



THE GROTESQUE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL
MASCULINITY AND LEADERSHIP IN IAN MCEWAN'S
*THE COCKROACH*¹

IAN MCEWAN'IN *HAMAMBÖCEĞİ* ADLI ESERİNDE
SİYASAL ERKEKLİĞİN VE LİDERLİĞİN GROTESK
DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

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ABSTRACT

This article reads Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach* beyond the confines of Brexit satire, analysing it as a structural critique of the collapse of hegemonic masculinity and the rise of a grotesque bio-politics. Synthesizing Critical Masculinity Studies with Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, the study argues that the populist leader replaces the protective father metaphor with an instinct-driven tyrant brother regime. Crucially, the article addresses the tension between biological essentialism and social constructionism, demonstrating that the leader's animalistic metamorphosis is not a biological destiny, but a hyper-real theatrical performance used to legitimize authoritarian power. Furthermore, it examines the construction of a swarm masculinity that systematically liquidates rational-democratic alternatives, symbolized by the purging of Benedict St John, which renders ethical leadership structurally impossible. Ultimately, the article reveals how the state is permanently colonized by a viral, irrational agency,

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where the crisis of masculinity is resolved not by restoring order, but by celebrating the triumph of the swarm.

Keywords: Ian McEwan, The Cockroach, Political Masculinity, Abject, Populism.

ÖZ

Bu makale, Ian McEwan'ın *The Cockroach* adlı eserini yalnızca bir Brexit hicvi olmanın ötesinde okuyarak, metni hegemonik erkekliğin çöküşüne ve grotesk bir biyopolitikanın yükselişine dair yapısal bir eleştiri olarak analiz etmektedir. Eleştirel Erkeklik Çalışmalarını Julia Kristeva'nın abject (iğrenç/zelil) teorisiyle sentezleyen bu çalışma, popülist liderin koruyucu baba metaforunu, içgüdülerle hareket eden bir zorba birader rejimiyle ikame ettiğini savunmaktadır. Daha da önemlisi, makale biyolojik özcülük ile toplumsal inşacılık arasındaki gerilimi ele alarak; liderin hayvansı dönüşümünün biyolojik bir kader değil, otoriter iktidarı meşrulaştırmak için kullanılan hiper-gerçek bir tiyatral performans olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca çalışma, Benedict St John'un dışlanmasıyla sembolize edilen rasyonel-demokratik alternatifleri sistematik olarak tasfiye eden ve etik liderliği yapısal olarak imkânsız kılan bir sürü erkekliğin inşasını incelemektedir. Nihayetinde makale, devletin viral ve irrasyonel bir fail tarafından kalıcı olarak sömürgeleştirildiğini; erkeklik krizinin ise düzenin tesisiyle değil, sürünün zaferinin kutlanmasıyla çözüldüğünü ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ian McEwan, The Cockroach, Siyasal Erkeklik, Abject, Popülizm.

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating popularity of the right-wing has manifested across Anglo-American politics in the first quarter of the 21st century. It appears as a shift in poll preferences; however, a deeper ontological crisis that shakes the protective father metaphor, conventional gender perspectives, and national identity configurations lies behind this electoral realignment. Brexit in the United Kingdom, dividing the public with strong lines as Leavers and Remainers, has been more than a mere political manoeuvre. This polarization fertilized a literary canon conceptualized as *BrexLit*, which refers to a genre that probes national

melancholia and cultural dissolution (Shaw, 2021: 4). Such literary reactions do not simply satirize circulating politics but also mirror a cultural spirit defined as the Imperial Gothic, framing the longing for strong imperial times and the anxiety of being invaded by others (Foster, 2024: 351). In this context, Ian McEwan's novella *The Cockroach* (2019) rewrites Franz Kafka's modernist masterpiece *The Metamorphosis* through a strategy of grotesque inversion and embodies these gothic fears through a corporeal metamorphosis and a crisis of political masculinity.

The critical literature emerging around the work tends to position the text primarily within the tradition of Swiftian political satire. However, this study argues that it primarily functions as a critique of populist performance. The novella introduces the central economic doctrine of "Reversalism" not only as a rational policy but as a populist desire for purity. It presents an absurd economic system where the flow of money is literally reversed to purge the nation of "waste and injustice" (McEwan, 2019: 13). This construction of an irrational reality requires a leader who is not a victim of chaos but its architect.

