

Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love* in a Secular Age

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“There are always antecedent causes. A beginning is an artifice, and what recommends one over another is how much sense it makes of what follows”—Joe Rose in *Enduring Love*

Abstract

In Ian McEwan's 1997 novel *Enduring Love* no character declares a belief in God except a mad stalker suffering from a delusional syndrome, and that character does not appear to hold recognizable theological or doctrinal positions of historical/institutional Christianity. On the other hand, the novel focuses on the conflicts between rational, emotional, even spiritual, behaviour as the characters search for enduring love in a postmodern culture. These ordinary characters' interactions as they respond to a hot air balloon accident help to define and interpret the nature of religion and spirituality in our “secular age.” What characterizes our “secular age” and the nature of its religious impulses McGill University philosopher Charles Taylor aptly examines in *A Secular Age* (2007). Taylor traces the historical threads emerging from the Protestant Reformation that now appear in the 21st century as multiple alternatives for making sense of life and experiencing fullness. Using Taylor's analysis as an interpretive lens, this article explores how an “immanent framework” both frustrates and opens possibilities for manifestations of transcendence.

[1] “[Jed Parry is] dreamily vague on the specifics of doctrine ... a self-made affair, generally aligned to the culture of personal growth and fulfillment.”¹ So says Joe Rose, free-lance science writer, about Jed Parry's religion in Ian McEwan's 1997 novel *Enduring Love*. Although Jed Parry is hopelessly embedded in his erotic fixation with Joe Rose, the quotation aptly describes how many see the contemporary state of religious belief. The encounter between Joe's scientific rationalism and Jed's highly individualistic Christianity seems to summarize the inevitable march of secularization. The novel's conflicts between pathology and rationality, between the theories of evolutionary psychology and Romantic intuitions about truth and beauty, between linear narration and postmodern fragmentation—all show the difficulties in finding adequate and sufficient causes for “enduring love.”

[2] Literary critic, Jonathan Greenberg cogently argues that McEwan's novel represents a series of interrelated conflicts between scientific, literary, and religious worldviews. Greenberg maintains that “despite its multifaceted critique of neo-Darwinism, *Enduring Love* does in fact hold out hope for a rapprochement between the sciences and the humanities.”² This essay poses a similar kind of interdisciplinary critical analysis

informed by Charles Taylor's monumental study, *A Secular Age*. *Enduring Love* will be interpreted and critiqued in light of Taylor's philosophical work on how persons live their moral/spiritual life with a certain moral/ spiritual shape in a particular time and place, a secular age.

[3] Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* identifies three ways in which persons inhabit a secularized society: "secularity" is viewed as the emptying of religion from autonomous social spheres," "the falling off of religious belief and practice," and "articulating the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place."³ Taylor adamantly explains that secularization is neither a total loss of faith nor a triumph of atheism; scientific understandings co-exist with a sense of the sacred or the transcendent in wide varieties of expressions. Throughout his lengthy, complex, and nuanced argument, Taylor focuses on the conditions of experience and search for the spiritual that emerge in new self-understandings and related practices. The stories of modernity that Taylor calls "subtraction stories" are rejected consistently because these accounts explain secularity as liberation from illusions, horizons, or limitations of knowledge to reveal "perennial features of human life" (Taylor 22).

[4] At first reading, the novel might work as a major subtraction story on the impossibility of objective knowledge, but if this is true we are left with pathological madness as an essential human trait.⁴ A closer reading of the novel shows that the lived experiences and practices of the characters exemplify, to limited degrees, something beyond themselves, something within themselves that is strangely transcendent, even within an immanent frame. Taylor poses the issue this way; "instead of asking whether the source of fullness is seen/lived as within or without ... we could ask whether people recognize something beyond or transcendent in their lives" (Taylor 16).

[5] McEwan's novel is set in five major "public" spaces, i.e., where more than one character is involved: the meadow where the balloon accident occurs, Joe Rose and Clarissa Mellon's apartment, the widow Jean Logan's Oxford house, the restaurant where the shooting occurs, and the house where Joe buys his gun. In each space, a vestige of a higher world is present in some form of *signal*. The signal acknowledges, anticipates, and then frustrates the intrusion of something more than the signal itself.

