arm here implicitly casts him as an object of study,<sup>9</sup> a curiosity to perhaps be examined and explained by a scientifically-minded expert; like Saleh, Michael is—quite literally, in this case—someone who has a story told about him. Michael shares one important method of resistance with Saleh: silence. As in the case of Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*, Saleh in *By the Sea*, and even Bartleby, silence, near-silence, and the refusal to explain becomes the most enraging form of resistance to controlling powers, culminating in an attempt to convince Michael to reveal information about the rebels (which he does not, in fact, possess):

‘Come on, my friend!’ I said. No one is going to hurt you, just tell us what we want to know!’ The silence lengthened. . . . ‘Come on, Michaels,’ I said, ‘we haven’t got all day, there is a war on!’ At last he spoke: ‘I am not in the war.’ Irritation overflowed in me. ‘You are not in the war? Of course you are in the war, man, whether you like it or not! This is a camp, not a holiday resort . . . it is a camp where we rehabilitate people like you and make you work! . . . if you don’t co-operate you will go to a place that is a lot worse than this!’ (Coetzee, *Life & Times* 138).

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<sup>9</sup> As well as being perhaps of a kind with Gregor Samsa, protagonist of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis”—Kafka being a major influence on Coetzee’s writing.



The doctor's anger is triggered in this scene not only by Michael's initial silence, but by his assertion of his separation from events in the public sphere. The "rehabilitation" he mentions thus takes on properties not only of individual, bodily rehabilitation, but of preparation to re-enter public life—even if that includes Michael being "in" the war.

In each case—Rachel's and the doctor's in *Michael K*—a character is presented with an inscrutable other; a liberal narrative of professional service reaches its limit in the face of an individual who appears in need of help yet resists and stymies efforts to aid him. Interestingly, both professionals react with frustration and anger in a manner suggesting that a fundamental expectation is not being met; if Rachel and the doctor are both service workers in the vein of the Ehrenreich's professional managerial class, the very object of their professional goals is frustrated by these resistant characters. To return to Saleh's being forced to listen to stories told about him, it is clear that he is quite conscious of the implications of narrative, particularly what Felicity Hand describes as a "tension between individual perceptions of history and collective consciousness" in Gurnah's fiction (76). I would add to Hand's statement that there is an additional tension between individual and *individual* perceptions of history on display in Gurnah's fiction, as seen in the relationship between Saleh and Latif; part of what Saleh and Latif undo throughout the novel are particular one-sided individual histories and perceptions (especially Latif's, which undergoes a good deal more revision than Saleh's throughout the story).<sup>10</sup> A key feature of narratives as Gurnah presents them is the way stories morph, adapt, and even become accepted as true over time, as seen in the story of Hussein's grandfather, Jaafar Musa. Jaafar is Persian, but "the British insisted on

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<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, one might reasonably argue that the gaps in Latif's initial history are also a kind of collective history: that of his immediate family, encouraged by the efforts of his parents.

describing him” as an Arab (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 25). By the end of Jaafar’s history, when he dies of a stroke, the narrative recounts that “so it was that Jaafar Musa, the legendary *Arab* cut-throat trader, died in the arms of his gardener, Abdulrazak” (26, my emphasis). The ethnic slippage that is a feature of this oral history connects with Hand’s point that “one of Gurnah’s projects in *By the Sea* is the examination of how history and memory intertwine and interfere with each other” (76). This is a point that is taken up further in the next section of this chapter. Jaafar Musa is another who has stories “told about” him—though unlike Saleh he does not survive to hear the ones readers of the novel are exposed to.

Jaafar Musa’s story reveals something about Saleh’s reluctance to speak to Rachel and other British officials at length about his past. In particular, it has implications for the asylum seeker or the refugee and his or her *narrative*. An intriguing point of comparison between Saleh and Bartleby, despite their similarities, is that Bartleby’s relative silence is not at all like Saleh’s; Saleh is quite verbose, only he directs his loquacity to the reader rather than to Rachel or especially Kevin Edelman. There is a refusal to tell the story to Edelman, but then the story is told in another register and context; a refusal to tell all that is required to Edelman, despite Saleh’s story being a very convincing account of his legitimacy as a refugee in the end; it is too complex and multilayered, not something that can simply be checked off on a list of requirements (as Edelman pushes for). Recall my lengthy summary of the novel’s plot above: summarizing it at all is difficult, and each element of Saleh’s history is crucial to understanding his story in its full complexity. Even at a glance, such a summary reveals why Saleh might be reticent to tell this long and complicated narrative to someone like Edelman, who is a kind of efficiency worker.

As a result of this reticence, Saleh becomes another case for Rachel, and a mystery to be unlocked like the small casket of ud-al-qamari he brings to England as one of his only possessions and which confuses Edelman upon opening it (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 13).

Rachel, though, seems to have a ready-made solution to Saleh's inscrutability: an appeal to expert mediation. As discussed below, expert intervention is anything but appealing to Saleh when the issue is first raised—until he discovers the “expert” Rachel has contacted is Latif. The arrival of an expert is even framed as inevitable by Saleh when he reflects on Rachel's reaction to learning that he speaks English: “It was not even ignorance, but an assurance that in the scheme of things it did not matter very much what language I spoke, since my needs and desires could be predicted, and sooner or later I would learn to make myself intelligible. Or sooner or later she would find an expert who would make me intelligible” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 66). Rachel's reaction also reveals a contradiction or inconsistency in her identity as a refugee worker: an inconsistency explained in part by the dovetailing of mapping and expertise in the following section. To return to *Life & Times of Michael K.*, though, we have seen how expert forces can be just as frustrated as any other in attempts to make an individual “intelligible.” This might be read in terms of Bhabha's conception of cultural difference, “the aim” of which is to “rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization” (162). Saleh's refusal to speak can be read as such a resistance to totalization—intelligibility, as he puts it himself. When Saleh is confronted with a culturally familiar and to him authentic expert on his area, though, he slowly becomes willing to share himself and his narrative in all its complexity, not only to the reader but to Latif as well, a point that should carry implications for the perspective of

expertise and its engagement with those outside of its own disciplinary or knowledge boundaries.