Available literature provides fruitful views on these aspects. Although McEwan reimagines Kafka's original work, the two narratives are fundamentally dissimilar in terms of identity and agency since while Gregor Samsa is trapped in a metaphysical predicament by losing the ability to speak, Jim Sams preserves his essential self and transforms language into a strategic tool that fuels social polarization (Michalski, 2024). The novella thus shifts from an abstract text dealing with existential anxieties into a harsh political critique where the leader acts as a malevolent figure consciously distorting reality. Just like in the Swiftian satire *A Modest Proposal*, contemporary post-truth politics is constructed by transforming the lie from a moral breach into a legitimate political instrument (Mondo, 2021). The absurdity of Reversalism operates as a systemic effort to remove rationality from discussion rather than a bug in the system. Furthermore, the leader's obsession with the lower layers of the material body undermines the sanctity of state governance through the lens of the carnival body (Cao, 2024). Finally, the insect metaphor operates as a discursive strategy of exclusion where biological disgust is weaponized to justify political purging, sharpening the polarization between the pure people and the corrupt elites (Tekin and Turgut, 2022).

While current studies remain within the boundaries of political allegory, they fail to adequately theorize the masculinity performance playing a vital role in the construction of the Jim Sams character. They also do not address how the leader's body transforms into an abject zone. The masculine language of politics reproduces itself through the protective father metaphor extending from the construction of the modern nation-state to contemporary populist leadership forms (Connell, 2005). McEwan deconstructs the idea of traditional father figure

dramatically. Unlike the expectation of being a loyal guardian of the nation, Jim Sams appears like an insidious invader hiding behind walls. The main motivation and power of this invader to corrupt the foundations of the state does not come from clear logic, but from the swamp of misery and abject instincts.

Addressing the tension in the perspective of the author about the relationship between biological determinism and social constructionism is significant before analysing this performative subversion. McEwan sparked a debate with his speech entitled 'Examining the Self' at the Royal Institution because he argued that gender is rooted in biological reality rather than being a social construct (McEwan, 2016). *The Cockroach* reveals a compelling paradox when examined through this materialist position. When political calculations of the populist leader are considered as instinctive nature of a cockroach in the novella, it may seem to align with biological essentialism; moreover, it may suggest that populist behaviour is a genetic imperative rather than a conscious choice. However, Jim Sams does not accept his insect nature passively but actively utilizes it in a way he delivers a hyper-realistic performance that reflects a confident masculine image. This reveals that populist power relies on a theatrical simulation to mask its abject essence. This paradox is grounded on a boundary that McEwan has deliberately established as flexible. This novella does not simply mirror human political categories in animal behaviour; on the contrary, by utilizing the ambiguity of the human-animal boundary, it reveals that the very idea of rational leadership is a fiction. If the instincts of a cockroach can live and function within a human body without being detected, the real question is not whether animals display masculinity, but whether human political masculinity is anything more than an instinct cloaked in an institutional guise. This reading does not reduce populism to biology, but it reveals the theatrical dimension of populist leadership. Its performance of decisiveness, toughness, and tribal solidarity are what makes the insect-politician indistinguishable from his human predecessors. The crisis, then, is not that a cockroach has seized power, but that power was already structured in ways that made such a seizure possible.

At this point, McEwan is deliberate in inverting Kafka's story to criticize the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. A tiny insect mind inhabits a colossal human body (Michalski, 2024). This detail creates a critical distinction for Critical Masculinity Studies. The leader has not been monsterized by an external threat but has been captured from within by the abject. The colossal and charismatic human body is a puppet governed by pure instinct and filth. The disgust Jim Sams feels upon seeing his human face in the mirror (McEwan, 2019: 5) represents the ontological rage felt by the abject towards the limitations imposed by the human form.

This study aims to re-read *The Cockroach* as a gendered crisis of populist leadership within the framework of Critical Masculinity Studies and the theory of the Abject. The abject is that which is repulsive, threatens order, and must be ejected where the boundary between subject and object becomes blurred (Kristeva, 1982). Jim Sams's hybrid form represents this violation of boundaries. Within this theoretical framework, the article is grounded on three fundamental axes. First, the leader's use of this body as a political object of desire while simultaneously feeling disgust towards it is examined as a grotesque performance. Second, it is discussed how pheromonal communication excludes the rational and the humane through the character of Foreign Secretary Benedict St John. The construction of the traitor is read as the replacement of reason and doubt with a toxic, male-dominated swarm mentality. Finally, the relationship between Sams and US President Archie Tupper is analysed as a homosocial bond. Two leaders using a Trumpian idiolect validate each other's masculinity and species to legitimize an abject desire for power that dismantles social and ethical boundaries.

