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RE-THINKING POLITICS: A STUDY OF IAN MCEWAN'S 'THE INNOCENT'

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine Ian McEwan's novel *The Innocent* (1990) that deals with highly topical current event, the Cold War. In this, the author undercuts the fictionality the work by bringing in characters taken from real life, such as George Blake, a double agent during the Cold War. The setting is highly historicised as well, with the protagonist Leonard occupying a postwar Berlin. The novel deals with a significant moment in history and deconstructs the play of power between two major nationalities, England and the USA. The book uses the Cold War scenario to bring out the suspicion and distrust that gradually on the rise between these two major world powers, focusing more on the mental aspect and the struggle of these populations to maintain hegemonic control over the rest of the world. Again, this is a kind of rewriting of Cold War history. McEwan uses the failure of a communications operation during the war to subtly point out the breakdown of language and meaning in the modern world. This paper analyses the above issues at some length.

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*The Innocent* is written in a mixture of genres, including the espionage thriller, the psychological as well as the historical novel. It follows the conventions of popular fiction combined with the thriller and creates a suspense-riddled plot with an unexpected climax. The basic structure is of the espionage novel:

The Berlin setting; the emphasis on the divided nature of the city; one of the central actions of the novel, the building of a tunnel into East Germany in order to tap Soviet military communications; the cameo appearance of a nonfictional spy (George Blake); the relatively complex plot...all these function as very clear genre-markers (Childs 116).

McEwan also borrows from realism, modernism and postmodernism. However, all this provides only a backdrop to the psychological motif of the novel. The modernist angle is seen from the fragmentariness of the text. Multiple perspectives are shown, from the British point of view as well as the American. Leonard the protagonist emerges from one and becomes initiated into the other. The narrative moves in a linear progression, but also draws attention to its own fictionality. It is self-referential because it combines many genres to highlight the constructedness of the narrative. It also does not let the readers involve themselves in any one plot, thus enabling critical detachment. It presents many narratives of different characters but does not really lead the reader to support any. One then is forced to exercise one's own judgement. The style and content of *The Innocent* further identifies the incompleteness of all narratives and opinions. All the characters

have lack of knowledge in some regard or the other and are shocked or surprised at various points in the plot. Leonard does not know many aspects and Maria also does not realise who he truly is. There is a blend of the realist and the modernist since there is an omniscient narrator with a consistent point of view but the themes are those belonging to the modern world. The narrative moves seamlessly, but truth, language, knowledge, innocence and point of view are constantly questioned and rendered unreliable. What one needs to note is the novel's complete lack of a moral centre. Often in modernist texts, the narrator and protagonist are both disturbing and as Head remarks, "take up a position that is dubious or depraved" (*Cambridge Intro* 258). This is true of all the major characters in this book. In content, it is the most 'poststructuralist' of all his novels. While it is overtly constructed as a linear, straightforward narrative, it is internally chaotic and without a fixed centre. There is also the nexus between the rational and the irrational in all his novels. In most realist texts, the irrational is put on a separate plane and sometimes destroyed. Here, as in most modern novels, both are given equal space and the text discusses the inevitable presence of the irrational in general existence. For instance, as Childs says, "In *The Innocent* the sensible Leonard discovers love, but also discovers the darker sides of emotions- dangerous fantasy, hatred, violence, and brutal murder" (14). Usually described as "morally relativist...Treachery exists in the world of the novel but is not condemned" (Childs 17). Most of the major characters such as Glass, Maria, Leonard and Otto commit some kind of betrayal or crime but nobody is condemned. Thus, Ian McEwan creates morally ambiguous characters with whom one does not know whether to side or not. Even the hero is grey and morally ambivalent, remaining so till the end. There are several innovations with point of view. It is purportedly Leonard who is the protagonist but by the end, he is seen as a mere pawn in the Cold War game. Moreover, his point of view is privileged "but the narrator persistently gives Maria's too" (Childs 114). While it is less self-referential than the other McEwan texts, it still carries within it much experimentation. More than language or structure, it is the content which is self-reflexive. The narrative voice is rendered unreliable throughout and no one possesses complete knowledge, not even the reader. The use of language varies in the text depending on the situation. For instance, style expresses content and feeling just after the scene where Leonard and Maria have killed Otto. According to Childs, "Here sentences are relatively short (at times they are mere phrases) and the vocabulary is largely simple and neutral...Simple and compound sentences predominate, and there is little syntactical complexity" (115). This is intended to keep the focus on the content and the suspense of the moment rather than formal elements, narration or structure. The narrative itself is constantly undermined by subsequent episodes. The moment Leonard is allowed to reach a level of maturity and apologises to Maria in the story, the episode of the murder of Otto and the betrayal of the Berlin tunnel follow. Since the narrative constantly questions its own validity, it is difficult to decide what exactly to believe.