### **Maps and new categories of knowledge**

Saleh's journey to England as well as his aimless walks around the unnamed seaside town he lives in shortly after arrival might usefully be considered in light of de Certeau's "myriad footsteps" from "Walking in the City": they "do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character" (de Certeau 97). These steps are particularly relevant for Saleh's narrative in terms of de Certeau's consideration of them alongside maps. Mapping the paths of de Certeau's walkers "only refer[s], like words, to the absence of what has passed by" (de Certeau 97). As de Certeau goes on to argue, "there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence. . . . Haunted places are the only ones people can live in" (108). *By the Sea* reveals a hidden subtext to de Certeau's framework: the "haunted place" for Saleh and Latif is not so much their current residence in England as it is their shared past in Zanzibar, their absence from that past, and the memory of their departure, to borrow the title of Gurnah's novel of the same name.<sup>11</sup> Maps represent, for Saleh, a paradoxically beautiful but constraining technique; unlike the mapped trajectories envisioned by de Certeau, maps successfully circumscribe and place populations—just as a summarizing expert might—but simultaneously serve as a metaphor for new forms of knowledge that inform his worldview from childhood to migration to England.

Saleh's narrative in the early pages of *By the Sea* often turns to his experience with the British colonial education system in Zanzibar during his childhood. Knowledge

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<sup>11</sup> *Memory of Departure* is Gurnah's first novel, published in 1987.

derived from education is familiar thematic territory in Gurnah's fiction. Even in novels set mainly in precolonial territories, such as *Paradise*, the "civilized" East African islanders see their knowledge as trumping the virile might of men from the continent's interior: "'a civilized man can always defeat a savage, even if the savage eats a thousand lion penises,' another guard said, a man from Comoro. 'He can outwit him with knowledge and guile'" (Gurnah, *Paradise* 60). Somewhat in contrast to the British settlers in *Things Fall Apart*—who "had not only brought a religion but also a government"—the British in Zanzibar brought education and government, rather than a religion: the "British brought us school, and brought the rules to make school work" (Achebe 155, Gurnah, *By the Sea* 35). In Saleh's case—despite his evident cynicism as an older man as he tells the story to readers—British colonial education was seen as a boon:

Years before, the British authorities had been good enough to pick me out of the ruck of native schoolboys eager for more of their kind of education, though I don't think we all knew what it was we were eager for. It was learning, something we revered and were instructed to revere by the teachings of the Prophet, but there was a glamour in this kind of learning, something to do with being alive to the modern world. (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 17).

The vague sense of reverence Saleh recounts—encouraged by the boys' Islamic faith and perhaps knowingly exploited by the colonists—rests on generally favorable views of modernity and British "civilization." Less aware at the time, Saleh now suspects that the boys "secretly admired the British, for their audacity in being there . . . and for knowing so much about how to do the things that mattered: curing diseases, flying aeroplanes, making movies" (17-18).

The general sense of apparent ignorance and inferiority of the past felt by the young Saleh unsurprisingly colors his perceptions of culture. Compared with the

dominating and practical British, “the stories we knew about ourselves . . . seemed medieval and fanciful, sacred and secret myths that were liturgical metaphors and rites of adherence, a different category of knowledge which, despite our assertive observance, could not contest with theirs” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 18). Intriguingly, Saleh again frames this juxtaposition through narrative: stories. The word “medieval” relegates these stories strictly to the past, no match for the “different category” possessed by the British. The effect of this recasting and limiting of traditional Zanzibari stories is that Saleh’s very response to narrative changes. “In their books,” Saleh recalls, “I read unflattering accounts of my history, and *because they were unflattering, they seemed truer than the stories we told ourselves*” (18, my emphasis). The suspicion that local cultural narratives are no more than fanciful myths is apparently confirmed through their reframing in the colonial discourses structuring Saleh’s education. This sequence almost reads like a bildungsroman in miniature: Saleh running up against a “different category” of knowledge forecloses any “fanciful” view he might otherwise retain of his own culture, and he emerges hardened to the realities represented by British technical knowledge. Saleh, though, remains skeptical of the British as the narrative of his education continues: “they left too many spaces unattended to. . . . Their good . . . was steeped in irony. They told us about the nobility of resisting tyranny in the classroom and then applied a curfew after sunset, or sent pamphleteers for independence to prison for sedition” (18-19). However, this suspicion of British hypocrisy is offset by the pragmatism represented by their technical ability. Though the sentiment is steeped in sarcasm, Saleh recalls: “never mind, they did drain the creeks, and improve the sewage system and bring vaccines and

the radio” (19). Another technique the British have perfected and passed on to Saleh is mapping.