1. FROM PROTECTIVE FATHER TO INVADING PARASITE: THE COLLAPSE OF THE LEADERSHIP METAPHOR

The patriarchal protective father metaphor has historically been a legitimate ground for political power. Along the line extending from the modern nation-state to contemporary populist leadership, hegemonic masculinity has been constructed upon a figure that guards the nation, home, or domus from external menace. This dynamic ultimately turns this figure into a rational authority (Connell, 2005). However, such construction is not organic but a strategic tactic of power specifically within political masculinities (Hearn, 2024: 237). Contemporary authoritarian populism signals a change from the democratic regime of the brother to the regime of the tyrant brother. This ruling power goes beyond the conventional father figure shielding the home. Furthermore, such dominance violates the egalitarian basis of politics grounded on the fraternity idea (Demiralp and Sayan-Cengiz, 2023: 295). Jim Sams embodies this transition. He is not a compassionate patriarch; on the contrary, he is a tyrant who has taken control of society and imposes his will on the flock. This collapse of the regime of brothers is clearly reflected in a BBC interview in which Sams justified his violation of the parliamentary pairing tradition. This tradition serves as a gentlemen's agreement which empowers democratic trust. In grave and reasonable tones, he reframes political betrayal not as a violation but as a tradition.

In this country we do not have a written constitution. What we have instead are traditions and conventions. [...] All these examples bind into place a convention of cheating that has passed into common practice. It is constitutionally correct. It shows the world that parliament is, above all, a fine and fallible

place, warm and vibrant with the human touch (McEwan, 2019:48).

Sams is an embodiment of populist inversion through his interpretation of corruption as a habitual cheating and the violation of trust as warm and vibrant. He is content when he stretches and even destructs the rules by replacing the protective father's ethical decisiveness with the tyrant brother's opportunistic fluidity.

This fluid transition points out a deeper ontological crisis referred to as the abject. The abject is defined not merely as filth but as that which "does not respect borders, positions, or rules" and "disturbs identity, system, and order" (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Jim Sams is the embodiment of this disturbance. He defies the primary border between the human subject and the animal object. Once he wakes up in the Prime Minister's body, he experiences the human form and utilizes it as grotesque materiality rather than as a vessel of reason. Unlike the protective father who maintains law, language, and borders within the symbolic order, the abject leader collapses these distinctions from the inside. An insect of the sewer in the highest chair of the nation depicts the ultimate discussion of the novella. Populism pollutes the symbolic order. The leader is powerful because he is abject. In other words, he gets his courage and power from his habitude of living in filth and his immunity to shame and the ethical boundaries of the human.

Equally important is this embracing since it is not only organic but also tactical. Hegemonic masculinity often adopts a "marginalized positionality" to "reclaim tacit social privileges" in the context of a "white male backlash" (Brayton, 2007: 59). This is ultimately performed in the novella by Jim Sams regarding his invasive swarm as a historically marginalised group that was despised and loathed. Sams adopts a rhetorical strategy where the intruder disguises as the victim. This corroborates the argument that the modern populist subject is structured through a "reflexive sadomasochism" (Brayton, 2007: 59). Sams is powerful with his abject nature since he embraces what is considered a weakness as a badge of honour. He turns the filth of the cockroach into a new form of sacred populism.

The contradiction of victim and dominant relationship constructs the being of Jim Sams. He symbolizes the ontological collapse and grotesque inversion of this metaphor. Jim Sams is not a father protecting the home. Instead, he is an invading parasite who hides in the crack of the concrete filling in the wall, multiplies in the dark, and rodents at the national body from within. This metamorphosis echoes even deeper when viewed from stylistic and performative perspectives. Being the man of the people is not an organic or innate trait but a socially constructed image. Moreover, this curated image is constructed upon masculine ideas such as toughness, emotional performativity, and gaucheness

(Sayan-Cengiz and Akyüz, 2021). From this perspective, Jim Sams can be read as a definitive example of such mimicry. He is ontologically an abject and fragile insect. Furthermore, he allocates the Prime Minister's body to stage a hyper-real performance of decisive masculinity. This performance mirrors the populist theatrics utilized in contemporary politics.

