

## 90. Towards an uncertain future: Brexit satirised in Ian McEwan's *The Cockroach*

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### Abstract

Ian McEwan's 2019 novella, *The Cockroach*, which is considered a product of "brexlit," is a bitter satire of British politicians' Brexit project. According to the author, the rising waves of ultranationalism, seasoned with British politicians' unreasonable populist discourse, drifted Britain out of the European Union. In the novella, McEwan's chosen medium in criticising Britain's status quo ante Brexit is satire. Due to its corrective nature, satire tends to repair and/or reform prevailing ills. However, in *The Cockroach*, McEwan does not intent to correct the troubles brought to Britain by Brexit, which he sees as the manifestation of stark irrationality. Indeed, political humour accompanies McEwan's exclusive satirical style, for the author was aware of the fact that the British Conservative Party's political slogan – "Get Brexit done" – had already fulfilled its mission by the time he was writing *The Cockroach*. Thus, this article follows the fictional route drawn by McEwan in *The Cockroach* in presenting how the bilateral association of populism and jingoism can darken the future vision of a country whose parliamentary democracy has a history of almost two centuries.

**Keywords:** Ian McEwan, *The Cockroach*, Brexit, Brexlit, satire, political humour

## Belirsiz bir geleceğe doğru: Ian McEwan'ın *Hamamböceği* adlı kitabında Brexit'in hicvi

### Öz

Ian McEwan'ın "brexlit" in bir ürünü olarak kabul edilen 2019 romanı *Hamamböceği*, İngiliz politikacıların Brexit projesinin acı bir hicvidir. Yazara göre, İngiliz politikacıların mantıksız popülist söylemiyle yükselen aşırı milliyetçilik dalgaları, İngiltere'yi Avrupa Birliği'nden uzaklaştırdı. Romanda, McEwan'ın İngiltere'nin Brexit öncesi statükosunu eleştirmek için seçtiği araç hicvidir. Düzeltici doğası nedeniyle, hiciv var olan sorunları düzeltmeye meyillidir. Ancak *Hamamböceği*'nde McEwan, Brexit'in İngiltere'ye getirdiği ve katı bir mantıksızlığın tezahürü olarak gördüğü sorunları düzeltme niyetinde değildir. Gerçekten de, siyasi mizah McEwan'ın özel hiciv tarzına eşlik eder, çünkü yazar, İngiliz Muhafazakâr Partisi'nin siyasi sloganının - "Brexit'i bitirin" - *Hamamböceği*'ni yazdığı sırada misyonunu zaten yerine getirdiğinin farkındadır. Dolayısıyla bu makale, McEwan'ın *Hamamböceği*'nde popülizm ve şovenizm arasındaki birlikteliğin, parlamenter demokrasisi

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neredeysi iki yüzyıllık bir geçmişe sahip bir ülkenin geleceęini nasıl karartabileceęini sunarken çizdięi kurgusal rotayı takip etmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Ian McEwan, *Hamamböceęi*, Brexit, Brexlit, hiciv, siyasi hiciv

## 1. Introduction

23 June 2016 Brexit referendum created a ground-breaking impact on Britain's sociopolitical, economic and cultural structure. Along with Britain's decision to withdraw from the European Union, there occurred an unprecedented fluctuations and unexpected turns leading to a severe rupture not only in the long-established institutions but also in public view of existing internal and global policies. Brexit referendum brought about a long lasting public discontent in that there appeared

a sudden and violent shift towards right-wing populism, hostility towards supranational forms of cosmopolitical democracy and global interdependence, extensive opposition to open-border policies, discontent with the cultural implications of globalization and xenophobic resistance to both immigrants and transnational mobility in general. Financial markets went into panic. (Shaw, 2021, p. 1)