[6] Taylor makes clear that a search for fullness characterizes all periods of human history. Whether in the pre-modern enchanted world with carnival and hierarchical order or in the following centuries of growing exclusive humanism and materialism, a sense of the extraordinary breaks through the ordinary and orients moral and spiritual life.⁵ The striking difference is that the power to reach fullness in the pre-modern era requires reference to God, a vertical Transcendent, and for moderns, the power to arrive at fullness happens within an immanent and horizontal landscape.

[7] Thus the question, do the characters in the novel, in some way or another, find such "fullness"? *Enduring love*? Taylor also creates the opening for such an interpretative question: "[w]hat we need to do is to get a sense of the difference of lived experience" (Taylor 8). Narrative calls attention to this "lived experience," and the novel becomes a

significant way to see persons living in a particular time and place and *making* sense of their experience.⁶ Paul Ricoeur puts it this way: [r]eflections on narrative manifests “the *social dimension* [sic] of human being in time” ... as well as disclosing the *ethical* orientation of human being in time toward the good Narrative embodies the same complex temporal structure as an actual self.”⁷

I. Reading the signals in an immanent framework:

[8] In the opening scene of the novel, Jed Rose and Clarissa Mellon are having a picnic in the Chilterns. Suddenly they notice a balloon with a young boy floating off alone despite the desperate attempts of the child’s grandfather to hang on. The child seems certain to be electrocuted on the nearby high-voltage power lines. Joe and several others race towards the balloon and try to anchor it by hanging on to the ropes. Only one man, John Logan, continues to hold the ropes as the balloon soars upward; Logan falls to his death. Who first let go of the ropes is very uncertain. The child is safe, but Joe finds he has attracted the affections of Jed Parry, who suffers from de Clerambault’s syndrome, a delusional belief that the object of his passion is in love with him. Jed obtains Joe’s phone number and makes calls, stalks Joe outside his apartment, and sends Joe over thirty letters which combine ardent proclamations of love and equally fervent religious arguments.

[9] The freak balloon accident that launches the plot of *Enduring Love* initiates a series of signals that are both repeated and modified throughout the novel’s major episodes. As figures of speech, signals of experience may become either metaphors or metonymies. In metaphor, there is a conceptual mapping between the source and the target domain. Each belongs to two different experiential domains.⁸ Metonymies also map conceptual entities between fields; however, in this figure of speech the vehicle (one conceptual entity) provides access to the target within the same sphere. Metaphors involve two conceptual domains; metonymies only one.⁹

[10] These two kinds of cognitive processes, as experienced in the novel, identify how characters know their world, and these narrative forms of “lived experience” foreground Taylor’s arguments on transcendence and immanence. From the outset, Taylor explains that transcendence (human-transcending spiritual reality) and immanence (sources of power found in Nature or in the inner depths of self, or both) existed in a kind of tension in societies prior to the Reformation (Taylor 9-11). Significantly, Taylor notes that during the post-Reformation era, the great disembedding had no room for these “ambivalent complementarities.” Taylor clarifies “disembedding” in this way:

The compromise between the individuated religion of devotion or obedience or rationally understood virtue, on one hand, and the collective often cosmos-related rituals of whole societies, on the other, was broken, in favor of the former. Disenchantment, Reform, and personal religion went together (Taylor 146).

[11] In the novel, this “disembedding” occurs in the blocking of metaphors so the signals that come to Joe Rose point to an immanent domain. Throughout, there are intimations of higher times intruding, but these moments fade, and Joe sustains a sense of the contiguous on his own. Joe moves between “pinpricks” and “prisons.” As first-person narrator, Joe says the story’s beginning is a “pinprick on the time map.” Joe and Clarissa’s apartment is equally a “pinprick of warmth in the vastness” (McEwan 37) while simultaneously their apartment represents the “high-walled infinite prison of directed thought.”¹⁰

[12] These incipient metaphors that might open Joe to an external transcendent (“vast” and “infinite”) are not sustained. Unlike the fall of Satan and the angels as poetically portrayed in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (an allusion made by Clarissa once she and Joe reflect on the accident in their apartment), the balloon in the meadow goes no higher nor falls no deeper than the persons involved in a kind of “mathematical grace” (McEwan 3). Only a buzzard sailing higher than the balloon can view the five tiny forms below silently running. When Jed Parry asks Joe Rose to kneel with him and pray after the accident, Joe responds nonchalantly: “[t]here’s no one up there” (McEwan 29). What causes the fall is nothing other than ruthless gravity. The spatial relationships of these material signs that hint at something higher/vertical remain grounded on a horizontal plane. The phone becomes the sign of *relationship* whether plugged in or not, whether thirty-three messages are listened to or not, whether disruptive to Clarissa and Joe’s lives or not. Noticing a spilt jar of marigolds placed at the site of a policeman’s murder, Joe turns the jar upright; he hints at an enchanted world, and then he dispassionately returns to his books:

[On] such hopeful acts of propitiation, fending off mad, wild unpredictable forces, whole religions were founded, whole systems of thought unfurled.