This mimicry also includes the superficial circulation of national memory detached from its historical and ethical context. In McEwan's novella, Jim Sams's political motivation is revealed to be not rational calculation but a feverish state of "barely conscious bliss" where he is "deliriously obsessed and burning with strange passion" (McEwan, 2019: 33). Crucially, this irrationality is dressed up in the costume of wartime heroism. He is prompted by "a dim recollection of Churchill in 1940" to validate his absurd Reversalist agenda (McEwan, 2019: 33). This moment illustrates Imperial Gothic nostalgia (Foster, 2024). The populist leader does not possess true historical gravity but merely simulates the gestures of the ultimate protective father to mask the fact that the state is guided by the delirious impulses of the abject body.

The transformation of the leader's body from a sphere of sovereignty into a mansion colonized by an abject essence can be analysed through the structural differences of the Kafkaesque metamorphosis. The transformation in McEwan's text takes place on a plane of agency diametrically opposed to that of the tragic victim Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. While Kafka's protagonist is a passive victim, McEwan's Jim Sams is an active political manipulator who retains his essential self (Michalski, 2024: 165). At the opening of the text, when Jim Sams finds himself transformed into a gigantic creature, he is in fact a microscopic mind inhabiting a human body. Indeed, the tiny creature trying to escape in the bedroom is the real Prime Minister. This creature waving its anxious antennae is "no doubt the displaced owner of the body he now" occupied (McEwan, 2019: 10). This displacement is proof that rational reason, coded as democratic masculinity, has been physically expelled from the sphere of power (Hearn, 2024).

This detail offers a vital thesis for Critical Masculinity Studies. The crisis of populist leadership is not the insectification of the leader. On the contrary, it is the internal rotting of society by the most primitive and abject drives wearing the mask of the highest authority. Jim Sams feels a deep abjection toward the human body he inhabits. The vulnerability of the internal skeleton and the softness of the skin provoke an ontological nausea as vividly described in the narrative:

An organ, a slab of slippery meat, lay squat and wet in his mouth – revolting, especially when it moved of its own accord to explore the vast cavern of his mouth and, he noted with muted alarm, slide across an immensity of teeth. [...] He was beginning to

understand that by a grotesque reversal his vulnerable flesh now lay outside his skeleton (McEwan, 2019: 1).

This disgust coincides with the horror the subject feels toward their own borders. This reaction operates as the violation of boundaries within the theory of abjection (Kristeva, 1982). This craving for the shell is not simply a biological desire but a political allegory in the form of armoured masculinity (Theweleit, 1987). Contrary to the mundane and mortal body this populist leader possesses, he longs for a machine-like body which endures all kinds of emotional and physical externalities. Jim Sams's repulsion for his own tongue, the slab of slippery meat (McEwan, 2019: 1), shows the disgust towards the humane and the desire for a stiff and cold insect being. This shows that his desire for the exoskeleton is a greed to curate a leader image immune to all externalities such as pain, empathy, and penetration.

Yet, paradoxically, Jim Sams renders this soft human body he loathes into an instrument of that populist performance of toughness (Sayan-Cengiz and Akyüz, 2021). His longing for his own exoskeleton is a metaphor for the desire for an armoured masculinity. Populist leaders covet this specific armour closed off to emotions, criticism, and fragility. Consequently, the protective father metaphor is demolished. The leader is no longer the protector of the home but a parasite who accelerates the decay in its foundations and loves the darkness, the dung, and the chaos (McEwan, 2019: 3).

2. THE LIQUIDATION OF THE RATIONAL MALE AND SWARM MASCULINITY

The metamorphosis within Jim Sams's body is more than an individual anomaly. It heralds a collective transformation that engulfs the entire apparatus of political decision-making. If the leader's body is a colonised territory, this occupation expands into the cabinet to construct an exclusionary swarm masculinity. The distinction between us and them operates as a hallmark of populist politics since it transcends ideological choice in McEwan's dystopia to become a biological imperative. This polarisation can be conceptualised by synthesising the analysis of team bonding in male environments with the sociological framework of divergent masculinities (Agnew and Drummond, 2011; Bolt, 2010).