The espionage novel might be fairly common but here, it is blended with a deeply psychological bent. "The fusion of two genres, especially since one of them is essentially formulaic (the espionage novel), surely draws attention to the fictional act. It reminds the reader of the text's status as text, particularly by drawing in elements (those of espionage fiction) that by the late 1980's have almost a clichéd aspect to them" (Childs 118). The array of themes these genres encompass within the text is also of a bewildering variety- that of popular as well as serious fiction, the historical, the bildungsroman, the qualifications of innocence and experience, guilt, crime and punishment. It is also, in some senses, a post war novel. It reflects the chaos and instability of the world after the war. The novel's setting in Berlin and Germany and its "step-by-step lapse into horror immediately call up the question of war-guilt, of the unimaginable (or all too imaginable) atrocities committed by ordinary citizens during the years 1939 to 1945" (Childs 129). It talks about a post war Europe and the fragmented nature of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The fragmentariness is represented by various metaphors. The crucial dismemberment scene is a typical example. It reflects the tortures of concentration camps and the callous attitude of Nazi leaders who, like Leonard, performed their tasks dispassionately. There is also the imagery of the broken post war city as Leonard walks through the streets of Berlin: "Every second or third building had a gutted interior, and was without its roof. Whole structures had collapsed and the rubble lay where it had fallen, with roof beams and rusted guttering poking from the heaps" (*Innocent* 46). There are

also fragmentations within the seemingly unified Operation Gold team. When first introduced to the team, Leonard is informed by his senior, "But do you think the Americans have the first notion of teamwork? They agree on one thing, and then they go their own way. They go behind our backs, they withhold information, they talk down to us like idiots" (*Innocent* 1). Structurally speaking, modernist elements are very much part of the text too. According to Head, there is a "Chinese Box structure to the novel that effectively dissolves its narrative structure" (*Ian McEwan* 96). Not only are many genres blended; it reworks the themes of the realist novel by keeping the structure, but also highlighting "the extraordinary rate of change that has characterised life in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries" (Acheson and Ross 2). It also reflects a modernist sense of the breakdown of language and communication, through the relationship of the couple, Leonard and Maria. The cultural and language divide between them is immense and consequently, the ideology and way of thinking. Unlike other modernist texts, however, there is a sense of hope and regeneration at the end.

