



Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia (Post-Contemporary Interventions)

Esther Sánchez-Pardo

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Cultures of the Death Drive is a comprehensive guide to the work of pioneering psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882–1960) and to developments in Kleinian theory to date. It is also an analysis and a demonstration of the distinctive usefulness of Klein’s thought for understanding modernist literature and visual art. Esther Sánchez-Pardo examines the issues that the seminal discourses of psychoanalysis and artistic modernism brought to the fore in the early twentieth century and points toward the uses of Kleinian thinking for reconceptualizing the complexities of identity and social relations today.

Sánchez-Pardo argues that the troubled political atmosphere leading to both world wars created a melancholia fueled by “cultures of the death drive” and the related specters of object loss—loss of coherent and autonomous selves, of social orders where stability reigned, of metaphysical guarantees, and, in some cases, loss and fragmentation of empire. This melancholia permeated, and even propelled, modernist artistic discourses. Sánchez-Pardo shows how the work of Melanie Klein, the theorist of melancholia par excellence, uniquely illuminates modernist texts, particularly their representations of gender and sexualities. She offers a number of readings—of works by Virginia Woolf, René Magritte, Lytton Strachey, Djuna Barnes, and Countee Cullen—that reveal the problems melancholia posed for verbal and visual communication and the narrative and rhetorical strategies modernist artists derived to either express or overcome them. In her afterword, Sánchez-Pardo explicates the connections between modernist and contemporary melancholia.

A valuable contribution to psychoanalytic theory, gender and sexuality studies, and the study of representation in literature and the visual arts, *Cultures of the Death Drive* is a necessary resource for those interested in the work of Melanie Klein.

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