McEwan transforms the populist cabinet into a grotesque parody of the band of brothers myth. When Jim Sams surveys his ministers during the first cabinet meeting, the political affinity is replaced by a biological recognition:

Looking into and beyond the various shades of grey, green, blue and brown of their mammalian eyes, right through to the shimmering blattodean core of their being, he understood and

loved his colleagues and their values. They were precisely his own. Bound by iron courage and the will to succeed (McEwan, 2019:10).

This moment mirrors the sense of belonging within elite male teams (Agnew and Drummond, 2011). Just as teammates in a locker room forge a closed, intimate bond that validates their masculinity, the cockroach ministers establish a pheromonal solidarity. Reason is suspended and replaced by the collective instinct of a swarm following its leader's scent. This solidarity is not metaphorical but literal. McEwan describes the cabinet meetings as being "conducted in pheromone, which runs at ten times the speed of standard English" (McEwan, 2019: 49). In this abject frequency, rational discussion loses its validity. Instead, the swarm focuses solely on approving their leader's "single-mindedness" and "rambunctious charm," since their only desire is to see the results. The swarm's natural haste also accelerates the political isolation of the state as "Britain now stood alone... Reversalism was delivered!" (McEwan, 2019: 49). This dynamic confirms that populist camaraderie solidarity is built on absolute conformity (Tekin and Turgut, 2022). However, the cement of this solidarity is the abject nature rather than shared ideas. This unified recognition marks another structural departure from the Kafkaesque original. While Gregor Samsa's family is deeply distressed by his transformation and enforces his isolation, Jim Sams's large family of cabinet members takes pride in his achievements and reinforces his monstrous agency (Michalski, 2024). Consequently, the swarm functions not as a site of alienation, as in Kafka, but as a site of grotesque empowerment where the band of brothers celebrates their shared inhumanity.

The sole threat to this homogeneous insect swarm is the only 'real' human in the cabinet. This human is Foreign Secretary Benedict St John. Benedict represents a divergent masculinity that fails to conform to the dominant group's norms of camaraderie (Bolt, 2010). The contrast between the swarm and the human is stark:

When Jim had looked into the eyes of Benedict St John, the foreign secretary, he had come against the blank unyielding wall of a human retina and could go no further. Impenetrable. Nothing there. Merely human. A fake. A collaborator. An enemy of the people (McEwan, 2019: 28).

When considered in the context of populist narratives, this distinction takes on a political dimension. The populist narratives regard rationality and scepticism as feminine indecisiveness or elitist detachment while impulsive behaviour and directness are seen as masculine traits (Sayan-Cengiz and Akyüz, 2021). Benedict's rationality is therefore redefined as a structural political weakness that undermines social and ideological cohesion of the team rather than being an

individual virtue (Agnew and Drummond, 2011). He is an actor who refuses to play the role expected of him in a scenario driven by populist imperatives.

This exclusion is not just biological but also epistemological. In the populist cabinet, objectivity and truth are regarded as an act of treason just like the ones in the chapter in the novella where they debate over a naval accident. When Benedict St John attempts to present concrete data from the Naval Command as evidence, Jim Sams harshly dismisses him and blames the experts as opportunists; moreover, he imposes his own narrative that this was a dishonourable attack carried out by the French. The climate of fear he creates within the cabinet and his ability to silence war veteran Humphrey Batton with a single glance demonstrate that this group operates through fear and imposed consensus. Furthermore, Sam's idea to celebrate the new public holiday, "R-Day", on his very own birthday exposes the true nature of this insect-like leadership. This indicates the absolute collapse of the nation-state into the narcissistic ego of tyrannical brother.

Ultimately, this narcissism displaces political logic with a self-justifying drive for power. Sams, in justifying his policies, abandons complex reasoning in favour of a circular claim:

There drifted through the PM's mind a number of compelling answers, though he did not utter them. Because. Because that's what we're doing. Because that's what we believe in. Because that's what we said we'd do. Because that's what people said they wanted. Because I've come to the rescue. Because. That, ultimately, was the only answer: because (McEwan, 2019: 44).

This single 'because' points out the end of democratic deliberation. In the insect regime, power is no longer about persuasion or causality; moreover, this dynamic relates to the leader's will being expressed in an inexplicable and purely symbolic way.