Saleh has what I take to be an ambivalent relationship with maps, understanding implicitly that they can be used as tools for the attainment of knowledge on the part of eager learners like himself but also carry the potential for fixing people and places through their drawn boundaries. “I speak to maps. and sometimes they say something back to me,” he muses early in the novel (35). He is enamored of maps, even as he recognizes their role in colonial dominance. Recalling the history of British colonialism in East Africa, he uses mapping as a paradigm for understanding the project: “new maps were made, complete maps, so that every inch was accounted for, and everyone now knew who they were, or at least who they belonged to. These maps, how they transformed everything” (15). Saleh recognizes the kind of synthesis mapping promotes, so that “it came to pass that in time those scattered little towns by the sea along the African coast found themselves part of huge territories stretching for hundreds of miles” (15-6). It is difficult to discern Saleh’s feelings initially, because he clearly states his love for maps yet describes mapping here as a part of the colonial project of defining and simplifying people and places. This diagnosis is also found in James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*, which in part is occupied by a concern with the kinds of local knowledge which were glossed over and tempered by large-scale colonial projects. Scott’s book grew out of a desire to understand “why the state has always seemed to be the enemy of ‘people who move around’”; the resultant “efforts at sedentarization” came to look like a given “state’s attempt to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions” (Scott 1, 2). Here, then, simplification is seen at

two levels: a simplification of society (or a view of society) and a simplification of what the state itself does. The issue of legibility is crucial: control of the population is contingent on understanding a population, preferably in the simplest way possible, as in a demographic map which designates that population visually and spatially. Indeed, as Timothy Mitchell notes, “power over persons was . . . reorganized as a power over space, and persons were merely the units arrayed and enumerated within that space” (Mitchell 90). As Saleh goes on to note, imperial mapping was thus not only a strategy for recognizing and organizing geographic spaces, but the people inhabiting those spaces as well:

Before maps the world was limitless. It was maps that gave it shape and made it seem like territory, like something that could be possessed, not just laid waste and plundered. Maps made places on the edges of the imagination seem graspable and placable. And later when it became necessary, geography became biology in order to construct a hierarchy in which to place the people who lived in their inaccessibility and primitiveness in other places on the map. (35)

The newfound intelligibility of exotic “places on the edges of imagination” also marks the transition to comprehensibility and control of populations. As Scott identifies the state as the enemy of people who “move around,” Saleh’s observation identifies mapping as a tactic by which a state might fix those people in place. This fixing in place includes both physical placement and arrangement as well as the biological classification—calling to mind racist discourses of the twentieth century such as eugenics, social Darwinism, and craniometry—that imperial nations utilized as methods of control and propaganda; it also recalls Saleh’s worry over being summarized by an outsider expert, who would also fix him in place and define him.

With this idea of simplification and spatial arrangement in mind, it is revealing to look at a specific example of mapping in action. I have in mind here Saleh’s account of



his first encounter with a map, which took place in a classroom. Saleh describes how the teacher “began to draw a map on the blackboard with a piece of white chalk. . . . [and] as he drew, he spoke, naming places, sometimes in full sometimes in passing. . . . Sinuously north to the jut of the Ruvuma delta . . . and then all the way to China. He stopped there and smiled, having drawn half the known world in one continuous line with his piece of chalk” (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 37). At least two features of this passage are significant and relevant to the purpose of this presentation. First, the importance of names and naming should not be understated. Indeed, Saleh recalls how “these names too were new to me, as were so many of the others, but [the teacher] said them with such reverence and longing—the fall of Granada and the expulsion of Muslims from Andalus—that I have never lost the moment” (37). This is territory Gurnah has explored elsewhere, such as in the short story “Bossy,” which features two young Zanzibari characters exploring a nearby unpopulated island, occasionally naming objects, and acting out a humorous archaeological and quasi-colonial exploration: “It seemed then that there ought to be a watermill as a sign of . . . an ancient Indonesian culture. . . . We posed for a photo to show the folks back home hand on hip. This rock we named Bygone My Arse” (Gurnah, “Bossy” 127). The crucial element here is that this use of names is also a necessary component of mapping, which typically involves labelling for the purpose of making an area legible and simplified. In *By the Sea*, beyond Saleh’s teacher naming these places, it is worth considering the act of his drawing them in one continuous line; this is evincing a totalizing mastery as he demarcates and summarizes “half the known world” with one smooth and contained motion. Perhaps more speculatively, the narrative identifying the specifically white chalk on the blackboard might be seen as further support for this being

an image of specifically colonial knowledge alongside Saleh's mention of biological hierarchies, as the white marker lays out the boundaries of "dark" colonized locales.<sup>12</sup>

The mastery of space represented by colonial mapping carries associations with control, modernity, travel, and even certain insecurities Saleh evinces. When Saleh begins to offer background for the ud-al-qamari (an incense) he brings with him to England, there is a very strange narrative moment. Saleh informs the reader that he is about to tell "the story of the trader I obtained the ud from," but qualifies the manner of telling with the following: "I'll tell it this way, because I no longer know who may be listening" (16). One might see this anxiety over being anonymously listened in on as reflective of a Foucaultian preoccupation with surveillance, famously exemplified in the theory of the Panopticon. Surprisingly, though, Saleh's situation in these early pages—as detailed in the previous section of this chapter—more closely resembles the Panopticon's predecessor, the plague-stricken town: "a system of permanent registration" in which a document is drawn up bearing "the name, age, sex of everyone, notwithstanding his condition.' . . . Everything that may be observed . . . is noted down" (Foucault, *Discipline* 196). Among the "haunting" memory of the plague as "disorder" are "people who appear and disappear"; precisely the form of disorder—such as the migrant—that figures like Edelman are tasked with guarding against (Foucault, *Discipline* 198). Saleh's concern with who might be secretly listening to his story is a statement that provocatively implicates the reader of the novel. Additionally, though, Saleh's worry is almost certainly reflective of his prior experiences with state control, repression, abuse, and internment.