The novel carries a strong social, political and historical dimension. The location is Berlin in 1955. Leonard is sent to dig a tunnel into the territory of the German Democratic Republic in order to spy over Russian channels of communication. This is both historically and novelistically significant. Like Stephen in *The Child in Time*, Leonard experiences history first-hand and consequently, so does the reader. There is a highly evocative, historically-specific atmosphere created in the picture of Berlin, full of spies and ruined by the War. As Leonard walks through a war-torn Berlin and experiences first-hand the consequences of war, the city seems full of divides and broken in all possible literal and metaphorical ways. "It provides clear dates to localise its action" (Childs 120). There are mentions of local places such as Ernst-Reuter- Platz station, the workers' uprising of 1953 and the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Precise historical dates are given at many points. All the characters are shown living through history, that is, right in the midst of a city that has been ravaged in the war. Leonard's nightmarish journey near the end of the novel, where he carries around the bag of Otto's body parts to get rid of them is probably symbolic of the Germans as well as the Allies' post war guilt, or 'baggage.' The whole atmosphere is of the Cold War with all its hostilities and intrigues. However, because the setting is where the hero is a spy in the Cold War, it makes the story more about suspense and espionage than history. McEwan privileges both narratives and conflates the personal with the historical. According to Childs, *The Innocent* is, above all, a "brush with history" (120). It is very specifically situated in a historical setting but it also re-thinks history. Childs adds that McEwan and *The Innocent* are concerned with "history as event and process and with history as account" (120). It thus brings out, like the other novels, the unreliability of any account of history. In fact, it has qualities similar to *Atonement* because at the end, it is revealed that what we were reading so far was only a partial account since the main point of focalisation, Leonard, is revealed to have possessed knowledge of only part of the plot. History is further questioned by many other devices. The key moment of the challenge is in the letter written by Maria at the very end. She reveals many of the plot strands, such as her marriage to Glass and the true betrayer of the Berlin tunnel. The fact that Leonard is, after all, not the traitor and that someone else made the revelation before him is a blow indicating that what he has believed all along is not true. The truth he believes in has been dismantled. The Russians already know about the tunnel and thus the seemingly extra knowledge the other characters possessed has been rendered irrelevant. The motif is extremely similar to *Atonement*, that is, when the past is revisited, there is an entirely new interpretation. The text necessitates a re-reading and a retrospective look is enforced in the novel in that "the lived past is not closed, but it is, through continual revisitation and memory, constantly disclosing aspects of contamination and rupture" (Colebrook 46). The idea is that history is constantly re-interpreted and re-thought. Another device used in this respect is the intermingling of the fictional with real-life details. 'Operation Gold' was an actual Cold War spy enterprise which is described here. The figure of George Blake, who was also a real-life double agent, is also mentioned. The novel thus mingles the fictional with the real to question the nature of reality and the validity of a historical account. It also conflates the personal with the political and equates love stories and familial dramas to show that "in the face of the grand evolutionary struggle between life and chaos the wars of nations matter little" (Colebrook 55). There is a deep connection in the novel between personal ethics and state ethics. The descent into manipulation, intrigue and violence by

the protagonist parallels that of the Cold War progression. There are also parallels between Leonard and Maria's relationship and the Cold War struggle with its politics of domination, subjugation, hiding of information, lies and deceit. The metafictional elements in the novel are fairly evident. It is repeatedly claimed that Leonard or any other person can only have a partial account of history. The text calls attention to itself as narrative. For instance, the power relations within Operation Gold between the Americans and the British and the higher and lower employees are complex and layered. According to Childs, the novel is concerned with history-as-narrative and "the power relations within that operation represent a historical process" (123). There is focus on the elements of storytelling and fiction in history. "The matter of the different 'levels' of information and initiation within the warehouse and the tunnel project has to do with story and fiction. Each person at each level is told a story that will keep him satisfied until he finds there is another story and that what he has is partly fiction" (Childs 123). Power structures are examined in the text. In Foucauldian terms, the level of knowledge is dependent on the level of power. Only those in power formulate truth and knowledge. Each person at each level is told a different truth about the operation. Glass tells Leonard:

But the point is this- everybody thinks his clearance is the highest there is, everyone thinks he has the final story. You only hear of a higher level at the moment you're being told about it. There could be a level four here. I don't see how, but I'd only hear about it if I was being initiated...You have level two, but you know there's a level three (*Innocent* 13).

Each person, then, only has a bit of the truth. The problems of giving a true historical account are highlighted. "It seems that finding a true account of events is remarkably difficult" (Childs 124).