Consequently, the country collapsed inward; divided into two camps as "Remainers" and "Leavers"; and started to wear out each other. Ramifications of such a tense atmosphere affected cultural formations, and thereby literature produced in Britain inevitably. The continuous interaction between literature and life gave way to the emergence of a new category of fictions that "either directly respond, or imaginatively allude, to Britain's exit from the EU, or engage with the subsequent sociocultural, economic, racial or cosmopolitical consequences of Britain's withdrawal" (Shaw, 2021, p. 4). Hence shortly before the EU referendum, "when Britain's fate was still unknown," scholar Kristian Shaw coined the term "Brexlit" for works "reflecting the divided nature of the United Kingdom as well as both the motivations for and ramifications of, the referendum" (2021, p.4). Thus, this article explores Ian McEwan's satirical respond to contemporary British politicians' Brexit policies through his novella, *The Cockroach*, which is considered a product of "Brexlit." Although the focus of this article is McEwan's *The Cockroach*, works of other "Brexlit" authors are briefly touched upon for their literary productions enable the reader to see the repercussions of and their respond to Brexit policies.

## 2. Satire and political humour

In the opening of *The Cockroach*, Ian McEwan presents a reversed version of a Kafkaesque transformation in that, while Kafka's Gregor Samsa wakes up as a gigantic insect one morning in *The Metamorphosis*, McEwan's main character, a former cockroach, surprisingly finds itself metamorphosed into a human being. Although Kafka does not specify the type of the insect in his work, McEwan identifies his protagonist-insect as a cockroach at the onset. Thus, Jim Sams, McEwan's main character, opens his astonished eyes at Downing Street No:10, trying to grasp the incredible change his natural body has undergone. As the address indicates, Jim Sams – the cockroach – wakes up to a morning in human form, and what is more, as the present Prime Minister of Britain. The ultimate mission assigned to Jim Sams is to take the final step in the Brexit process at all costs. As the novella unfolds, it is observed that Prime Minister Jim Sams succeeds in making the majority of the Parliament and the country approve of his unprecedented economic plan, which is found "insane" by the opposition – consisting of the Remainers, economists and the EU zone countries that have numerous trade deals with Britain. One noteworthy feature of Ian McEwan's style is that, although the novella's opening echoes that of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, the author's satirical approach to contemporary British

politicians and their administrative methods, strategies and political manoeuvres in handling internal and foreign matters is obviously Swiftian. Undoubtedly, Sams's suggested economic plan, "Reversalism," which will be discussed later in this article, is reminiscent of Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, wherein Swift suggests, for instance, selling a hundred thousand babies of the poor to the rich as a highly nutritious food. In a mock modest tone, Swift further proposes the use of not just the flesh but also the delicate skin of babies in producing gloves and boots for the rich. In materialising such irrational solutions, Swift ironically claims, Ireland would solve the devastating problems of poverty, starvation and overpopulation. In *A Modest Proposal*, the target of Swift's Juvenalian satire is the ruling class's insensitivity and indifference towards the sufferings of the Irish people in the eighteenth century. Likewise, in *The Cockroach*, Ian McEwan aligns with Swift as both writers employ satire as a tool to criticise incompetent politicians' abuse of power, their mismanagement of public funds, wrongdoings and irrational decisions that drag the authors' respective countries into a nearly irreparable chaos. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Ireland was a colony of Britain at the time Swift was writing.