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<sup>12</sup> Maps alongside the idea of civilization in education also seem to have had an enduring effect on Gurnah's own life. Gurnah still recalls his first history lesson during his secondary schooling, writing that "on the first page of our history books was a map of Africa in outline, with a dotted line separating North Africa from the rest. I can't remember the rubric that accompanied this map, but I remember the first question the teacher asked the class. He wanted us to explain why it was that Africa below this dotted line was uncivilized throughout the centuries until the arrival of the Europeans" ("An Idea" 14).

That these trials are still very much on his mind is showcased by his juxtapositions of English state workers like Edelman with those he encountered previously as well as his later detailed recounting of internment later in the novel, an episode that adds an additional tragic layer to his narrative. This oblique reference to that experience is notable in light of its spatial distance from the narrative present of the novel. Paul Virilio, who has written extensively on speed and distance in the modern world, notes that “the annihilation of time and space by high speeds substitutes the vastness of emptiness for that of the exoticism of travel, which was obvious for people like [nineteenth-century German poet Heinrich] Heine who saw in this very annihilation the supreme goal of technique” (109). This “annihilation of time and space” of course facilitates Saleh’s route from Zanzibar to England and his subsequent relocation(s) after arrival, but it is also present in maps, which circumscribe, summarize, and serve as a snapshot of an area at a particular time. Its framing as technical ambition by Virilio, in this context, highlights how Saleh’s worldview encompasses both England and Zanzibar: mapping the distance between the two necessarily allows a simultaneous view of both, and the numerous temporal shifts of the novel between colonial and post-revolutionary Zanzibar and contemporary England encourage the reader to draw connections between the “stories” told about Saleh in the past which doomed him to state internment and the stories told about him in the present by Rachel and others.

Saleh’s disgruntlement at the stories told about him dovetail with his ambivalence about expertise. Take the scene where Latif is first described to Saleh (but not by name) as an “expert on [Saleh’s] area” who has agreed to help with his immigration case (65). Saleh has an immediate and clear negative, even angry reaction to this news. He

sarcastically repeats the term “my *area*” several times while imagining this person’s professional activities, in a passage worth quoting at length:

someone who has written books about me no doubt, who knows all about me, more than I know about myself. . . . He will have slipped in and out of my *area* for decades, studying me and noting me down, explaining me and summarising me. . . . An expert in my *area*, someone who has written books about me no doubt, who knows all about me, more than I know about myself. He will have visited all the places of interest and significance in my *area*, and will know their historical and cultural context when I will be certain never to have seen them and will only have heard vague myths and popular tales about them. He will have slipped in and out of my *area* for decades, studying me and noting me down, explaining me and summarizing me, and I would have been unaware of his busy existence. (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 65, emphasis in original)

Saleh’s description is reminiscent of the district commissioner at the end of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, who reflects on protagonist Okonkwo’s hanging body that “one could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter, but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate” (208-9). For any reader, these plans to summarize Okonkwo’s story, which has richly filled the pages of Achebe’s two hundred-odd page novel, should be enraging. Similarly, Saleh’s immediate reaction to this proposed expert visitor assumes the expert to be an outsider, potentially even a kind of colonizing force. Note also that Rachel’s presentation of this so-far unnamed expert casts his expertise in spatial terms: not Saleh’s language or culture, for example, but his *area*; Saleh’s reaction, then, implicitly reinforces his ambivalent stance on maps, those beautiful devices which are nonetheless often used as tools of imperial demarcation. However, Saleh changes his tune when he is told that the expert is Latif Mahmud, someone he knows of and who is not only an expert *on* his “area,” but from it as well—yet turns out to have not as much faith in his expertise as Rachel and Saleh do. “[T]hat was something,” Saleh thinks, “not a stranger who came to summarize us, but one of our own” (67). It is noteworthy, again,

that Saleh seems to take the word “area” more or less literally, as a space rather than merely a subject. My argument is that this reflects his interest in maps, which designate, define, and summarize areas, which leads to the claim that Saleh’s view of expertise relies on a kind of authenticity. The colonizing English expert, no doubt, would merely attempt to summarize him. Latif, in contrast, will map his—their—area in the proper way, like the maps that “say something back” to Saleh and give “shape” to the limitless world (Gurnah 35).

Despite Saleh’s lionization of what he perceives as Latif’s authentic expert knowledge, Latif himself is far from enamored of the profession in which he presumably applies that knowledge. A professor of poetry, he nonetheless alerts the reader early in his own narrative that they are essentially empty: “I abhor poems,” he reflects. “I read them and teach them and abhor them. . . . They say *nothing* so elaborately, they reveal *nothing*, they lead to *nothing*. . . . Give me a lucid bit of prose any day” (74, my emphasis). Latif’s preference for prose over poetry’s apparent lack of meaning curiously leads him not only to dismiss the genre itself, but his own value as an expert. When Saleh teasingly mentions the quote that so disturbed him before learning Latif’s identity—“Rachel said you were an expert in *our area*”—Latif responds with self-directed venom: “I’m not an expert on anything, he said, sneering at himself. I teach English literature” (151-2, emphasis in original). Latif’s naming of specifically English literature as the subject matter he teaches recalls his earlier anxiety about going to meet Saleh, when, like Saleh, he was unaware of the other’s identity: “Would they tell me, or think to themselves, how English I had become, how different, how out of touch?” he wonders. “As if it was either here or there whether I had or not, as if it proved something uncomplicated about alienation” (Gurnah,