The leader does not perceive this as a legitimate debate. Instead, he regards this as an ugly disloyalty. McEwan describes the Prime Minister's reaction as a retreat of primitive violence. Behind his polished public image, Sams fights against his instinctive desire to "hit someone or break something", and he imagines that, if he were free from social constraints, he would "happily have taken an axe to the man's throat" (McEwan, 2019: 35). This homicidal rage proves that the populist regime is founded on the logic of physical destruction. However, since he cannot use an axe, he uses a modern equivalent. He utilizes the tabloid press. The leader's rage calms down just when he sees the political assassination weapon in front of him in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Benedict St John's dismissal contains one of the darkest ironies in this novella. To overcome this logical obstacle, Jim Sams and his team paradoxically

use a tool of modern gender politics as a weapon. They do not hesitate to use the allegation of sexual harassment. These abject cockroaches, feasting on filth, pretend to be morally superior to set a #MeToo trap. The forged report has been strategically presented as having been “written more in regret than vengefulness” in order to lend the narrative “added veracity.” However, Jim Sams’s personal reaction to this fabrication reveals the depth of the regime’s cynicism. Sams, who is fascinated by the way the lie is constructed, describes it as a “vicious, ruthless, heartless lying” and, most crucially, “an insult to real victims of masculine power” (McEwan, 2019: 40). This moment reveals that the populist leader uses not only gender but also the suffering endured by women as a weapon to consolidate his own patriarchal dominance. Thus, the exclusion of human values from the system is achieved not through the pure application of force, but by resorting to the mimicry of virtuous behaviour. This transforms the political sphere into a biopolitical space that denies the right to life to those who are excluded.

The conflict between Jim Sams and Benedict St John serves as more than a clash of species. It represents the structural collision between two antagonistic forms of political masculinity (Hearn, 2024). Benedict embodies a rational-democratic masculinity which values institutional legitimacy, verifiable facts, and deliberation. In contrast, Jim Sams mobilizes the tyrant brother regime. This regime is predicated on performative toughness, decisiveness, and the violent exclusion of the Other (Demiralp and Sayan-Cengiz, 2023). Thus, the fluidity of the abject body finds a rigid shell within this authoritarian gender construct. By dismissing Benedict, the cabinet does not simply eliminate a human rival. They also dismantle a democratic concept of brotherhood and a regime centred on the principles of equality. Moreover, they establish a regime grounded on a patriarchal structure in its place that shows no tolerance for dissent. This confirms that the Reversalist project is more than an economic absurdity. It is also a project designed to reclaim male dominance by re-establishing the hegemony of the ruling will over the feminine constraints of reason and law.

Consequently, the liquidation of Benedict St John serves as more than a narrative purging. It signifies the structural impossibility of alternative masculinities within the populist imagination. In the binary universe of the novella, the space for a rational-democratic masculinity, one grounded in institutional legitimacy and deliberation, is systematically obliterated. In the context of hyper-masculine cultures, the failure to perform the dominant script results in a precipitous fall from ‘hero to zero’ into a shamed identity (Shields, Kuhl and Westwood, 2017). Benedict’s adherence to facts is not viewed as a valid alternative political stance but is coded by the swarm as a lack of virility and decisiveness. By forcing a choice between the ‘abject swarm’ and the impotent individual, the text suggests that contemporary populism survives by destroying the middle ground. Thus, the text renders alternative masculinity impossible. One

must either embrace the tyrant brother's distinct lack of ethics to hold power or retain one's humanity and be expelled from the political sphere entirely.

3. ABJECT BODIES IN POWER: GROTESQUE PLEASURES AND DIPLOMATIC MASCULINITY

In McEwan's grotesque satire, the populist leader is not merely defined by his political ideology but by his relationship with the material bodily lower stratum (Bakhtin, 1984). Jim Sams's tenure as Prime Minister is marked by a collapse of the distinction between the sublime dignity of the state and the low desires of the body. There are two interconnected manifestations of this collapse. The first is Sams's scatological obsession with filth and the second is his homosocial alliance with US President Archie Tupper.

The grotesque body is utilized to degrade the sanctity of political office (Cao, 2024). This degradation reaches its peak in the scene where Jim Sams inspects the Horse Guards Parade. While a traditional leader would view the military procession as a symbol of national discipline, Sams is captivated solely by the fresh horse manure on the ground:

He regarded himself as something of a connoisseur. He knew how to live well. This particular consignment he could instantly place. Who could mistake that nutty aroma, with hints of petroleum, banana skin and saddle soap. The Horse Guards! (McEwan, 2019: 3).