In a broad sense, satire is defined as a literary device which is employed to foreground shortcomings, animosities, vices and follies existing in a particular society, institutions, or individuals using humour, irony, exaggeration or ridicule. In "Wit as a Political Weapon: Satirists and Censors," Leonard Freedman defines political satire as "offensive, acerbic, disrespectful," and goes on saying that "[i]ts practitioners especially relish aiming their fire at the politically powerful" (2012, p. 88). In McEwan's novella, one cannot help reflecting upon the author's use of animal imagery to fictionalise his deep discontent and disappointment against contemporary British politicians and their practices. Why does the author specifically choose a cockroach—blatodea in Latin—to represent his satirical view of the UK's fictional Prime Minister in his novella? A possible answer might be found in the definition of the very distinctive biological characteristics of this type of insect. In *Cockroaches: Ecology, Behavior, and Natural History*, it is stated that this species, whose existence on Earth dates to approximately 300-350 million years, is resistant to all kinds of tough living conditions. Their reddish-brown or dark-brown shell protects them from any external attack. In addition, "cockroaches are considered social creatures who do not like to live alone. It is claimed by scientists that it is difficult to conceive of any group of animals that are as universally and diversely social as cockroaches" (Bell, Roth&Nalepa, 2007, p. 131), and whenever necessary, they act instinctively and simultaneously, always as a whole, according to a common decision-making mechanism. Obviously, the author attaches certain characteristics of this type of insect to politicians like Jim Sams. It is observed in the opening pages of the novella that an intense feeling of mutual disgust arises when the two life forms – man and cockroach – meet unexpectedly. Such a scene occurs when Jim Sams, formerly a cockroach, examines his human form in the mirror for the first time. He finds his image so repulsive that he can hardly bear detecting the features of his new appearance. Jim Sams' description of his human body, which he sees as a grotesque presence, draws the reader's attention to the author's use of satirical humour:

The bristling oval disk of a face, wobbling on a thick pink stalk of neck, repelled him. The pinprick eyes shocked him. The inflated rim of darker flesh that framed an array of off-white teeth disgusted him. [...] as he combed his gingery brown hair, he noticed with sudden homesickness that it was the same colour as his good old shell. At least something has survived of [his] looks, was his melancholy thought .... (McEwan, 2019, pp. 11-12)

The incongruity of the scene, that is, Jim's assessment of his human image as shocking and repulsive, incites laughter due to the recognition that the two life forms (the man and the cockroach) are equally stunned by a similar feeling of abhorrence on seeing each other. It is understood that the author's satire is targeting a specific politician in that the "ginger-brown" hair is not only reminiscent of the cockroach's

former self, but it is also an implicit reference to the parodied representation of the UK's current PM, Boris Johnson. Sams' melancholy mood further deepens; yet, on remembering the seriousness of his cause, he is fraught with such confidence, courage and belief that he could tolerate anything on the way to fulfil his mission. At first, Sams thinks he is alone in his challenging mission, but he is overjoyed on recognising that "others like him were heading towards separate ministries to inhabit other bodies and take up the fight. A couple of dozen, a little swarm of the nation's best, come to inhabit and embolden a faltering leadership" (McEwan, 2019, p. 20). Yet, in Sams' cabinet, which consists of his transformed comrades, there is only one whose existence among them irritates the PM profoundly for that person is an original human being, not a metamorphosed cockroach. Sams defines Benedict St John – the foreign secretary – as "the traitor at his side," a devil in paradise:

When Jim had looked into [his] eyes, 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. Just the sort who might rebel and vote to bring down his own government. (McEwan, 2019, pp. 20-21)