*By the Sea* 73). Latif's worry about Zanzibari reactions to his professionalization demonstrates an anxiety that works against John Marx's claim in *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* that the "very ties of education and expert knowledge that helped generate a national professional-managerial class also laid the foundation for a global class of specialists linked more securely to their overseas colleagues than to their home countries" (22). If this was the case during the Modernist era, it is no longer so in Latif's eyes. The tension between his cultural heritage and his specialization as a professor of poetry—and a poet, as well—reveals not secure ties to a "global class of specialists" but a worry that his expert training has put him out of touch with his birthplace and its people. This takes the form, upon meeting Saleh and receiving his compliments, of Latif disparaging his own professional accomplishments:

‘I’m not a professor, and not a distinguished poet,’ he said . . . looking displeased with my attempt at flattery. ‘I have a handful of pitiful poems in a little magazine which is too generous for its own good. I’m surprised anybody knew about any of them.’ ‘Well, they did,’ I said, interested to see the way he punished himself for the achievement, which after all was real and his own, rather than accepting the meagre applause lightly. (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 145)

This passage makes clear that Latif's dislike of poetry, his chosen professional subject, extends to an insecurity over his own poetic output. While we are not told explicitly just what Latif's degree of renown is, the fact that Rachel was able to locate him at all and Saleh was aware of his work demonstrates that his name is, to some degree, "out there" beyond the confines of the university. Yet here, his poems are framed as "pitiful" and only appearing in one "little" magazine. This self-repudiation of Latif's professional status should be seen as a deep insecurity of his own knowledge, an insecurity that finds its roots earlier in the narrative.

Latif's lack of faith in his knowledge is not confined to the narrative present, either. In the portion of the novel he narrates, Latif recounts his travel to the German Democratic Republic for his education. After arriving, he has a realization about the boundaries of his own knowledge, and reflects: "I knew a little bit about the fishing banks of Newfoundland, and the Fire of London and Cromwell, and the Siege of Mafeking and the Abolition of the slave trade, because that was what my colonised education had required me to know" (122). The experience of arrival forces Latif to confront the limits of that colonial education, causing him to realize that "I knew nothing about Dresden or a multitude of other Dresdens. They had been there for all these centuries despite me, ignorant of me, oblivious of my existence. It was a staggering thought, how little it had been possible to know and remain contented" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 122). It is crucial here, I think, to consider that the limitations of Latif's knowledge function as a barrier to both within and without: he knew nothing about a multitude of places, yet the subpoint of his observation is that they also know nothing of him. It is not only his own lack of knowledge but the lack of recognition on the part of these locales which makes Latif feel so minimized. Later, after befriending a young East German man and his mother, he remarks to them: "I don't know anything. . . . Or been anywhere" (131). Gurnah's intention here is perhaps to frame this as a subtle double entendre alongside Latif's view of poetry: what he really knows best is "nothing," like the poems he feels say "nothing" themselves (though as a young man he may have not yet studied the subject). Latif, like Gurnah, is someone with one foot in academia and the other in literary production; as such, I turn to Gurnah himself to continue examining the role of knowledge, professionalism, and narrative in his fiction.

### **Gurnah's identity and its implications for reading *By the Sea***

One reviewer of *By the Sea* contends that “for someone concerned with politics, Gurnah is a highly literary writer”—an odd statement that attempts to set up a dichotomy between the literary and the political which most critics of recent decades would likely take issue with (King 85). It is also rather loaded: the reviewer does not go on to define his use of either of the terms, both of which have been subjected to endless scrutiny. What the reviewer seems to mean by literary, though, is Gurnah's numerous implicit and explicit references to other texts, mostly fiction such as “Bartleby the Scrivener,” but also the Qur'an. A familiarity with Gurnah's biography makes this feature of his writing less surprising (if indeed a writer of fiction referencing other works of fiction is surprising to begin with), as Gurnah was a student of literature before he established himself as a major literary author. Like the above reviewer, I find Gurnah's biography and his public identity of interest and relevant to an analysis of his fiction. A specific point to add is that a significant aspect of that identity is Gurnah's scholarly profession and output.

While both McEwan and Smith have ties to the academic realm, McEwan through an MFA in fiction from the University of East Anglia, and Smith through teaching at Harvard and Columbia universities and as a tenured professor at New York University, only Gurnah has aligned himself clearly and solidly with the academy (“Zadie Smith Joins Faculty”). While McEwan and Smith are both public figures, frequently contributing to popular publications like *The Guardian*, Gurnah devotes himself, if not as much as to his fiction, to the academic sphere and academic writing. His faculty page at the University of Kent—where he earned a PhD in 1982—lists him as Professor of Postcolonial Literatures and PhD Director at the school of English, and also notes that



Gurnah is “*now* best-known as a novelist” (Head 470; “Professor Abdulrazak Gurnah,” my emphasis). The language here implies that while Gurnah is now a major novelist, and the university takes advantage of his name recognition, his prime and original career orientation was as an academic. Zadie Smith, for instance, can readily be found featured not only in her own collections of essays—such as *Changing My Mind*—but also in compilations such as *The Best American Essays* alongside creative nonfiction writers like Kelly Sundberg and humorist David Sedaris.<sup>13</sup> Gurnah’s nonfiction is more likely to be encountered in lesser-known and explicitly academic venues, such as the two volumes of Heinemann’s *Essays on African Writing* he edited and contributed to. It is in this mode that Gurnah engages in debate with literary critics *as a literary critic* himself, not as an author of fiction (though barring the use of a pseudonym his name will inevitably carry some implicit weight by association with his fiction).