The novel presents a virulent critique of Cold War politics. It refuses to take sides and in any case, does not see it as a war between good and evil. It thus re-thinks the general view of history. A method adopted to subtly critique it is through Leonard's loss of innocence and identity because of the intrigues and manipulations of Cold War politics. According to Head:

The resolution to this ideological strait-jacket, and a reassertion of a reinvigorated personal identity, occurs when Leonard betrays (or aims to betray) Operation Gold- the Berlin tunnel designed to tap telephone lines in the Soviet sector- in order to protect himself and Maria. In short, the novel adopts the framework of a spy novel to envisage the collapse of the individual identity that is finally reasserted in such a way as to undermine the basis of Cold War politics (*Ian McEwan* 23).

Another historical theme played out throughout is the opposition between the European and the American ideology. It depicts the loss of Britain as a world power and the "rise of global American cultural dominance" (Childs 76). While England seemingly stands for staid, old-world traditional values, America is seen as an epitome of novelty, liberalism and openness to change. The erstwhile invulnerability of Britain is challenged by an imposing new culture, causing a clash of power systems. The American "energy and force" (Childs 122) is contrasted with the more calm, almost drab nature of the Englishman Leonard. This is indicative of the tremendous American influence in European affairs that was taking place around this decade. This novel thus fits in with the political writing phase of Ian McEwan. It engages with national politics and the collapse of Communism, as well as the corruption and amorality of post-war Britain. It presents a picture of world politics and critiques them. Moreover, all Ian McEwan's novels criticise the savagery and totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a profound and deeply disturbing elucidation of the ramifications and subtle underpinnings of power. The idea of secrecy in the novel ties in with this. Leonard as the protagonist is both in-the-know as well as not. Politics in the novel are not overt but consist of a network of lies, intrigues and undercover activities. Power is thus hidden and in Foucauldian terms, panoptical. It enhances the theme of history as a series of narratives since the creation of truth and validity is, if seen in general terms, highly circumspect. Images of secrecy abound throughout such as "covers and concealment, tunnelling and burrowing, doubles and duplicity, ignorance and revelation" (Childs 76). The imagery of the tunnel resonates throughout and stands for secrecy, surveillance, hiding and deceit. However, by the end it is revealed that the tunnel was not a secret after all and was already known to its targets, the Russians. "Politics take on the structure of the open secret; nothing is truly held apart, and there is no ultimate sense or truth that is contested" (Colebrook 54). The tunnel also

functions as a symbol of an in-between space, a liminal one where Leonard stands at the end of the novel at the crossroads between knowledge and revelation, necessity and choice. It serves as an initiation passage for his movement from innocence and ignorance to experience and knowledge. Further, language is questioned by the modes of secrecy in the novel. It is used to conceal rather than reveal. Communication at various levels of Operation Gold is ambiguous and deceitful. The inadequacy of language is displayed through the thoughts and feelings which are hidden and revealed only later. The ever-changing interpretation of narrative and historical record makes it a site for contesting viewpoints and partial truths. The text brings out "language as a medium of political control" (Wells 57) and there is repeated manipulation of it for the purposes of propaganda. Truth is created and formulated in the text by power structures. Certain information is shared while the other is withheld at both the political level in the novel as well as the romantic or personal one. The re-thinking of history is carried out through other plot strands as well. The final decision of Leonard to betray his country through the revelation of the tunnel shows a privileging of the personal over the political since it is aimed to save both Maria and himself. It also serves as an instrument of undercutting Cold War politics and providing a critique of them. Moreover, it outlines the futility and uselessness of such spying and manipulative operations.