The depiction of the foreign secretary underlines the function of political humour in McEwan's satirical style in producing binaries in that it reveals the distinction between the in-group and the out-group by fostering solidarity among those who share a specific political view and by alienating those who do not (Tesnohlikova, 2021, p. 3). In McEwan's case, the cooperating solidifying ones that make up the in-group are the cockroach members of Sams' cabinet; the out-group consists of one single alienated member, Benedict St John, who is the only human being in Sams' conservative government and perceived by the others as a traitor to be annihilated. In Frye's view, "two things are essential to satire; one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (2000, p. 224). To put it another way, "using mechanisms such as absurdity, inversion, distortion, and reduction, a satirist creates an improbably fantastic oppositional reality in comparison to which reality looks impossibly absurd" (Park-Ozee, 2019, p. 589). Hence it sounds reasonable to claim that in *The Cockroach* McEwan voices his anti-Brexit views by creating a fictional Britain, whose ruling cabinet consists of transformed cockroaches. The author impersonates those cockroaches as grotesque politicians who put their absurd, entirely irrational policies into practice obstinately, without paying any attention to the warnings of common sense. In a sense, in *The Cockroach*, the fantastic oppositional reality populated by McEwan's insect-human politicians makes the real seem absurd. In the novella, the object of attack is Britain's integration with the European Union. Sams and his government initially implement their separatist policies by splitting the country into two severely distinct groups. On the one hand, there are the Clockwisers; this group includes intellectuals, artists, scientists—economists in particular—and the majority of Britain's young population; in brief, those who support Britain's integration with the EU. According to Maria Brock, "each dominant political regime produces forms of resistance" (2018, p. 282), and Clockwisers are the ones who represent resistance in *The Cockroach*. In the work's fictional world, Sams' populist political discourse disdains and labels them as "the elites;" in the context of the UK's de facto foreign policies, however, they stand for "Remainers," who were and are still the followers of the idea that Britain should be an integral part of Europe. Robert Tombs, in his article "Who are the Remainers?,"<sup>3</sup> examines "Remainers" under three groups: Ideological Remainers, Professional Remainers and Worried Remainers. Ideological Remainers are the group of people who consider themselves emotionally attached to the EU; Professional Remainers are a group that supports Britain's integration with the EU for their personal interests and career opportunities. This group consists of people dealing with different occupations, such as executives of multinational companies,

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.briefingsforbritain.co.uk/brexit-who-are-the-remainers/>

academic researchers, politicians, and employees of media groups. To the advocates of this group, the UK's departure from the EU would certainly be a threat to their careers. Worried Remainers make up the third and the most crowded group. This group includes the ones who are rather concerned about the economic problems that leaving the EU will trigger. A common concern among the sympathizers of these three distinct groups is that the UK's membership of the EU is indispensable for their future. They believe in the idea that a peaceful, prosperous future could be attained only through a partnership with the EU and Europe. On the other hand, the group standing against the Remainers" is named "Leavers"; this group consists of those who follow the government's Brexit policies unquestioningly. According to Robert Eaglestone, "Brexit has stirred up a terrifying political discourse in which opponents of Brexit are described as 'saboteurs' or 'enemies of the people'" (2018, p. 6). As is seen, Leavers tagged the Remainers "enemies of the state, "saboteurs" of English national identity and England's national unity."

Coming back to the novella, Sams knows that the only way to increase the number of his supporters and to consolidate his voting base is to create and demonise an adversary group as populist ideology requires. In doing so, Sams believes, his followers (called "Reversalists" in the novella) would outnumber those who are against his segregating moves. Sams' skill in inducing "Reversalist" masses to uphold his "reverse money flow" project is noteworthy. His tactic is based on voicing a populist rhetoric, imbued with patriotic and nationalistic slogans, such as "Take Back Control,' 'Take Back Our Country,' and 'Britannia waives the rules'" (Pettifor, 2016, p. 131), which would appeal to the ultranationalists as well as the nostalgic ones who aspire to make Britain the world's leading power again. However, as Shaw states, imperial nostalgia has a secondary role in the Vote Leave campaign compared to the "primary motivating factor [which contained] ... a strange alliance of establishment figures, disenfranchised working-class voters and disillusioned Middle Englanders" (2021, p. 30). Yet, Sams' Westminster speech, which he delivers while waiting for the Reversalism Bill to pass, is filled with such exaggerated and assertive future promises that there occurs a tumult even among the backbenchers. Sams says,

When the bill returns to this house, our mission will be to deliver Reversalism for the purpose of uniting and re-energising our great country and not only making it great again, but making it the greatest place on earth. By 2050 [...] the UK will be the greatest and most prosperous economy in Europe. [...] Reversalism will bless our future – clean, green, prosperous, united, confident and ambitious. (McEwan, 2019, pp. 45-47)

