

The Ethical And Moral Dilemma As Reflected In Ian Mcewan's *Amsterdam*

S.Manikandan^{#1}, Dr.F.Suji Brindha Theodore^{*2}

#Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, Government Arts College, Tiruchirappalli-22

¹*harrismanimusic@gmail.com*

Abstract— The present study tries to look ethical and moral dilemma in terms of euthanasia, betrayal, private or personal doctrines, political principles and friendship in the novel of *Amsterdam* (1998). Ian McEwan is a postmodernist critique and he explores the status and consequences of the social, political and cultural issues and how they positively or negatively affect today's world and the same has been applied in the novel. McEwan's characters are tested by circumstances and ethical morality. *Amsterdam* is a satire and dark examination of morality, politics, media and creative life of modern times. It is a tragedy that explores several moral issues viz. euthanasia, friendships, English political system, psychology of human nature, privacy rights, yearning for greatness, sacrifice and media power (press).

Keywords— *Amsterdam, Euthanasia, Betrayal, Private, Doctrines, Friendship, Moral and Ethical*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ian McEwan has been an eminent and essential figure of the recent revival of the British literature, especially in fiction. British fiction in the 1980s has gone through a period of innovation, discovery excitement, technological and media that expresses the artistic satisfaction and celebration. He has become a strongest novelist of that warning intimation, a writer of the New World Disorder and its deepest anxieties, a shaper and motivator of our present feelings, emotions and imagination. His novels are well-crafted and stylised; they combine rich insights into human condition with plots that comment on public anxieties and concerns. His characters are from middle class viz. writers, university lecturers, quantum physicists, neurosurgeons, spies, judges, musicians, newspaper editors and nurses. His characters show a few important features like interior monologue and reflective contemplation which tend to be thoughtful questioning individual emotions and internal intellectuality. McEwan pays attention to the intricacies of plot, characters and settings. 'Death' is a predominant idea of McEwan's novels and short stories.

2. DILEMMA IN AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam is divided into five parts; all five parts contain a different number of chapters. All the chapters are presented and narrated with free indirect speech, and from multiple perspectives. The composer Clive is the narrator of first and third part; second part is narrated from Vernon's point of view. The final two parts of the novel has mixed narrators; it is narrated by Julian Garmony's wife (Rose Garmony) Vernon, Clive, George and an objective narrator. In the novel *Amsterdam* one of the characters is 'Molly'; her death brings together two of her former lovers, and Julian Garmony, a right-wing politician. Ian McEwan's characters again explore the opposing perspectives on the world like highbrow, lowbrow, arts, commerce, patterns of social ideals and inequality. In the novel *Amsterdam* the city *Amsterdam* itself symbolizes a paradox: 'There was never a city more rationally ordered (AM 168)'. But it turns out to be the place where people can get away with murder, suicide and euthanasia.

Ian McEwan questions the quality and moral responsibility of the society. In a horrific and terrible situation a woman needs help and protection. But in the case of Clive, he has never cared for the woman and has not reported the incident to the police; Clive offers more importance to his creating symphony. The author criticises the society and every individual for not being conscientious about morality. In the Lake District, Ian McEwan clearly projects immoral incidents:

The man had hold of her wrist and was trying to drag her round the tarn towards the shelter of the sheer rock face directly below Clive. She was scrabbling on the ground with her free hand, possibly looking for a stone to use as a weapon, but that only made it easier for him to jerk her along... he was in his music. His fate, their fate, separate paths. It was not his business (AM 88-89).

Second dynamic case deals about the editor, The Judge Vernon Halliday, who considers the foreign secretary Julian Garmony as his enemy because once he is also a lover of Molly. Once Halliday gets a chance to publish Garmony's private pictures in his the Judge with the support of his editorial team. After the publication of Garmony's private pictures the circulation of the Judge has been increased but Halliday has been forced to resign his job. In this scenario Halliday's duty is to make introspection whether his action is ethical or immoral. Halliday clearly expresses in his conversation with his friend Clive that a newspaper editor's role is to point out the hypocrisy of the people and in that way he targets the next prime minister, Garmony and prevents him from ruining the country. Halliday's words towards Clive, 'Then he put them back in the envelope and said quietly, 'Incredible. The hypocrisy of the man'. (AM 107)

According to Vernon the foreign secretary is a hypocrite but Clive argues that Garmony is a politician who has personal or private subject, without Garmony's permission, Halliday is not supposed to publish the photos. If Vernon is to publish the private photos, it will ruin his political and familial future, because he has a beautiful wife and children. So, in the general term- The personal subject should be personal.