Then I went back indoors to the reading room (McEwan 48).

[13] Another signal that ruffles (no pun intended, reader!) Joe Rose’s equilibrium and Jed Parry’s mad watchfulness is a curtain. The curtains become some kind of tremulous clue according to Jed Parry standing outside, but exactly what the clue is remains vague. That curtains might be metaphor or even symbol for something abstract, even transcendent, Joe Rose cannot fully grasp it. He merely edges toward metaphor and backs away.

It was a quarter memory, a niggle, a faint connection rooted in a forgotten bout of reading, irrelevant to my purposes at the time but lodged in me like an enduring fragment of a childhood dream The key word was *curtain* [sic] ... (McEwan 95-96).

[14] This mental “nigging” fades until he hears Parry shouting along the rainy street and suddenly two words—“signals” and “curtain”—mate to spawn an elementary syntax in Joe’s thought current. These fragile associations have no connection with seeing through a glass darkly, or the rent Temple curtain, or Polonius behind the curtain, or the thin veil between madness and sanity, or the blind Oedipus who now can *see*: Joe’s mind moves

metonymically from curtains to his study, to the black boxes filled with clippings, to the hard disk drive that might “build a bridge between ... these two words” (McEwan 98). The bridge is not built because curtains remain curtains; widow Jean Logan’s children wrap themselves playfully in the curtains, French psychiatrist de Clerambault identifies the pathology of a female Parisian stalker who believed George V was sending her coded love signals by the way he moved the curtain (McEwan 133). She lived her life in this delusion that curtains were something other than curtains.

[15] Following the shooting in the restaurant when Joe realizes that Jed Parry may have contracted to kill him, Joe has a flash of insight about connections:

I was about to say something to her [Clarissa] when I got it, I understood completely, it came to me without effort, in that same neural flash of preverbal thought that comprehends relation and structure all at once, that knows the connection between things better than the things themselves (McEwan 186).

[16] Taylor refers to this kind of insight as noted in Heidegger’s pre-ontology, “... the implicit, largely unfocussed background of this experience and search,” (Taylor 3), i.e., Joe has momentarily glimpsed the complex web of interaction; he is a person entangled in everything going on. According to Joe, this inchoate awareness quickly “[shrinks] into one’s core, shrinking so deeply that everything else ... appeared as though on the other side of a thick glass panel” (McEwan 193).

[17] In the North Downs house filled with a motley collection of “intellectuals “ and where Joe buys his gun, the drug dealers’ assorted moral and psychological deliberations break the “glassy continuum of [Joe’s] selfhood” by throwing out statements as “[e]verything’s connected ... it’s a society ... basically holistic” (McEwan 215). Alongside the dealers’ “negative equity,” Joe finds a moral stance; he decides he is equally a “bad” person and declares, “suddenly I was set free” (McEwan 216). Free to do what? Joe’s reading of the signals just points to next accessible referent.

[18] When Joe returns to the meadow after visiting Logan’s widow, he traverses the field noting where each part of the incident occurred. These remembered particulars are, he interprets, “my stations of the cross,” places of pathological love and morbidity, a “failed extension into mental space” (McEwan 136, 137). The structure of the novel even moves metonymically as the final meadow scene gives way to a case study and then to the letter which itself leaves space for something else. These spatial relationships occurring in various scenes of the novel cluster material artifacts together so that the parts remain as such, and as Luc Ferry, French philosopher, notes about life in a secular age, “the meaning of meaning—the ultimate significance of all these particular meanings—is lacking.”¹¹

II. “Living” carnival; “living” disembedded

[19] Early in the novel, as Joe tries to get Jed Parry's words on tape, Joe makes some striking observations about his nemesis' "prison of self-reference." Ironically, Joe explains that Parry's delusional state harks back to a kind of early enchanted world:

He crouched in a cell of his own devising, teasing out meanings, imbuing nonexistent exchanges with their drama of hope or disappointment, always scrutinizing the physical world, its random placements and chaotic noise and colors, for the correlatives of his current emotional state—and always finding satisfaction. He illuminated the world with his feelings, and the world confirmed him at every turn his feelings took (McEwan 153).