But what is Reversalism? Or how does reverse money flow operate? It is explained that employees pay their companies for their weekly work hours; in return, employees are paid for all the items they "carry away" whenever they go shopping. In addition, they are not allowed to make investments or deposit money in a bank, for money saved in a bank account would receive no more than a negative interest rate (McEwan, 2019, p. 25). The reverse money flow project is aimed at reviving economy; when "the economy is stimulated there are more skilled workers, everyone gains" (McEwan, 2019, p. 26). Another instance Sams mentions in his parliament speech to convince the opposition about the mechanism of his Reversalism project reads as follows:

[f]or example, our newly empowered police might pull over a recklessly speeding motorist and hand through the window two fifty-pound notes. It will be that driver's responsibility, in the face of possible criminal charges, to use that money to work and pay for more overtime or find a slightly better job. [Therefore,] Reversalism will stimulate the economy, incentivise our brilliant citizens, and render our democracy more robust. (McEwan, 2019, p. 47)

Thus, Sams introduces his economic plan as a win-win project.

In his *Guardian* essay<sup>4</sup> Ian McEwan refers to an old populist tactic frequently employed by politicians like his fictional character Jim Sams. Through this tactic, the author observes, politicians either hide or put the blame of their wrongdoings on a fake outside enemy; in doing so, they persuade masses that it is not them but an outside enemy who is the source of all troubles prevailing in the country. In Sams' case, the first outside enemy created to justify his irrational Reversalism project is Brussels, the centre of the EU. Treating Brussels as a trouble-making centre, one of the greatest hurdles before the prosperity of the UK, enables Sams to make his first serious move on the way to Brexit. On this way, which is fraught with hardships, France provides Sams with a second opportunity to invigorate the pro-Brexiteers who support his cause heartily. The accidental shooting of six English fishermen by the French within the territorial waters of France allows Sams to turn this tragedy into a national issue; hence, he manages to stir into action the ultranationalists in the UK. He provokes the patriotic feelings of his supporters by declaring the dead fishermen heroes who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their great nation. Jim Sams exploits this tragic incident to arouse public sentiment and to increase his popularity as a daring politician. Consequently, he takes charge of planning the funeral at the military airport. He plans that he himself would be waiting for the coffins arriving from France, proudly standing alone under a heavy rain and without an umbrella:

He would stand alone on the airstrip, silently facing a camera crew and the massive propeller plane [...]. A brave lonely figure confronting the giant machine. [...] The coffins, draped in Union Jacks, were brought in single file, [...] and placed at the prime minister's feet. The rain played well. He correctly refused an umbrella as he stood to attention in the downpour. Were those tears on his face? (McEwan, 2019, p. 63)

Obviously, shedding tears before the public is a tactic commonly used by leaders to attract sympathy; and in Sams' case, the rain drops on his face help him give the impression that he is in a deep agony. Thus, turning the French into a "staunch enemy" of state, Sams strengthens his political profile as an unyielding leader. In addition, "[p]atriotic journalists praised the prime minister for facing down the French and speaking up for 'our lost boys'" (McEwan, 2019, p. 54). Keeping the political agenda of the country busy with such a populist discourse, Sams smoothly proceeds in his way to realise his secret scheme.

In the meantime, however, Sams knows that inventing an outside enemy would not suffice to put Reversalism into effect; evidently, without foreign support, Sams' unprecedented "reverse money flow" project would likely fail. While the French and the German leaders of the E.U. try to convince Sams to give up his unreasonable project, Archie Tupper, the president of the US, seems to stand by Sams as the leader of the global superpower. In *The Cockroach*, McEwan creates the Archie Tupper character as a parody of the former US president, Donald Trump. The narrator's ironic tone defines Archie Tupper's character as

a serious man of big tastes, with his own moral certitudes, by background not trained up to value the subtle ribbons-and-medals allure of the honours system. What were White's or Hyde Park to one who owned more expensive clubs and bigger courses? Who care for 'Sir' when one was 'Mr President' for life. (McEwan, 2019, pp. 56-57)