Furious arguments arises between two friends that has made two controversial ideas, and ultimately Clive discloses that private photos are taken by Molly, and if the photos are to be published in the newspaper it will create questions about Molly's private life. Ian McEwan attacks the cultural failure of the English society through the character of Molly Lane. Molly is the wife of George but she is the lover of Clive, Vernon and Garmony.

Novel, Amsterdam ends with the pact of Euthanasia. It is a big question, should human beings have the right to decide on issues of life and death? Generally, in the case of euthanasia, no one is permitted to do such an act. Euthanasia or mercy killing is the termination of a very sick person or one who is in incurable condition. Like terminally ill, mental pain, severe pain, breathlessness, paralysis, damaged physical condition, suffering prolonged and unbearable pain in order to relieve them of their suffering; and the decision is made by the courts, medics and relatives. Euthanasia raises two ethical and moral problems; one group of people supporting the arguments and they argued euthanasia should be allowed- reasons are – a civilised society should allow people to die in dignity and without any incurable pain and should not disturb others daily life. Again they argued that 'our bodies our own' and it is a personal freedom and human right. They argued it is not immoral. Other group of people argued that euthanasia should be forbidden because of religious perspective. Soul is given by God and only god should decide when to end it.

Molly's death projects the universal moral truth, "Molly was ashes. He would work through the night and sleep until lunch. There wasn't really much else to do. Make something, and die" (AM 141). The last sentence reveals the moral truth of the human condition, all people try to achieve something but in the end they die and disappear with absurdities. The novel explores the suicidal contract, or euthanasia which is against the laws of nature. Both Vernon and Clive have different attitudes and principles and their approaches to life are absolutely different. The general moral law forbids one to enter into the personal arena of others. But Vernon, harbouring vengeance in his heart, plans to destroy Julian's political career. Looking at the whole case from another perspective, Julian as a political leader should prove himself to be a role model for others in matters of ethical values. But his illegal affair with Molly shatters his political image and ultimately both Vernon and Julian lose their future as well as their lives.

McEwan has been focusing on his two central protagonists, compressing the significant aspects of their careers as he uncovers the kernel of each one's social identity. Two central characters Vernon Halliday and Clive Linley each face an ethical dilemma, which exposes a fatal lack of substance in their professional conduct. For Halliday, the key moment involves his decision to publish compromising photographs of the xenophobic foreign secretary, Julian Garmony. He is trying to take his paper The Judge downmarket, but he is out-manoeuvred by Garmony, and the 'scoop' explodes in his face. There is an element of straightforward moral come-uppance about this: Halliday, 'once an apologist for the sexual revolution', fails in his hypocritical attempt to cash in on a mood of moral conservatism (AM 73).

The key ethical choice for Linley is starker. Blocked in his attempts to complete his commission- he is writing 'The Millennium Symphony' for the celebration in 2000- he goes hiking in the Lake District for inspiration, and duly finds the motif for his finale in the song of a bird. He ignores a disputing couple to keep the creative spark in mind, actually abandoning a woman being molested by a rapist. His moral come-uppance is as clear as Halliday's: the completed symphony is flawed by its final movement, derivative of Beethoven, and the performance is cancelled (AM 176). McEwan, in the parallel portraits of his two principals, expose the vacuity of a self-perpetuating professionalism, irresponsive to the contingencies of life.

Linley's major mistake in composing his symphony apart from the plagiarism of Beethoven, is to reintroduce an earlier theme into his finale, as he races against the deadline, without achieving the 'significant variation' that is needed (AM 142). The further risk is that Linley associates 'the absence of the variation had wrecked his masterpiece' with his plan to kill Halliday, which, he feels, 'had the amoral inevitability of pure geometry' (AM 161). It explores the artistic failure and unethical professional rivalry. However, McEwan has been using mood shift- the vacillation between knock about satire and more earnest self-consciousness- wrong foots the reader looking for clear signals about the book's moral dilemma. In relation to the decisive moments of moral quandary- Linley's failure to intervene at the rape scene, Halliday's decision to publish the compromising photograph- both characters seek to justify their actions,

Linley by giving precedence to his 'creative excitement' (AM 89), Halliday through the utilitarian justification that the humiliation of Garmony, a potential Prime Minister, will spare the country a term of disastrous government policy (AM 74). Neither one is on sound ethical ground. Halliday's self-justification, in particular, shows how self-deception conceals the personal motivation: he is driven by professional success and personal vengeance, but wants to see a golden political age dawn as consequence' (AM 111).