Here, the abject returns as an object of intense political desire. Civilization and the symbolic order actively seek to expel this abject reality (Kristeva, 1982). The leader's body, trapped in a suit, remains fundamentally connected to the sewer. This connection reinforces the notion that his populism is a politics of the gutter.

This abjection is not limited to external filth but is internalized in the very organ of political speech. The nauseating physical detail of Sams's tongue described as a "slab of slippery meat" suggests that this new human organ "will be used exclusively for malevolent ends" (Michalski, 2024: 165). For the insect-politician, language is severed from truth and becomes purely a tool for causing mischief and spreading hatred, and a potent instrument of gratuitous demolition. Thus, the physical repulsion of the body and the destructive violence of speech become inseparable.

This celebration of the low finds its diplomatic counterpart in the relationship between Sams and Archie Tupper. Diplomacy has historically been coded as a feminine art associated with softness, etiquette, and relationship-building, often derided as the domain of cookie-pushers in contrast to the

masculine realm of war (Towns, 2020). Jim Sams and Archie Tupper violently reject this feminised figuration of the diplomat. Their communication strips away all feminine courtesy, replacing it with a hyper-masculine performance of vulgarity and raw power.

Tupper's idiolectic language is characterized by simplistic syntax and insults (Michalski, 2024). McEwan provides a striking example of this Trumpian rhetoric in Tupper's tweets:

The American president was awake early to head the debate from his bed and demonstrate how it was done. 'Tiny Sylvie Larousse sinking English ships. BAD!' It was poetry, smoothly combining density of meaning with fleet footed liberation from detail. Larousse was emasculated, then diminished with a taunt that, true or not ... The final judgement was childlike and pure, memorable and monosyllabically correct (McEwan, 2019: 28).

This linguistic aggression is a deliberate strategy to re-masculinize diplomacy. Tupper embodies a distributive, win-lose masculinity that views cooperation as weakness (Ruane, 2006). However, what truly binds Sams and Tupper is deeper than style; it is what Hearn calls a transnational political masculinity rooted in shamelessness (Hearn, 2024). When Tupper brags about diverting the defence budget to his own hotel chain, Sams recognizes a kindred spirit.

This interaction redefines the concept of the 'Strongman'. Sedgwick (1985) theorizes homosocial desire as the continuum of male bonding that structures patriarchal power. Although Sedgwick's framework was not formulated with post-human politics in mind, its structural logic maps onto the Sams-Tupper relationship with unsettling clarity: their bond is mediated not through the exchange of women but through a shared non-human, pheromonal essence. McEwan explicitly reveals this cross-species solidarity in their private phone call:

One last thing, Mr President. May I ask you something personal?' 'Sure. As long as it's not about—' 'No, no. Of course. It's about...before.' 'Before what, Jim?' 'Six?' 'Say again.' 'Are you...Did you once... Have, erm... Six legs?' The line went dead (McEwan, 2019: 31).

This silence confirms that diplomacy has ceased to be a feminine art. They recognize each other's pheromones across the Atlantic, bypassing the feminine protocols of the Foreign Office. Tupper's chaotic twitter storms and Sams's Reversalism are revealed to be products of the same hive mind. Thus, the Imperial Gothic anxiety mentioned by Foster goes global: the world is not being run by rational actors, but by a fraternity of monsters who use the structures of democracy to satisfy their grotesque appetites (Foster, 2024). Diplomacy, therefore, ceases to

be a feminine art of negotiation and becomes the mutual sniffing of two alpha pests who have colonized the highest seats of power.

4. CONCLUSION: THE PERMANENCE OF THE ABJECT AND THE END OF THE HUMAN

Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach* concludes not with a restoration of order but with the total and irreversible triumph of the irrational. The successful implementation of Reversalism is an economic doctrine as absurd as the bodies that enacted it. This implementation signifies that the protective father figure of the nation-state has been permanently displaced by the abject invader. This article has argued that the novella should be read beyond the confines of a momentary Brexit satire. It operates as a structural investigation into the collapse of hegemonic masculinity and the rise of a grotesque bio-politics. By synthesizing Critical Masculinity Studies with the Gothic, the analysis has revealed that the crisis of the modern state is at its core a crisis of the human body and its replacement by a performative and instinct-driven exoskeleton.

