

Terrors of Subjectivity:

Melancholia and Revolt in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden*

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Abstract

This thesis shall delve into Ian McEwan's debut novel, *The Cement Garden*, in order to unravel the inherent melancholia of the characters, utilizing the body of theories expounded by Julia Kristeva as the theoretical framework through which this thesis shall be approached. This thesis shall study the concepts of melancholia, alienation, asymbolia, matricide and literary creation. What is aimed is to use Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories to elucidate the reasons behind characters' melancholia and its subsequent effects such as asymbolia and impossibility of love for the melancholic subject. Initially, it shall attempt to shed light on how loss of the mother in infantile stages of development can affect the children's melancholia. Subjects' 'asymbolia' or their inability to use language for communicative purposes will be discussed in relation to their melancholia. Further on, Kristeva's notion of literary creation as the main remedy for melancholia will be analyzed in Jack's narration and Sue's diary writing. The very possibility of love for the melancholic shall be studied, focusing on whether the subject, as innately melancholic and stripped of the process of desire, is capable of sustaining a marriage bond with another person. The characters' reaction to 'psyche-numbing' mechanisms of contemporary societies will be touched upon through modern society's manipulation of subject's psychic processes which deprive him of the ability to 'desire' and the 'culture of revolt.' Through Kristeva's reformulation of Debord's 'society of the spectacle,' the last section of the thesis investigates the ways through which subjects can redeem themselves from the bounds of melancholia. It sheds light on their revolutionary deeds through Kristeva's notion of 'Intimate Revolt,' which engenders jouissance in once melancholic subject. This research aims to elucidate the fact that the characters' revolt can only bring about transitory jouissance due to the fact that society produces its agents in every direction and limits characters' ability to revolt.

Key Words: Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden*, Melancholia, Alienation, Asymbolia, Literary Creation, Intimate Revolt

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