A seminal moment in the plot that needs to be discussed is the dismemberment scene which combines within itself all the historical, political, language and war themes in the novel. It symbolically reflects the fragmentariness of the novel, in the lives of its characters and in the general inhabitants of that historical moment. The incident is a complete overturning of the characters' lives. It brings out the role of the irrational in Ian McEwan's work, where it is evident that he gives it equal space and does not judge. Another of the author's recurring techniques is evolved through this episode- a focus on the randomness of experience and the unpredictability of life. Many of his novels, as has been mentioned before, put characters in a moment of crisis that lays stress on the dilemma and process of resolving it. The dismemberment is an intense, concentrated moment in time that changes everything in the text. It shows how regular, ordinary people can suddenly find themselves in the midst of horror. It functions as a complex allegory for the post war world, and thus has major historical underpinnings and attempts to redress the conventional view of history. The Allies who were seen as the positive side of the war in actuality ended up in dividing the world under the garb of reformation. Leonard and Maria can be seen as representative of the Allies who started out as innocent and well-intentioned, but then committed brutal acts. During the act of dismemberment of Otto's body, Leonard is seen as taking draughts from a gin bottle, showing the extent of detachment and practicality he has reached. The dismemberment of the body itself as an act probably stands for the division of the world in the Cold War as well as the divides between Europe, America and the Russian Soviet Union. Head agrees and remarks, "McEwan makes a gruesome point about the carving up of the global body politic in the Cold war period. However, the personal theme of the loss of innocence predominates" (Ian McEwan 91). After committing the act, when Leonard looks at Otto's body, the scene is described, "What was on the table now was no one at all. It was the field of operations, it was a city far below he had been ordered to destroy" (Innocent 166). The act has been performed with an attitude that this task had to be undertaken as a necessity. This 'duty calls' kind of response possibly echoes the attitude of the Allies who believed it was their duty to collate the fragmented post war world. Near the end of the novel, Leonard describes how he will defend the action in court.

Yes, gentlemen, I plead guilty to the charge as described, I killed, dismembered, lied and betrayed. But what follows are the real conditions, the circumstances which brought me to this, and you will see that I am no different from you, that I am not evil, and that all along I acted only for what I took to be the best [emphasis in the original] (Innocent 201-202).

The terms he uses in the above passage seem to be those that nations use to justify their actions in acts of violence in historical episodes such as the World Wars and the Cold War. According to Acheson and Ross, "the death and dismemberment of a German ex-army sergeant becomes a metaphor for the brutality not only of the Third Reich, but of the Allies, too, exercised against civilian populations" (2).

This scene also identifies the treatment of morality in the text. Otto may have been presented as a drunk and an oafish person who is prone to abuse, but nowhere in the text are strong enough reasons given to kill him. The killing is not condemned but is not shown as justified either. McEwan involves the reader in all senses. The act is described in such graphic detail that the reader is forced to participate in every single moment. In some senses, this scene seems to have been inspired from some of the particularly explicit ones in realist texts, such as the morgue scene in the aforementioned Zola's *Therese Raquin*. There also arises a necessity for the reader to present his/her own view in the judgement of the killing, since the text does not provide any. Further, the act is described as more of an accident than of evildoing, bringing out the ambiguous moralities in the text and the blurring of the ideas of right and wrong. The idea of crime and punishment are both rendered problematic. "They are rather presented as things anyone could find him/herself involved in under the right (or wrong) circumstances" (Childs 17).

This very gripping incident is the moment where all previous assumptions in the text are undermined and the modernist sense of meaninglessness revealed. While it is given in scientific, biological detail, the empiricism is also undercut in the text by the sheer irrationality of the act. It is representative of Leonard's own fragmented identity after his experiences in Berlin. When he mutilates the body and then rinses his mouth in the bathroom, it occurs to him that "The contact with clean water was a reminder of another life" (*Innocent* 169). He has merged with the body metaphorically and cannot see himself as distinct from it. The loss of innocence is now complete and the replacement is not exactly experience, but a far more disturbing change.

The idea of innocence has many resonations in the text, where the title is qualified repeatedly. This is a recurring theme in many of McEwan's texts, including *The Child in Time*, *The Daydreamer* and *Atonement*. All these texts problematise the definition and raise the question of what it actually means. The idea of knowledge in *The Innocent* is deeply troubled and accompanied by problems and baggage. Knowledge acquisition always comes at a price; that is, one has to pay for it through the loss of innocence. A key moment in this transition between both states in the protagonist is his move to Berlin. It plays a significant role in the development of knowledge. He meets his first Americans here and comes face-to-face with another nationality. He moves out of his protected, enclosed British home into a different, cosmopolitan culture. Leonard becomes a part of politics and history since he moves out of his enclosed domain into the public world. His sexual and emotional initiation takes place through his affair with Maria. He is described initially as reserved, timid and the titular 'innocent' of the novel, but his 'affair' with both Maria and Cold War politics leads him to murder, the macabre and the violent.

