



SATURDAY

By Ian McEwan

Jonathan Cape, pp 279, \$44.95

Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon living comfortably in London with his lawyer wife and blues musician son, is looking forward to a relaxing Saturday: squash with a colleague, a visit to his elderly mother in a home, and shopping for a meal he'll cook for a family reunion that night. He hopes to see his adult daughter and her grandfather, both poets, reconciled after an estrangement.

The day's events unfold against the backdrop of mounting government pressure for action against Saddam Hussein, and a huge anti-war march clogs the city and subtly intrudes into the story. A morning traffic incident pits Perowne against a young man and his two sidekicks, with violent consequences that resonate throughout the book.

In his first novel since *Atonement*, Ian McEwan moves effortlessly from the intimate — with meditations on family relationships, medicine and mortality, and the redemptive power of music and poetry — to the political as Perowne's opinion on the looming military action in Iraq is challenged.

The ending may be almost too neat, but McEwan's handling of his set pieces is as masterful as ever, and his command of language draws the reader deep into each scene. It is quite simply impossible to stop reading *Saturday*.

© Mark Rossiter 2005