[20] If Jed Parry's world is perpetual carnival manifested in a form of continual madness, then Joe Rose's world is rational, secular, disenchanting, disembedded.¹² Jed Parry's foray into his pre-axial world includes a merging of the material with the spiritual. The carnivalesque, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators; there is no life outside Carnival; the very idea embraces everyone; and in carnival time, the carnival laws of freedom become the special condition of everyone (Bakhtin 7-8). Jed makes little, if any, distinction between the material and the spirit world, nor does he make a clear distinction between himself and Joe Rose. Of course, the delusion lies in Jed's belief that all persons and things are living Carnival as well.

[21] Immediately after the balloon accident, Jed tells Joe that "[s]omething passed between us up there on the hill, after he fell. It was pure energy, pure light?" ... The fact that you love me,' he continued, 'and that I love you is not important. It's just the means ... I know that Christ is within you ... and that [Christ] is you" (McEwan 70). Jed Parry's letters also continue this theme of the oneness of the material and the spiritual: there is a "pattern woven through the skein of God's sensuous creation unfolding in a scorching sense of touch" (McEwan 104). Jed is referring to the "glow" on leaves of the hedge that burns his fingers when he touches the same leaves that Joe has touched.

[22] Taylor puts it this way: "in the enchanted world of our medieval ancestors for all that the God they worshipped transcended the world, they nevertheless also had to do with intra-cosmic, and they dealt with causal powers which were embedded in things: relics, sacred places and the like ... even the high gods are often identified with certain features of the world" (Taylor 150). Joe Rose says of Jed's religion: "God was undeniably 'within' rather than in his heaven, and believing in him therefore was a license to respond to the calls of feeling or intuition. ... Parry listened only to the inner voice of his private God" (McEwan 164). Without question, Parry's private God is not the socially-binding Transcendent Divine of ancient Carnival, nor even the "common action" of modern approximations of Carnival. Parry's solitude does not fuse into a powerful common feeling of togetherness with a vast group (Taylor 582). Joe Rose is his god.

[23] In Carnival landscape, certain acknowledged places become the *omphalos*, the *axis mundi*, the navel, sacred places where heaven meets earth. The balloon incident and his meeting Joe, the point of beginning, serves as the *axis mundi* for Jed Parry, but for Joe

Rose, this cosmic axis is his narrative that might determine self-identity and thereby his innocence in the tragedy as well as any complicity in Jed's delusions. Joe Rose is his god.

[24] "Hanging a few feet above the Chilterns escarpment, our crew enacted morality's ancient, irresolvable dilemma: us, or me" (McEwan 15). Is he innocent or not of letting go of the rope and causing the calamity? What was / is the right thing to do? Joe Rose the modern individual- in-the-world is constituted to search a moral imperative for himself. Taylor says that moral agents, freed from the ontological status of larger hierarchical orders, aim to secure mutual benefits of freedom, a reinterpretation of society and the self in horizontal rather than vertical terms (Taylor 171). This notion is essential to Taylor's definition of "secularization," i.e., the absence of a transcendental basis on which to legitimize self and society by something other than existing for itself. Not bound by a valorizing transcendental / vertical source for moral action, Joe Rose finds a norm, however unstable, for his action in his own unfolding narrative account of the balloon incident and embedded scientific narratives.

[25] Throughout the novel, Joe presents brief scientific accounts of how persons and their practices are grounded in a naturalistic framework. As research- physicist-turned-popular-scientific writer for magazines, Joe offers scientific and rational explanations for responses and reactions, his as well as others. The Hubble telescope, the evolutionary development of a smile, the story of 19th century Phoebus Levine who dismissed the DNA molecule as relevant, the triumph of the Genome Project, de Clerambault's syndrome, dinosaurs, chaos theory, black holes, consciousness, evolutionary psychology, adaptability of creatures, "emotions that duck the higher reasoning process"—examples all—are embedded in Joe's personal narrative.