Gurnah’s scholarly output often aligns with the thematic material of his fiction. Part of what Gurnah seems to admire in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s celebrated novel about the eve of Kenyan independence, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), is how its narrative form “slips in and out of present-time and between narrating voices, creating some instability about what is known and what it means to know” (Gurnah, “Introduction” ix).<sup>14</sup> It is worth considering how Gurnah’s identity as scholar-author positions him to be a natural fit for this sort of literary introduction. It is not, I argue, just that Gurnah is an author who is, like Thiong’o, from East Africa, but his cultivated role as a serious scholar of literature who also produces respected literary-creative works that makes him seem an appropriate

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<sup>13</sup> See *Best American Essays 2015*, edited by Ariel Levy. Smith was also featured in the 2014 edition.

<sup>14</sup> It may be worth noting again that Gurnah’s introduction to *A Grain of Wheat* was written for a Penguin Classics edition published in 2002, one year after the publication of *By the Sea*. The issue of knowledge and its attendant instability may have been particularly present in Gurnah’s thinking while writing or shortly after writing *By the Sea*, one of his more experimental novels in terms of narrative structure.

figure to set the stage for the Penguin edition of *A Grain of Wheat*. Because of this status, Gurnah's statement on narrative voice in Thiong'o's novel takes on a dual meaning: the novel is an object of analysis expertly dissected for the reader of this edition of the novel—from a publisher which is respected in academic circles—and is also revealed as an inspiration for the form Gurnah's own creative fiction takes. Certainly the narrative of *By the Sea* could be described in precisely the same terms by which Gurnah describes *A Grain of Wheat*, word for word; if anything, *By the Sea* more thoroughly embraces the instability of knowledge Gurnah finds in Thiong'o's novel. This is in part due to the first-person narrative it employs, as opposed to Thiong'o's close third-person narrative which allows for some expository and contextual information beyond individual characters' perspectives to emerge.

This concern with the limits and instability of knowledge seems to be a common reference point in Gurnah's thinking. In an interview, he speaks to his place as a writer from Africa and as a critic of that body of literature: depictions of a kind of "precolonial homogeneity" are "crude," but nonetheless make sense in the context of "the aftermath of that [colonial] onslaught of ridicule, of contempt" (Gurnah, Interview 359-60). Gurnah sees his own fiction as a corrective to a simplified view of precolonial Africa:

I felt it was necessary in books like *Paradise* to perhaps complicate the vision. I thought it was necessary to try and write and see how it might have worked if you portrayed a society that was actually fragmented. Fragmented doesn't mean that it doesn't work. It just means that it worked in a different way. . . . I am not trying to suggest that what was there before was admirable. It was simply that it worked. (Gurnah, Interview 360-1)

It is important to recognize in the above quote that Gurnah's vision is directed to the past, to history. As demonstrated in this chapter's analysis of *By the Sea*, a concern with narratives of the past is a major concern of Gurnah's fiction. Indeed, his writing *on*

fiction reveals how sustained an interest this really is. In an article for *Moving Worlds*, Gurnah targets Wole Soyinka in a surprisingly heated polemic directed at Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). Gurnah calls a novel cited by Soyinka—Ayi Kwei Armah's 1973 *Two Thousand Seasons*—"a bombastic and misanthropic work, written with a self-righteousness so absurd and an idea of Ancient African Society so egalitarian and caring that it is embarrassing beyond ridicule" (Gurnah, "An Idea" 12). "But Soyinka likes it," Gurnah continues, "because it not only condemns the European colonial enterprise but recounts in lurid detail the other 'whites' who have colonized Africa, that is to say, the Arabs" ("An Idea" 12). Gurnah goes on to detail the expulsion and murder of anyone falling under "the category 'Arab'" under Abeid Karume's Zanzibari government, noting that "the same Karume is mentioned among the heroes of 'racial retrieval' in Soyinka's book" ("An Idea" 12). As Claire Chambers notes, "as a member of this group of hybrid Zanzibari Arabs, Gurnah seeks to complicate any easy nostalgia for the precolonial past" (115). This is a primary concern of both Gurnah's fiction and scholarship: an undoing of the harmful simplifications and smoothing over of complexity and variety he finds in Soyinka's and Armah's books.

Gurnah's embrace of complexity and its attendant multitude of discourses and perspectives is not without precedent, yet is far from a universal assumption, even among literary authors. Most significantly, Gurnah's view puts him at odds with a particular strand of thought from earlier in the twentieth century. In *A Genealogy of Modernism*, Michael Levinson demonstrates a modernist impulse to be skeptical of the often stupefying complexities brought into the public sphere by the rise of disciplinary

specialists. At the forefront of this stance was Ford Madox Ford, who targets quantitative reasoning in particular:

Practical politics have become so much a matter of sheer figures that the average man, dreading mathematics almost as much as he dreads an open mind, is reduced, nevertheless, to a state of mind so open that he has abandoned thinking—that he has abandoned even feeling about any public matter at all. (qtd in Levinson 51)