The behavioural and cognitive parallels between Sams and the US president impress Sams to such an extent that he even suspects Archie Tupper to be a transformed cockroach like himself. Indeed, Tupper's puzzling tweets praising Sams' "Reversalism" project are first received with "weary or condescending smiles" in Brussels, but later, when the number, frequency and content of his insistent tweets related to

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/01/brexit-pointless-masochistic-ambition-history-done>

the subject become unbearable, “the smiles in Brussels began to freeze,” especially when “President Tupper was proposing an ex-general, the billionaire owner of a string of casinos, to be the new ‘czar’ of the British National Health Service” (McEwan, 2019, p. 83). One of Tupper’s simplistic tweets reads as follows: “In the name of free trade, American prosperity and greatness, and raising the poor, Reversalism was good. Prime minister Sams was great” (McEwan, 2019, p. 83). Tupper’s choice of the adjectives “good” and “great” in defining Sams and what Tupper calls his “Revengelism” project not only proves the level of the US president’s intellectual depth but also carries a decisively commanding air, dictating to Brussels his positive view of Sams and his project. As a matter of fact, Archie Tupper’s tweets at least ensure that the audience listens to the speech delivered by Sams at the NATO headquarters, “with unusual courtesy.” Sams delivers this speech in place of his foreign secretary, Benedict St John, whom vengeful Sams has eliminated after he has been informed about Benedict St John’s secret involvement with the Clockwisers and the group’s intention “to help the opposition defeat the Reversalism Bill when it came back to the Commons” (McEwan, 2019, p. 67). Dubbed as the moving force of the Clockwisers, the foreign secretary leaks to the Daily Telegraph, with all the confidential records and evidence kept by the two related states, that The Roscoff Affair (the killing of the British fishermen by the French) was no more than a tragic accident, and that the Prime Minister manipulated the incident to consolidate the proponents of his Reversalism project. Infuriated by the attack targeting his cause, Sams himself carefully devises a revenge plan to destroy his Clockwise enemies led by Benedict St John. While relating the phases of Sams’ rage, the narrator’s playfulness, combined with his satirical approach to the ambitious politician’s revenge strategies, evokes bitter laughter. His first reaction might be interpreted as the expression of an animalistic instinct to annihilate his enemy at all costs:

In his fury, he wanted to hit someone, or break something. [...] He should have dealt with Benedict St John days ago. If only he was a free agent, Jim would happily have taken an axe to the man’s throat. (McEwan, 2019, p. 68)

Yet, after becoming calm, Sams invents a story of harassment which is supposed to have taken place between Benedict St John and Jane Fish fifteen years ago – when she “was parliamentary private secretary to Benedict St John” (McEwan, 2019, p. 77). Sams himself writes the deceitful article, cautiously assessing all the details of its desired aftereffects before leaking it to the *Guardian*. The narrator’s depiction of Sams prior to the article-writing scene indicates that Sams’ resilience and formidable determination in surviving all the traps plotted against his autonomy are chief characteristics of his species:

His was a perfectly pitched and balanced mind, well adapted by inheritance over unimaginable stretches of time to the art of survival and the advancement of his kind. Also, a life of constant, almost routine struggle had perfected in him effortless mastery in defending all that he possessed – while seeming not to. And in this moment of scheming, he was richly self-aware, fully alive to the joy of politics at its purest, which was the pursuit of ends at all costs. (McEwan, 2019, p. 70)

The difference between St John’s and Sams’ recrimination is that while the former’s claim is true, the latter’s indictment is based on slander. Drawn as a Machiavellian politician, Sams forces Benedict St John to sign a resignation letter immediately.