[26] These scientific explanations are essential for what Taylor might call "human flourishing," an ethic of beneficent order writ both large and small. *Large*, in the sense that a buffered self,¹³ disengaged from a world anchored in enchantment, is a rational agent who can debunk the control of ignorance and the influence of the false.

The buffered self is the agent who no longer fears demons, spirits, magic forces. More radically, these no longer impinge; they don't exist for him; whatever threat or other meaning they proffer doesn't 'get to' him (Taylor 135).

[27] The weaving in of these scientific bits is *small* in the sense that ordinary lives may know a rational truth about the world. Joe Rose says of himself:

People say I have a talent for clarity. I can spin a decent narrative out of the stumblings, backtrackings, and random successes that lie behind most scientific breakthroughs. It's true, someone has to go between the researcher and the general public, giving the higher-order explanations that the average laboratory worker is too busy, or too cautious, to indulge (McEwan 79-80).

[28] That scientific explanations advanced against the claims of Christianity as the ages moved through the Reformation and the Enlightenment toward secularization, Taylor argues is a woefully inadequate subtraction narrative. A more adequate account, according to Taylor is as follows: “[w]hat this view reads out of the picture is the possibility that Western modernity might be powered by its own positive visions of the good, that is, by one constellation of such visions among others, rather than by the only viable set left after the old myths and legends have been exploded” (Taylor 571).

[29] Co-existing with Joe’s scientific, rational explanations in the novel is Clarissa Mellon’s academic passion for Romanticism. Clarissa, Joe’s partner for eleven years, is a scholar on Keats (1795-1821), the 19th century poet who imaginatively pursues beauty as truth and truth as beauty. The couple’s respective responses to Jed Parry’s intrusion in their lives largely result from the rational vs. the romantic. Clarissa notes early in the novel that neo-Darwinism, evolutionary psychology, and genetics are “rationalism gone berserk. ‘It’s a new fundamentalism’” (McEwan 74). Clarissa believes that “larger meaning is being lost” when a reason can be given for everything. Only “unfolding love” has meaning through time (McEwan 75).

[30] Taylor notes that finding meaning to life in humanist terms within the individual and within nature for the romantics was a way to find fullness in the ordinary. Taylor calls this “expressive individualism” (Taylor 473). Rational order had divided reason and emotions, and poetic beauty “required the harmonious fusion” of the two. Keats’s predisposition toward receptive intuition in his description of “negative capability” allows “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”¹⁴ The lived experiences of Joe Rose and Clarissa Mellon, on the other hand, are not fused in some kind of harmonious blend of feeling and reason as the novel progresses. For example, Clarissa cannot understand that Joe’s terror at Jed’s presence may be a completely rational response. Joe describes Keats as a “genius no doubt, but an obscurantist too, who had thought science was robbing the world of wonder when the opposite was the case” (McEwan 75).

[31] A third-person narrator at this moment in Joe and Clarissa’s gradually eroding relationship offers a bird’s eye view much as the buzzard saw the balloon falling into the meadow below (McEwan 2). In this spatial relationship between narrator and the couple, the narrator’s voice serves as another “internal transcendent” within the framework of the novel.¹⁵

The trouble with Joe’s precise and careful mind is that it takes no account of its own emotional field. He seems unaware that his arguments are no more than ravings, they are an aberration and they have a cause. He is therefore vulnerable, but for now she [Clarissa] cannot make herself feel protective. Like her, [Joe] has reached the senseless core of Logan’s tragedy, but he has reached it unaware. Whereas she wants to lie quietly in soapy hot water and reflect, he wants to set about altering his fate (McEwan 89).

[32] As the door slams and Joe leaves Clarissa in the apartment, the omniscient narrator fades away, and Joe, first person narrator, starts the mental niggling intuitions about signals once again.¹⁶

III. Violence and love

[33] Undoubtedly, the violence that ensues in the novel's concluding chapters can be attributed to the paranoia, madness, and revenge that have been building between Joe and Jed. Interestingly, Taylor offers intriguing ideas about a secular age and eruptions of violence that cut across both believers and unbelievers. Violence is not a behaviour that can be easily relegated to sin and depravity as denoted in a Christian consciousness but may be viewed as human self-affirmation with its distorted forms. "[In this] complex interweaving, the moves towards God (a repudiation of our wild side) and the resistance to him are often hard to disentangle" (Taylor 657). Joe Rose might agree with Taylor's clarification that violence can be understood in biological, evolutionary processes "wired" into us (Taylor 657), or from another stance, Joe Rose might also agree that violence (his own of course) has a kind of numinous meaning. That is to say, aggression, however sufficiently explained by strictly evolutionary theories, may lead to something higher in one's life (a protest for human or environmental rights for example).