There is a major difference played out in the text between 'knowing' and 'not knowing.' Leonard does not 'know' many things right till the end of the book. However, the definition of innocence is deeply problematic and seen more along the lines of naivety. Leonard is excessively prone to outside influence because of his lack of knowledge. His innocence translates into immaturity, self-interest and brutality. He is, rather, undeveloped and susceptible to cultural imperialism and is also unable to understand the psychological and emotional complexities of a relationship. He becomes integrated into American culture and the affair with Maria, but proves to be less innocent than either of them. He betrays both; America and Berlin through revealing the secret of the tunnel to the Russians and Maria through physical violence. Innocence in the text is also linked to freedom, since it carries no baggage of prior knowledge. This is particularly appealing to Maria, who is happy with this *tabula rasa* nature of Leonard when she discovers he is a virgin. "Her fear of being physically abused had receded. She would not be obliged to do anything she did not want. She was free, they both were free, to invent their own terms. They could be partners in invention" (*Innocent* 53). Leonard, when first entering the Berlin world, is seen as free to create his own identity. But ironically, the loss of innocence also implies a loss of identity. He loses his sense of self, and whatever made him who he was. He lets go of his cultural antecedents and betrays love even on being initiated into it. He betrays his new identity by revealing the tunnel and even betrays his humanity by committing murder. The transition from innocence to experience, then, is not entirely positive. The novel traces the psychological development of Leonard where his

inexperience at the beginning is completely transformed by the end. The sexual innocence, for instance, transforms from the loss of virginity to an understanding of the complexities of love to fantasies of rape to abusive violent behaviour towards his lover to actual brutal murder and violence. The text questions the definitions of innocence and experience since the experience is not necessarily an improvement on the original. What is 'innocence' really? Leonard is seen as such in the beginning but this would imply that he is "someone with humble expectations, and whose impact on his environment is minimal, benign" (Head, *Ian McEwan* 97). Of course, this is nowhere near true in the text.

In the light of this theme, the novel intersects the private with the public. The loss of innocence parallels the world after the World Wars and the Cold War. The structure of the novel is constructed in such a way that Leonard has to undergo a series of 'tests' to 'prove' his innocence. It is structured like an obstacle course. The novel places innocence in the light of a pre-war world, and the loss of it after having been touched by the war, along the same lines as Leonard's journey. The progress to experience of Leonard follows a smooth but inevitable trajectory. From being awkward, amateur and timid, he starts fantasising about domination. "This time, she [Maria] was his by right of conquest and then, *there was nothing she could do about it*. She did not want to be making love to him, but she had no choice [emphasis in the original]" (*Innocent* 78). He increasingly pushes himself into the male aggressive role. His fantasies and ideas become more violent. "He had fantasies of confrontation that made his heart race. He saw himself in movie style, the peaceable tough guy, hard to provoke, but once unleashed, demonically violent" (118). He soon progresses to the physical manifestation of such ideas. These fantasies are symbolic of the domination of some countries over others. The individual merges with the historical in the text. Childs finds it problematic that Leonard's transition from innocence to experience takes place through violence (85). The American-British paradigm also plays out this theme. In the novel, it can be seen to symbolise the opposition between innocence and experience, between "amateurism [and] professionalism" (Head, *Ian McEwan* 93). Leonard, the Britisher, is seen as mawkish and amateur at the beginning of the novel. Representative of innocence, he does not know what to do in his superior Glass' office. Glass' statement, "This is a war, Leonard, and you're a soldier in it" (*Innocent* 40) receives an awkward, clumsy response from the protagonist. "His heart was a ratchet, with each thud he was wound tight, harder" (40). As the novel progresses, "the distinction between what is innocent or amateur, and what is knowing or professional, becomes acutely problematic" (*Ian McEwan* 93). Significantly and somewhat disturbingly, the loss of innocence in the book is characterised by Leonard's integration into American culture. He gradually begins to enjoy US music, popular culture and food. The mentions of Burger King, Unisex Jeans, Spielcenter, McDonald's and other icons of American culture at the end of the novel (213) reflect how much he has been familiarised with them. He becomes symbolic of Britain being colonised metaphorically by America. Innocence is associated with Britain; and jadedness and knowingness with America, who is adult and capable of manipulation. Additionally, the under confidence of Leonard who goes abroad for the first time reflects the recent under confidence of Britain (Head, *Ian McEwan* 94) and its uncertainty because its seemingly unshakeable power has been destabilised.

