

## **Neuroscience, Anxiety and Meta-Narrative in Recent British Neuronovels: David Lodge's *Thinks...* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday***

Anton Kirchhofer and Anna Auguscik

Presented at the British Society for Literature and Science Ninth Annual Conference

In the critical debate which has sprung up over the past few years about the phenomenon of the 'neuronarrative' or 'neuronovel', two concepts have recurred in salient manner: On the one hand, novels and critics alike have placed strong emphasis on the importance of narrative – not merely in the context of narrative fiction, but also as an element of science, and as fundamental aspect of humanity. On the other hand, critics have sought to link the interest which a substantial number of contemporary novelists have shown in the recent findings and topics in neuroscience to an underlying anxiety that besets the authors and manifests itself in their texts (Gaedtke 2012). How do these two phenomena fit together? Are these narratives symptoms of an anxiety experienced by novelists (and perhaps more generally by those who range themselves on the humanities side of the two cultures split) in the face of the ever growing epistemological dominance of (neuro)science (Roth 2009)? Or does the neuronovel have the potential to “refresh and redeem the field of literature” (Johnson 2008), thus corroborating Michael Austin's general claim (2010) that the creation of fictional narrative can provide a successful resolution of anxiety?

Against the background of these questions, our paper will ask about the function which both anxiety and narrative are made to play in two contemporary classics of the neuronovel – David Lodge's *Thinks...* (2001) and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005). We will explore the ways and contexts in which these texts insist on the pervasive relevance of narrative, in order to assess both the quality and the function of their metanarrative dimension. And we will analyse at the connections between the texts' metanarrative dimension and their representation of anxieties. In doing so, we will raise the more general question, whether the various anxieties negotiated here arise in consequence of the continued virulence of the two culture split, and if so, how narrative can come into play either in order to bridge or to deepen the rift.