[34] In regards to Joe's decision to rescue Clarissa from the pathological Jed Parry, Taylor might note this as "moments of fusion in a common action/feeling, which both wrenches [Joe] out of the everyday, and seems to put [him] in touch with something exceptional, beyond [himself]" (Taylor 482). The discussion between Johnny Wells and Joe Rose as they drive to the drug dealer's home to buy the gun anticipates such a "moment of fusion." Joe's reaction to Johnny Well's report that these drug dealer/addict types are "intellectuals" who think they're Bertrand Russell is curious: Joe retorts that he hates them already (McEwan 206). Why is this allusion to philosopher Bertrand Russell illuminating?

[35] In Taylor's discussion of "providential deism," Taylor cites Bertrand Russell's idea of universal benevolence through disengagement, i.e., "there is an opening to the universal which is not based in some way on a connection to the transcendent."¹⁷ Taylor notes there can be a confidence within that can be self-stabilizing even as the illusions give way in a disenchanted world, and Bertrand Russell was first to note the possibility of this new mode of moral life (Taylor 257). These alternative sources for moral life may be the charter of modern unbelief, according to Taylor, and the varieties of unbelieving positions today are still marked by this point of origin (Taylor 259).

[36] This idea of a mutual benefit and human good in a secular age that does not point to the Transcendent but still seeks harmony and unity echoes in Clarissa's final words to Joe about the way he treated Jed Parry:

He [Jed] brought out something in you. From day one you saw him as an opponent and you set about defeating him, and you—we—paid a high

price. Perhaps if you had shared more with me, he might not have got to the stage he did. ...

You went your own way, you denied him everything, and that allowed his fantasies, and ultimately his hatred to flourish. ... You were right; you acted decisively and you're right to take pride in that. But what about the rest? (McEwan 235).

[37] The rest, so to speak, Joe, Clarissa, Jean Logan (John Logan's widow), the children Leo and Rachel, Professor James Reid and Bonnie Deedes (the lovers who were silent witnesses to the balloon accident) gather again for the novel's last episode in the meadow. The matter of forgiveness returns: Reid and Deedes ask for forgiveness for not coming forward sooner; Jean Logan seeks forgiveness for believing that her husband was having an affair. Joe Rose, however, claims he does not "know" about the rationality of forgiveness:

This breathless scrambling for forgiveness seemed to me almost mad, Mad Hatterish, here on the riverbank where Lewis Carroll, the dean of Christ Church, had once entertained the darling objects of his own obsessions. I caught Clarissa's eye and we exchanged a half-smile, and it was as if we were pitching our own requests for mutual forgiveness, or at least tolerance, in there with Jean's and Reid's frantic counterpoint. I shrugged as though to say that, like her in her letter, I just did not know (McEwan 247-48).

[38] The appendices in this postmodern novel, one that moves between narrative voices, epistolary and expository fragments, erotomania and rationality, poetry, passion, and paranoia, fiction and non-fiction, include a psychiatric case study on de Clerambault's syndrome and a final letter from Jed Parry written from his mental institution. Jed is still deeply in love with Joe, and the last line of his letter is the last line of the novel, "faith is joy!" (McEwan 262). Regardless that Joe believes "religion is shed, like an old skin, and we have moved into the sunlight of reason," Jed lives in a sense of fullness, a deeper meaning if you will, that can break out "in the light of a certain understanding of the place of the spiritual in [his] life" (Taylor 769-70). Such seems to be true for Jed even though disquietly he has made Joe into a religious idol.

[39] There is a kind of moral predicament and power in both of the novel's appendices that echoes what Charles Taylor argues throughout his work. Taylor's pervasive thesis as he works toward a definition of a secular age is that the rise of scientific facts and the power of materialism do not account completely for contemporary lack of belief nor do they explain the sustenance of ethical values and human flourishing (such as Joe Rose and the Logan children returning to a kind of innocence in the meadow and the suggestion of an adopted child in the future for Joe and Clarissa). Equally, Jed Parry who lives without creeds and traditional religious beliefs holds a spiritual vision that sustains him in his isolation and even madness.