There are other qualifications to the word 'innocence' too in the text. Colebrook compares the idea of innocence to the Freudian state of childhood. Leonard replaces the figure of the innocent child who is initiated into adulthood and experience, and in the process explores profound issues of politics and history. Infancy is subjected to the authority of the 'adults' or the Cold War politicians such as Glass and Blake. The link with childhood is also seen through the America-Europe opposition. Earlier, America was seen as the infant because it was new and just-born, while Europe was old, traditional and culturally-rich. In the novel, "America is now closer to being a street-wise and awakened adolescent enlivened by knowledge acquisition. English culture is now presented as being in a position of childlike subjection, puzzlement and seduction in relation to the adult world of post-war America..." (Colebrook 48). The novel thus centres the theme of "infantile subjection to the specific modes of post-war politics and sexuality. The English characters and Englishness in general, occupy a position of unwitting, dull and subjected naivety, while American characters and culture seem to open out to the future, to sexuality and to knowledge" (Colebrook 49). It is a world that has lost its erstwhile innocence

and the text shows the modernist disillusionment with history. Another qualification of the word 'innocence' is in terms of its opposition to the word 'guilty'; in other words, it is linked to the idea of guilt and transgression in the novel. But who is actually the guilty one in the story? Is it Maria, who shares in the crime of killing Otto, uses the innocent Leonard as a tool, who betrays Leonard and who marries Glass? Is it George Blake, who actually reveals the secret of the tunnel? Is it the Russians, who are the overt enemy? Or is it Otto, who is abusive and violent? Is it Leonard himself, who kills Otto and betrays both his lover and his country? Thus, McEwan renders ambiguous the idea of guilt and transgression. Moreover, at the end, there is a positive resolution given to the couple, who have apparently been transgressors. Like most of McEwan's other protagonists, only when Leonard moves beyond the self, accepts the other person's point of view, leaves behind self-interest and places himself in Maria's position is he finally allowed to take a step towards development and maturity

Only now, as he came to name them- shame, desperation, love – could he really claim them for his own and experience them. His love for the woman standing by his door was brought into relief by the word, and sharpened the shame he felt for assaulting her. As he gave it a name, the unhappiness of the past three weeks was clarified. He was enlarged, unburdened. Now that he could name the fog he had been moving through, he was at last visible to himself...He said, after a pause, 'Please forgive me.' (*Innocent* 100).

Berlin proves to be a rite of passage and a trial by fire for Leonard. Innocence, experience, personal growth and history are thus conflated in this novel to explore profound issues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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#### **A Brief bio of Corresponding Author**

**Antara Bhatia** has completed her graduation, post graduation and MPhil from the University of Delhi and PhD from the University of Mumbai. She submitted her thesis in 2015. Her specialisation throughout has been in Literature and Visual Art, particularly modern Indian art. She has taught as Assistant Professor at the University of Delhi for more than 6 years and also simultaneously run an editing and proofreading website for Indian and international documents. The following is a paper she has written on the author Ian McEwan 's novel *The Innocent*.