The trajectory of this invasion mapped out in the article demonstrates a viral expansion of the abject. The transformation begins at the somatic level where the Prime Minister's body is colonized by a parasitic agency. This subverts the Kafkaesque tradition. Unlike Gregor Samsa who becomes a victim, Jim Sams becomes a perpetrator utilizing the human shell as an instrument of power. This individual pathology metastasized into a collective swarm masculinity. By liquidating rational actors like Benedict St John, the cabinet established a toxic camaraderie based not on ideology but on a shared biological and pheromonal imperative (Bolt, 2010). Finally, the global echoes of this crisis expose how diplomacy has transformed from a feminised negotiation art into a homosocial spectacle of vulgarity. Two powerful men recognize their shared monstrous essence across the Atlantic.

The post-human political atmosphere in the novella concludes with an unsettling ending. Having achieved their chaotic goals, Jim Sams and his cabinet decide to leave the human bodies they have occupied. This departure is less a retreat and more the completion of a mission. Sams contrasts the fragmented nature of the human mind with the dogmatic mindset of his own flock and reveals the essence of their victory in his farewell speech. That speech lays bare the relationship between the flock's biological integrity and the success of the political project:

As you have discovered, it is not easy to be Homo sapiens sapiens. Their desires are so often in contention with their intelligence. Unlike us who are whole. You have each put a human shoulder to the wheel of populism. You have seen the

fruits of your labour, for that wheel is beginning to turn. Now, my friends, it is time to make our journey south. To our beloved home! (McEwan, 2019: 50).

This statement proves that the populist movement originates from its rejection of complex human intelligence in favour of a simplified and instinctive sense of wholeness. The abject is no longer the outsider and has successfully turned the wheel of the state. This permanence is grotesquely illustrated when the Chancellor of the Exchequer is accidentally crushed by a garbage truck. This event provides a fittingly ironic end for a creature of the waste. His colleagues do not mourn him with human dignity. Instead, they gather around his broken body and view his exposed fluids with appetite rather than horror:

From under his shell, there was extruded a thick, off-white creamy substance, a much-loved delicacy. There would be a heroes' banquet that night and what fun it would be, with so many extraordinary stories to tell. Before the lights changed again, his colleagues had just enough time to pick him up and place the extrusion reverently on his underbelly. Then, with six ministers each taking a leg, they bore him away to the Palace of Westminster (McEwan, 2019: 51).

This act of auto-cannibalism is the ultimate rejection of the symbolic order and the social contract. By consuming the body fluids of their deceased fellow, the Cabinet is reinforcing a bond that is entirely biological in nature and lacking in human morality. This consumption marks the final victory of the material bodily lower stratum over the rational mind (Bakhtin, 1984). This distorted ritual implies that the new political order is sustained by a self-consuming cycle of waste and consumption.

McEwan's grotesque satire validates the Imperial Gothic anxiety where the fear was that the home would be invaded by the Other (Foster, 2024). The reality is that the Other has become the Home. As Jim Sams sheds the Prime Minister's skin to return to the skirting boards, he leaves behind a nation fundamentally rewired to operate on the logic of the cockroach. The human actors may return to their bodies but the institutions they inhabit have been hollowed out. This leaves only the exoskeleton of democracy. The crisis of masculinity is not resolved by a return to the protective father. Rather, it concludes with the realization that the state itself has become abject. The political stage remains but the performance has proven that to rule in the age of populism is to embrace the darkness, the dirt, and the swarm. In the final perspective, the grotesque nature of this victory is laid bare.

The prime minister, still in the Christmas spirit and looking rakish in a pink paper crown, sprawling shoeless in an armchair, neat whisky in hand, watched [...] helicopter shots of mile-long queues along Oxford Street. He would have liked to say it out loud, but he let the words murmur in his thoughts: it was over;

his job was done. Soon he would assemble his colleagues and inform them that it was time to begin the long march to the palace and be welcomed as heroes by their tribe (McEwan, 2019: 49).

This image of the cockroach in a paper crown serves as the final haunting emblem of the Imperial Gothic. It confirms that the protective father was never there to save the home. He was there to turn the nation into a feast for the swarm while leaving behind a hollowed-out shell celebrating its own demise.

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