[40] Taylor is not arguing for a superficial kind of complementarity of these two narrations, but he does wonder if they might be two sides of the same coin within the

immanent framework. Each position can be challenged, questioned, chosen, yet neither one must remain a “closed world structure.”¹⁸ The struggle for either is never completely won or lost; nor is enduring love.

Notes

1. All *Enduring Love* references and quotations are from Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love* (New York: Anchor/Random House), 163.
2. Jonathan Greenberg, “Why Can’t Biologists read Poetry? Ian McEwan’s *Enduring Love*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.2 (Summer 2007): 2.
3. All *A Secular Age* references and quotations are from Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 2-3.
4. As a telling comment on dilemmas with objectivity, Joe Rose says after the shooting scene in the restaurant: “Pitiless objectivity, especially about ourselves was always a doomed social strategy. ... There could be no private redemption in objectivity” (Taylor 196).
5. Charles Taylor takes an example of “experienced fullness, of joy,” From Bede Griffiths’ autobiography. Using Griffiths’ experiences of “fullness,” Taylor identifies three varieties of such experiences: 1. A sense of the presence of God or some external force such as nature so we are deeply moved; 2. A sense of absence and exile, even a negation of fullness; 3. A stable middle condition so there is regular contact with meaning in daily activities (Taylor 5-7).

Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian philosopher and literary critic, comments on the world of Carnival and its totality of fullness:

[Carnival] occasions ‘built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. If we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval cultural consciousness nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood. To ignore or underestimate the laughing people of the Middle Ages also distorts the picture of European culture’s historic development. (*Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6.

6. Unpublished handout, Susan Stephenson, Sarum College, UK, “Narrative, Identity, and Spirituality,” 15 May 2008.
7. David E. Klemm, “Individuality: The Principle of Ricoeur’s

Mediating Philosophy and Its Bearing on Theology of Culture,” in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 1993), 283.

Ricoeur says something similar in *Time and Narrative*, “Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.” (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52.

8. Antonio Barcelona, “On the Plausibility of Claiming a Metonymic Motivation for Conceptual Metaphor,” *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective*, ed. Antonio Barcelona (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003) 32.

9. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 35-38.

10. Another example of metonymic contiguity, according to Joe Rose, is the moment when the balloon incident/narrative begins: “this pinprick is as notational as a point in Euclidean geometry” (McEwan 19).

11. Luc Ferry quoted in Taylor 677; *Man Made God: The Meaning of Life*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 7.

12. Taylor defines the term “disembedded” as the “growth and entrenchment of a new self-understanding of our social existence, one which gave an unprecedented primacy to the individual” (146). “Disenchantment” is a part of Taylor’s understanding of the “great disembedding”—promoted from the Reformation onward—located ordinary life in secular time.

13. Taylor defines “buffered self” as “the self which is aware of the possibility of disengagement. And disengagement is frequently carried out in relation to one’s whole surroundings, natural and social” (42).

14. Letter to George and Tom Keats 27/12/1817. *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant F. Scott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 193.

15. Taylor defines “internal transcendent” in the following way: “exclusive humanism tends towards a rejection of the aspiration to transcendence; and yet it has trouble setting it aside altogether. ... [In] modern belief [there is] an analogous tension between human flourishing and the demands of God” (656).

16. See pp. 3-5 above. The impossibility of finding meaning in a signal

also happens to Clarissa: “[Joe] you even left the drawer open so I’d know when I came in. It’s a statement, a message from you to me, it’s a signal. The trouble is, I don’t know what it means” (141).

17. Taylor considers Russell’s ideas, “even if we think that this appeal is insufficient, because it leaves something important out, we have to recognize that the development of this purely immanent sense of universal solidarity is an important achievement, a milestone in human history” (Taylor 255).

18. Taylor 589. “[W]hatever the equilibrium point which dominates in any milieu, it will always be fragile. Some will want to move further ‘inward.’ towards a more immanentist position, for all the reasons rehearsed earlier in this book; and some will find the present equilibrium confining, even stifling, and will want to move outward” (Taylor 770).