Towards the end of the novella, Sams himself talks about the parallels between his species – cockroaches – and human beings. The first common behavioural characteristic he emphasizes is related to the two distinct species’ preference for darkness, which could also be connected to the etymology of the Latin word “blatta,” meaning “shunning the light.” Sams defines his likes as

...creatures that shun the light. We understand and love the dark... [for thousands of years] we have lived alongside humans and have learned their particular taste for darkness. [...] But whenever [darkness] is predominant in them, so we have flourished. Where [human beings] embraced poverty, filth, squalor, we have grown in strength. (McEwan, 2019, p. 98)

At a symbolic level, McEwan's protagonist-cockroach is referring to the malicious, hypocritical sort of human beings, politicians exclusively, who hide their ill intentions behind a darkening populist discourse as their respective society falls into recession followed by a desperate impoverishment. The deeper human beings sink, the more powerful the cockroach population becomes. In a sense, McEwan's satirical style, while voicing the potential negative outcomes of Brexit, affirms Frye's definition of the function of satire: "Satire is a militant irony, where moral norms are relatively clear, and standards are assumed against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (2000, p. 223). Jim Sams' cabinet, which consists of transformed cockroaches, except the previously mentioned Benedict St John, is as ambitious and determined as their leader, the PM, in realising their "Reversalism" project. The idea lying at the very core of Sams' concept of Reversalism, which literally stands for Brexit, is that it would split the country into two sharply divided poles. The irony is that while cockroaches live and act as a tightly united community, the Reversalism project led by Sams and his cockroach cabinet is intended to destroy the unity of the UK. In order to do so, Sams and his cabinet believe, they must first break Britain's integration with the European Union.

In fact, Britain's decision to leave the EU led to heated controversies within and outside the country, especially in other European member states. Julien Navarro, in "A disruptive moment? Parliaments, Brexit, and the future of European integration," points out the bilateral effect of Brexit as follows:

On 23 June 2016, 51.89% of British voters chose to leave the European Union. If the outcome of the referendum was clearly the choice of the British people, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU – a process known as Brexit – will have – and in fact already has had – major consequences for Europe as a whole. (2021, p. 443)

In a sense, the Brexit project divided not just Britain but the remaining member states into two: as Navarro states,

[T]he British decision to leave the EU could reinforce Eurosceptic narratives and trigger a 'domino effect' in other countries. Or, on the contrary, it could prompt politicians from the remaining member states to take new initiatives to preserve and strengthen the unity of the EU. (2021, pp. 446-47)

In his critical review<sup>5</sup> published in *The Guardian*, McEwan claims Brexit to be "...the most pointless, masochistic ambition in [Britain's] history..." It is seen that Ian McEwan is not alone in voicing his criticism of Britain's Brexit policies through his fiction and nonfiction writing. Also, there are other contemporary British writers whose Anti-Brexit views are resonating in the UK's literary circles; the three authors selected here are Bernardine Evaristo, Ali Smith and Mohsin Hamid. For instance, Bernardine Evaristo, in her 2019 novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*, emphasises the theatricality of contemporary British politics and politicians by calling the Brexit issue the "comedy of errors of our time;" the author finds "politics is way more dramatic than anything on stage at a theatre: Brexit & Trumpquake!" The author's playful use of the word "Trumpquake" is a pun reminiscent of the collaboration between the UK and the US on the way to Brexit and its earthquake impact on Britain. Another contemporary author who employs her anti-Brexit views as a recurrent theme in her works is Ali Smith. In her *Autumn* (2016), which is considered the first post-Brexit novel, the author expresses her deep discontent resulting from the polarization of the UK by the Brexit issues. Smith's narrator in

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/01/brexit-pointless-masochistic-ambition-history-done>

the novel interprets the acute ideational and emotive division in the country in a chapter which is replete with the phrase “All across the country,” indicating the two adversary camps:

... All across the country, people felt it was the wrong thing. All across the country, people felt it was the right thing. All across the country people felt they'd lost. All across the country, they'd won. [...] All across the country people called each other cunts. All across the country people felt unsafe. All across the country people were laughing their heads off. All across the country people felt legitimized ... (Smith, 2016, pp. 59-60)

On the other hand, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) touches upon the crisis of cosmopolitanism resulting from global migrant mobility. Cosmopolitanism, which denotes the idea of “the citizen of the world,” grants humanbeings the privilege of living anywhere in the world regardless of possessing the legal citizenship of a particular nation state. However, the idea and ideals of cosmopolitanism deeply disappoint Hamid's two immigrant protagonists – Nadia and Saeed – in their journey to the West where they believe they will find peace and security. The couple's London destination, where they confront fiercest attacks of xenophobic ultranationalist, and heavily armed police force's incessant oppression on and surveillance of immigrants through helicopters, drones, cctv cameras (Hamid, 2017, pp. 150-152), alludes to – immigrants in particular – Theresa May's (former Prime Minister of the UK) thoroughly negative, even hostile, view of those who see themselves as “citizen of the world”: “Prime Minister May declared that she is ‘putting...on warning’ those who think they are ‘a citizen of the world’ [are] ‘a citizen of nowhere’ who doesn't understand what the very word citizenship means” (May qtd in Eaglestone, 2018, p. 7). As is seen, contemporary authors like McEwan, Smith, Hamid, and Evaristo use their creative skills to reflect their anti-Brexit views on the platform of literature.

Likewise, another Remainer who voted against the 2016 Brexit referendum is scholar Ann Pettifor. In her article, “Brexit and Its Consequences,” Pettifor conveys her serious concerns about the potential catastrophic outcomes of the Brexit decision, which she finds unwise. She states,

I voted to Remain. I do not believe that Brexit is a wise decision. I fear its consequences in energizing the Far Right both in Britain but also across both Europe and the US I fear the break-up of the UK, and the political dominance of a mall tribe of conservative ‘Little Englanders.’ They will diminish this country's great social, economic, and political achievements. (2016, p. 131)

As expected, Britain's break-up with the EU occurred on December 31, 2020, casting clouds of uncertainty on all British citizens without exception. Ambiguity spreads everywhere in the country; people start to fear the coming of an uncertain future. In Shaw's words, “...established parties enabled the far right to colonise the political landscape, exploit patriotic sentiments as antithetical to European integration and cast the EU as the scapegoat for a variety of cultural ills” (2021, p. 30).

### 3. Conclusion

In *The Cockroach*, after the passing of the Reversalism Bill, Jim Sams and his cabinet turn back to their former cockroach bodies. The mood of the whole crew is uplifted; they are feeling victorious for they have accomplished their revenge mission, and they would surely “be welcomed as heroes by their tribe” (McEwan, 2019, p. 95). The awestruck cockroaches listen to Sams' speech about the ancient history of animosity between mankind and his species, about how cockroaches learnt the complicated ways to “ruin” their enemy in the long run:

And by tortuous means, and much experiment and failure, we have come to know the preconditions for such human ruin. War and global warming certainly and, in peacetime, immoveable hierarchies,

concentrations of wealth, deep superstition, rumour, division, distrust of science, of intellect, of strangers and of social cooperation. (McEwan, 2019, p. 98)

A possible interpretation of Sams' words might be that human beings themselves are responsible for every disaster they encounter; since there are certain innate flaws in human nature, it is easy for a wise, united enemy to destroy the human civilization. The author's use of satire in Sams' final speech, thanking his comrades for their efforts in fulfilling their mission successfully, once more touches upon follies, vices, and weaknesses in mankind: "I congratulate and thank you. 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" (McEwan, 2019, p. 99). In a sense, Ian McEwan's final remark negates Maria Brock's view of satire that "[it] can inject an optimism into despair which may serve to reinvigorate the political arena" (2018, p. 205). Evidently, McEwan does not cherish the hope that a better future is awaiting the UK citizens.

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