

The story focuses on the difference between rational, scientific thought and Romantic, religious thought. Explain and Comment.

From the initial stages of *Enduring Love*, McEwan explores the theme of thought and its different processes; Rational, Scientific, Romantic and Religious. Using his characters McEwan leads the reader to sympathize with each character in the novel and gain a form of insight into how each character thinks and develops throughout the narrative. From the very beginning it is apparent which characters depict which process of thought. The three main characters introduced within the opening chapter; Joe, Clarissa and Jed Parry can be split clearly into separate groups. Joe is the rational scientist:

“I was the world’s most complicated simpleton“.

Clarissa is the romantic:

“Clarissa thought that her emotions were the appropriate guide”

and Parry is the religious fanatic:

“God has brought us together in this tragedy.”

McEwan explores these types of personality throughout the text and develops them further with each event that occurs.

The opening chapter of the novel is arguably the most important chapter of the book.

McEwan initiates the novel through the voice of its narrator, Joe:

“The beginning is simple to mark.”

This opening sentence has been interpreted in many ways by academics. Not only does it offer an insight and flavour of the novel's narrator and his rationality but it has been put forth that this line also alludes to the opening pages of the Old Testament:

'In the beginning.'

It could also be argued that the differences between the two opening lines provide the reader with an understanding of Joe's apprehension of religion.

As the text begins to unfold further Joe's rationality and scientific thought become more apparent. The constant digressions in narrative delay the story and at times can be quite frustrating as a reader. However, this was an intentional device used by McEwan. Not only does it force the reader to continue with the story it also gives the reader an insight into Joe's rationality and how frustrating it could be to live with at times. In an interview McEwan put forth his reason for using this technique. He said that he had always wanted to write a book that had an almost addictive quality from the beginning. He felt that by delaying information the reader would feel compelled to continue. McEwan even uses Joe to inform the reader of what he is doing.

"I'm holding back, delaying the information."

As the ballooning incident begins to transpire McEwan uses repetition of the word '*we*' to underline the togetherness and love between Joe and Clarissa.

"we heard a man's shout. We turned to look across the field and saw the danger."

This sentence provides an interesting insight into the calamity that unfolds as the plot develops.

"We turned to look across the field and saw the danger."

I find use of the word "*danger*" an interesting choice in this instance. It's almost as if McEwan is trying to inform the reader by not continuing the description further that Joe and Clarissa are the ones in danger as well as Gadd and his grandson.

As the ballooning incident begins to take further shape McEwan explores the roles of gender within our society. Although this is not overt, the fact that Joe is the one to run to the scene to help sets up interesting debate:

“Next thing I was running towards it.”

Commonly, within Western society, rational and scientific thought is associated with males and romantic, religious with females. However, this irrational and uncalculated behaviour presented to the reader through Joe’s reaction and description of the event help to blur the lines between gender and thought process flipping the stereotypical roles around:

“hearing the caution Clarissa called after me.”

McEwan is suddenly using Clarissa as the rational thinker. This kind of behaviour, however, is almost stereotypical of Clarissa who seems somewhat unpredictable, mirroring Joe in the later stages of the book. McEwan furthers the reversal of gender within modern society when looking at Joe and Clarissa’s relationship. Clarissa states that she chose Joe to be with because of his rationality.

“Rational Joe”

This I feel is an interesting point. Once again it illustrates a power shift between genders common now in modern society. Clarissa is the one who chose her partner.

From the opening chapters McEwan uses Joe’s rationale to set a benchmark of trust between the reader and the text’s narrator. Joe is in complete control of the story and determines not only the information the reader is given but also how quickly and when and clearly states this within the text. Witness for instance the opening line of the second chapter:

“Best to slow down.”

In this first paragraph of the second chapter McEwan begins to show the reader how scientific Joe’s process of thought is. The use of language within his description is almost odd at times.

“so much branching and subdivision”

And

“The best description of a reality does not need to mimic its velocity.”

Joe’s use of language almost gives him aloofness despite his apparent insecurities about his appearance and failure to succeed in his profession as much as he’d hoped.

In looking at Clarissa, it is clear from the start that she is a true Romantic. Joe states very early on that there are two men in their relationship; him and Keats. Clarissa completely embodies some of the fundamental values of Romanticism; self expression, sincerity, spontaneity and originality. This is shown on many occasions not least after she receives her birthday present from Joe.

“You’re a bad boy to spend so much money. I’m going to make you fuck me all afternoon.”

As the book develops so does the concept of ‘beauty is truth.’ It is clear to see that the more secretive Joe becomes about Parry the further Joe and Clarissa’s relationship begins to collapse. When Joe invades Clarissa’s privacy by snooping through her drawers it is almost the final straw for Clarissa.

“He brought something out in you.”

It could be viewed that Clarissa views Joe’s obsession as a breakdown in his rationale and his secretive almost deceptive behavior brings an end to the part of him Clarissa

found beautiful; the truth within his rational thought.

When looking at the character of Jed Parry, the religious thinker he must be considered as key to the entire text and the events that occur. He is McEwan's vehicle for developing each character's thought. His religious beliefs verge on extremist, so much so that Joe believes Parry plans to murder him.

"What reason had I given him for murdering me?"

Jed's unrelenting love for Joe continues throughout the entirety of the novel.

The obvious beginning of his affections is seen at the end of the second chapter.

"I understand what you're feeling. I feel it too. I love you."

This initially appears in a homosexual way to the reader. However, as the plot develops it becomes more apparent that it is purely out of religiously based. And that Jed feels God has told him to love Joe.

"I praise God that He has sent me to you."

As Jed's obsession grows so does Joe's this is shown when Joe talks of Clarissa's view of his situation.

"To her I was manic, perversely obsessed."

Jed's continual bombardments of religious and affectionate messages culminate in his taking Clarissa hostage. In this vital chapter we see all the characters throughout the novel peak. Joe's almost comical trip to the Hippy house to purchase a gun illustrates his final breakdown of rational thinking. Jed's taking Clarissa hostage highlights that his religious and affectionate beliefs have finally become extreme and Clarissa's Romanticism almost go with the flow attitude is tested to limit with the showdown of Parry and Joe.

In conclusion McEwan uses each character as a device in order to explore the differences in thought processes prevalent within society. He explores how they can all be tested and the effect that if compounded by each other the outcomes that can occur. Somehow he seems to make Parry a believable, albeit somewhat bizarre character work within this novel in order to carry the plot forward. The interplay between Joe, the rational and scientific thinker and a Jed, the fanatically religious and Love obsessed 'Jesus freak' works to an extent where Clarissa the Romantic can still be viewed in her own separate way. Enduring Love manages to deal with the differences in thought in a strange but compelling way and the subtle scientific, Romantic and religious hints that are displayed by each character, even in small pieces of speech, help to make the book wholly more convincing and satisfying.