The over-complexity of practical public matters is a necessary byproduct, in Ford's eyes, of the specialists, who "brought an end to generalizing thought," while "the popular press vulgarized whatever thought remained" (Levinson 51). Gurnah, born several generations into the specialist-mediated world modernists like Ford saw expand, adopts quite a different stance through his focus on humanistic discourse, represented mainly by literature. The rise of global literature in English as a broad and ever-growing set of texts made available to students and the general public trends toward a greater variety of less opaque knowledge for Gurnah, who views contemporary world literature as facilitating a more intelligible reality; the "dread" of an open mind referenced by Ford does not come to pass. The transnational or multicultural status of writing today "makes us realize how accessible other knowledges are. . . . the world actually becomes a smaller place where we can make connections and which is more and more understandable" (Gurnah, Interview 359). Recall Latif's simultaneous deprecation of his supposed expert status alongside the English literature he teaches in *By the Sea*: perhaps a character Gurnah might write as an expert in world literature would appear less alienated. Like Saleh, Latif might then see himself as an authentic expert with access to "other knowledges," rather than finding himself—after being called a "blackamoor" by a passerby on the street—living in "the house" of English, a "language which barks and scorns at me behind every third corner" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 72-3).

Gurnah's use of terms like "other knowledges" and "understandable" in the above passage represents more than a token gesture to multiculturalism, though. While there is, I think, an implied tension between a specifically English literature and a broader world literature in Gurnah's statement, it also represents an engagement with discourses of modernity. The idea of the world becoming a "smaller place" is virtually cliché today, but is also part of a wide-ranging body of scholarship on modernity, represented quite notably by authors such as Anthony Giddens. Giddens has written extensively on what he calls "disembedding mechanisms." "By disembedding," Giddens means "the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens 21). These mechanisms take the form of "symbolic tokens" such as money that can be "passed around" without a concern with who is handling them, as well as "expert systems," which is a "continuous" deployment of expert knowledge; a house or a car, for example, is reliant on and connected to a multitude of expert systems which make it possible (Giddens 22, 27). I am primarily interested in symbolic tokens here, because Gurnah's statement inserts an additional complication to Giddens's scheme: namely, the effect of a specific kind of information which goes unnamed in Giddens's account, that is, intercultural information and communication. Intercultural exchange of knowledge, unlike a symbolic token such as money, is—definitionally—implicated in the individuals and groups involved in the exchange. Gurnah argues that "'the story of our times' can no longer be sealed in a controllable kind of narrative. The narrative has slipped out of the hands of those who had control of it before. These new stories unsettle previous understandings" (Interview 358). These new stories crisscrossing the globe, like disembedding mechanisms, function

across “indefinite spans” of time and space; however, narrative as characterized by Gurnah effectively makes the lifting out of local contexts an impossibility. Saleh and Latif each retain, indefinitely, their Zanzibari past, and various cultural markers—racial, religious, etc—are even reinforced by constant reminders in England, from Saleh’s fellow group home inhabitants to the bigot uttering a racial slur as he passes Latif in the street.

Latif and Saleh both struggle with the view—or lack of a view—that European culture has of them, a conflict well-established by the accounts of each of their educations. Interestingly, by the end of the book Saleh’s perspective of knowledge, despite being the older man with first-hand experience of both a colonial education and victimization at the hands of state power, seems to be more hopeful than Latif’s. I think that the explanation for Saleh’s relatively positive outlook lies in the twisting, uncertain narrative of the novel, which slowly unravels a history which is only fully revealed by the mutual exchange of stories by Saleh and Latif. Between the two of them, it is Saleh who has access to the more complete version of the story, which he has the opportunity to relay in detail to Latif. Gurnah himself comments on the kind of narrative encouraged by colonizing culture, saying in an interview that: “What the colonial cultures and people think about those accounts of them is not important because the focus, the emphasis has been in Europe, in the West. So what’s known by the West constitutes knowledge, it doesn’t matter what those ‘others’ think they know” (Gurnah, Interview 358). However, Gurnah sees this primarily a remnant of the past. Today, he goes on, “‘the story of our times’ can no longer be sealed in a controllable kind of narrative. The narrative has slipped out of the hands of those who had control of it before. These new stories unsettle

previous understandings” (Gurnah, Interview 358). This “unsettling” of previous understandings is precisely what is on display in *By the Sea*. Crucially, though, the unsettling is aimed not at the knowledge of colonizing states, but at Latif himself. If he claims to know nothing as a student in Germany, and to study the nothingness of poetry in his professional life, he might nonetheless be seen as grasping control of his own narrative and history both in Zanzibar and Europe throughout the course of the novel and his interactions with Saleh. And perhaps Saleh looks to Latif as a new generation who has come to terms with that history and is also still young and able to embark on a new narrative.

The perspective of knowledge cultivated by Gurnah’s fiction and scholarly writing encourages readers to see the “taking control” of narrative by Latif and Saleh in detail above not as a settling of accounts, but as an embrace of a necessary shifting and uncertainty that accompanies narrative. Gurnah says that stories can “take on a life of their own; they develop their own logic and coherence. At first it might seem like this is a bit of a lie; in reality what you are doing is reconstructing yourself in the light of things that you remember” (Gurnah, Interview 353). To return to Hand’s note on “tension between individual perceptions of history and collective consciousness” in Gurnah’s work, that interpretation might be reinterpreted as a tension within the very conception of knowledge itself in Gurnah’s writing (76). I have tried to shed some light on the function of mapping and knowledge itself in *By the Sea*, arguing that it is only by mutual, cross-generational recognition and sharing of knowledge—and a coming to terms with the limits of one’s own individual understanding and perspective—that Saleh and Latif come to terms with the instability inherent in the knowledge of histories and cultures.

## Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have suggested that expertise and professionalism are both critiqued and deployed by recent novelists. These moves, however, are far from uniform; it is clear to me that there is no consensus about expert knowledge nor the role of professionalism among contemporary authors, though each is a key element of their fiction. I have also argued that there is something to be gained from looking at how these writers engage with expertise and professionalism in public, nonfictional settings: some under the active control of the author, such as their answers to interview questions, and some, like faculty web pages, which may be more passive. I believe that my analyses of McEwan, Smith, and Gurnah demonstrate the usefulness of this approach. That is, it is possible and worthwhile to see the connecting strands between authors as public figures—or public intellectuals—and the fictional output they produce without being reduced to engaging in something akin to biographical determinism in an analysis of fiction. In particular, this sort of dual analysis has aided me in analyzing the way these authors use form in their novels; this was clearest to me in chapter 1's connection between Ian McEwan's style of realism alongside his preparatory research for his novel, but it also played a role in the chapters on Smith and Gurnah.

I see *Boundaries of Knowledge* as adding to scholarly understanding of recent Anglophone literature, particularly that with a connection to British culture, by emphasizing the enduring importance of expertise and professionalism from throughout the twentieth century to the present, including its sharp rise in prominence in the late colonial era to its somewhat imperiled status today. My extensive use of secondary research in the social sciences stands out as a call for greater interdisciplinary



collaboration; the prominence of research into my topic from disciplines outside of literary studies has been at times startling. Without downplaying the significance or quality of previous examinations of expertise or professionalism in recent literature, I believe that literary criticism has much to gain from further examination of these topics.

An enduring question that I think is beyond the scope of this dissertation to answer definitively is whether the cultural output of the time period I focus on—the years leading up to and immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001—takes a special stance toward expertise, or has particular relationships to it, that were uncommon or unseen previously. It would be intriguing to study, for example, whether fiction written at the turn of the twenty-first century anticipates the increasing backlash against expertise and professional knowledge workers that have become so prominent in the late stages of this writing (and as I describe in this dissertation's introduction). It is my hope that *Boundaries of Knowledge* encourages other scholars to investigate this and related inquiries further.

I also remain intrigued and puzzled by how globalization and the rise of transnational literatures might be seen as functioning alongside expertise and professionalism, which are so often themselves seen as on the rise. Each of the novels analyzed in-depth in this dissertation can be seen as international in scope: *Saturday* through its concern with the United States, the regime of Saddam Hussein, and the pending invasion of Iraq; *On Beauty* with its oscillation between the United States and England and its mixed-nationality families; and of course *By the Sea* and its ever-more-timely portrayal of the experiences of refugees. Indeed, each of the authors I have focused on have led transnational lives: McEwan spent much of his early life living from

country to country due to his father's military work, Smith splits time between the United Kingdom and United States, and Gurnah's migration from Zanzibar to England mirrors that of so many of his characters. This is a common thread that could have been spun out more prominently in *Boundaries of Knowledge*. While I have mostly focused on expertise and professionalism in a British context, it is nonetheless a global phenomenon and well worth continued investigation.

The fiction I have examined in this dissertation calls readers to reflect on how knowledge is formed, the shape it takes, and the benefits and drawbacks of how it has been institutionalized through disciplines and professions. The nuanced engagement with expertise undertaken by McEwan, Smith, and Gurnah at times shows us, I have argued, that disciplinary specialization can close as many doors to our understanding of one another and the world around us as it can open. Most readers of this dissertation are likely disciplinary specialists or experts themselves; perhaps by reflecting on the status of expertise and professionalism in the wake of the opening decades of the twenty-first century we might better avoid the boundaries between forms of knowing that these authors illuminate.

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EDUCATION

M.A. in English, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, August 2011.

B.A. in English, Saginaw Valley State University, University Center, MI, December 2008.

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed Journal Articles

“‘The Black,’ Space, and Sexuality: Examining Resistance in Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*.” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 52.2 (June 2017): 350-64.

“In Pursuit of Race in Ian McEwan.” *JAISA: Journal of the Association for Interdisciplinary Study of the Arts* 11.1 (Fall 2012): 49-65.

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Entries for *On Chesil Beach*, *Saturday*, *Á Reboours*, and “Odour of Chrysanthemums” in *The Dictionary of Literary Characters*. Facts on File, Inc. 2010.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Dissertation Excellence Fellowship, University of Kentucky, 2016-17.

Provost’s Award for Outstanding Teaching, University of Kentucky, 2016.

College of Arts and Sciences Certificate for Outstanding Teaching, University of Kentucky, 2016.

Dissertation Writing Award, University of Kentucky, 2014.

Ben Wathen Black Memorial Graduate Scholarship in British Literature, University of Kentucky, 2013.

Department of English Research Award, Three Years, University of Kentucky, 2011-2014.

Provost Fellowship, West Virginia University, 2011. (Fellowship for 2011-12 academic year—declined in order to study at University of Kentucky.)

James Paul Brawner Expository Writing Contest, West Virginia University  
2011. 2nd place, graduate division, for “‘Nature's Logic was too Horrid’: a  
Lacanian Reading of *Jude the Obscure*.”

Rebecca Mason Perry Award for Outstanding First-Year Graduate Student,  
West Virginia University, 2009-10.