It is manifestly a piece of social satire, a dissection of persons functioning within social institutions and contexts. Vernon Halliday is editor of *The Judge*, and several sections of the novel present the meetings, staffing and policy decisions and office intrigues of the press (AM.29). Clive Linley is part of the establishment of culture, an environment of commissions, performances, broadcasts and celebrity (AM 24). These circles- journalism and culture- intersect with institutions of government and politics. At Molly Lane's funeral, Clive and Garmony exchange barbed remarks. Vernon seeks to destroy Garmony's political career and is defeated by the superior skills of conservative central office (AM 125). Ethical and moral ambivalent are frequently explored in the forms of public and private relations and its manipulations and power. Clive perceives the Manchester police station, to which he has been summoned, as 'the family living room' (AM 153), inhabited by policemen, criminals, social workers and unfortunates, trying to solve or mitigate the seemingly intractable problems of people and society. Finally, Clive and Vernon's dreams and illusions as they are murdered by the medical team each has hired to kill the other are rendered in convoluted detail (AM 173).

Ian McEwan makes moral questions central to his work by presenting the ways in which his characters are tested by a contingent world, the moral and ethical dilemmas that result from the unforeseen event. Critics of literary works generally move towards the outcome point which is believed to reform or refine the human society. The brutal or the aesthetic 'telling' 'always already' has the hidden agenda that the humanity may benefit in some way or the other. Even the 'art for art's sake' or 'art for life's sake' works which usually negate enlightenment for the purpose of entertainment, end up with reformatory ideas as life everywhere moves fast with twists and turns. The author may not have intentioned 'morals' or 'ethics' but the reader intersects the works for 'benefits' and the 'intertext' provides whatever the reader desires to comprehend. When the world is conflict-ridden, there is an urgent necessity for ethical values as the saviour model. Ethical dilemmas, the crux of this research work has within itself buried the ethical values that make up a peaceful world. Life need not be understood from good and positive 'how to be'; it can be better understood and best lived if readers understood "how not to be".

Ian McEwan's ethical and moral reflections are highly self-conscious, sometimes involving ironic interrelationship between the narrator, the characters and the implied reader. Readers have to look beyond the plotlines, the presentation of actions, and resist the simple interpretation of those scenes with a seemingly incontestable moral purport. It makes clear that these complications of the moral and ethical treatment do not prevent the reader from getting a purchase on the ethical and moral questions emerging from his contexts. In his select novels the conflict between altruism and self-interest are clearly linked to historical and political questions, especially where political power, role of the state and impinges on interpersonal relationship. His portrayal of character and the quest for identity that underpins in an interesting tension with ideas and with systematic explanations. McEwan's ongoing intent is to reconnect narrative fiction with moral sense and moral responsibility.

3. CONCLUSION

The role of postmodernist writers is to instruct the readers with entertainment. In the same way, Ian McEwan novels always combine social and moral instructions with entertainment through sugar-coating approach. According to Ian McEwan, the moral and ethical plot could psychologically create complex characters and always paves ways to take clear moral path. The novels based on moral and ethics is very successful in the hands of Ian McEwan because he has carefully designed and framed in a narratives mode which has allowed the characters learn by their own mistakes, rather than by direct authorial admonition.

A close look at the actions and attitudes of all characters reveal that they are selfish and totally ruthless in achieving their goals. Clive's failure to help the lady in distress and in reporting the matter to the police expose how inhuman he is; Vernon's priority of increasing his newspaper sale at the cost of betraying his friend and ladylove; Clive's craze for creating a symphony at the cost of basic human values; the disastrous plans of the protagonists to euthanize the other; each stabs at the back of the others these inhuman and immoral attitudes showcase the whole society during the pre-war and post-war periods. As the novel progresses, McEwan sprinkles all over a lot of criticism, sarcasm, satire and irony. Irrespective of the status and class, English society as a whole known for all moral values, here, the author intends to build a constructive, compassionate and moral-based society.

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