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**BEYOND THE IDEALISED MATERNAL BOND:  
REDEFINING THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER  
RELATIONSHIP IN *THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF  
LEENANE* AND *THE LAMBS OF LONDON***

**İDEALİZE EDİLMİŞ ANNE-KIZ BAĞINDAN  
ÖTE: ANNE-KIZ İLİŞKİSİNİ *THE BEAUTY  
QUEEN OF LEENANE* VE *THE LAMBS OF  
LONDON* ESERLERİNDE YENİDEN  
TANIMLAMAK**

**ABSTRACT**

Julia Kristeva asserts that maternal bond plays a significant role in the formation of an individual's subjectivity. She claims that when the child gets separated from the mother to form its own identity, it goes through the process of abjection. As a result of this separation from the (m)other, all human desires, fears, insecurities, and sense of creativity associated with the semiotic aspect of language come to the fore. Kristeva relates the semiotic part to the unconscious, while the symbolic is all about properly representing objects, logic, and order through language. Thus, the symbolic realm functions to balance our desires, drives, and feelings and helps the subject to express its drives through language, yet in a filtered way according to the laws of the father and society. However, if the child cannot enter the symbolic order; or cannot liberate itself from the mother, it may have inner and mental struggles. Even though years pass, the remnants in the psyche continue to disturb the individual. In this respect, this study will reflect the condition of two daughters portrayed in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and *The Lambs of London* who are still in the process of abjection and incapable of entering the symbolic order.

**Keywords:** subjectivity, semiotic, abjection, Kristeva, motherhood

**ÖZET**

Julia Kristeva, bireyin öznelliğinin oluşumunda annelik bağının önemli bir rol oynadığını ileri sürer. Çocuğun kendi kimliğini oluşturmak için annesinden ayrıldığında, iğrenme sürecinden geçtiğini iddia eder. Anneden ayrılığın bir sonucu olarak, dilin göstergebilimsel yönü ile ilişkili tüm insan arzuları, korkuları, güvensizlikleri ve yaratıcılık duygusu ön plana çıkmaktadır. Kristeva semiyotik kısmı bilinçdışıyla ilişkilendirirken, sembolik kısım tamamen nesnelerin, mantığın ve düzenin dil aracılığıyla uygun şekilde temsil edilmesiyle ilgilidir. Böylece sembolik alan, arzularımızı, dürtülerimizi ve duygularımızı dengeleme işlevi görür ve öznenin dürtülerini dil aracılığıyla babanın ve toplumun yasalarına göre filtrelenmiş bir şekilde ifade etmesine yardımcı olur. Ancak çocuk sembolik düzene giremezse; ya da anneden kurtulamazsa içsel ve zihinsel mücadeleler yaşayabilir. Yıllar geçse de ruhundaki kalıntılar bireyi rahatsız etmeye devam eder. Bu bakımdan bu çalışma, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* ve *The Lambs of London* adlı eserlerde canlandırılan, hâlâ iğrenme sürecinde olan ve simgesel düzene giremeyen iki kız çocuğunun durumunu yansıtmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** öznellik, semiyotik, iğrençlik, Kristeva, annelik

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## Introduction

The pure unity between a mother and a daughter might not always be so simple to interpret as it is actually a fragile connection. While there can be a perfectly healthy mother-daughter relationship, the issue of matricide is also present. To understand the motivation behind this dreadful act, it is better to grasp the effects of both encouraging and constraining maternal bond. In this respect, Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of the subject based on motherhood might be highly enlightening.

As a philosopher and psychoanalyst, Kristeva claims that the bond between a mother and a daughter is more than just an interaction of love and compassion, and that it has a huge impact on the daughter's subjectivity. Therefore, she contemplates the maternal bond, particularly focusing on the phase where the child makes the distinction between herself and the mother. Kristeva underscores that this separation is necessary for the child to gain her own subjectivity.

To explain the notion of "subject", Kristeva refers to Lacan's ideas on the developmental stages of life. Lacan claims that the human psyche goes through three stages: the "real", the "imaginary", and the "symbolic". *The Real* order consists of pre-linguistic desires and feelings that are not influenced by language. In this phase, the child and the mother are inseparable; thus, the child feels complete wholeness. In *the imaginary stage*, aka 'mirror stage', "the child gains a first apprehension of self by seeing his figure in the mirror, which provides the optical illusion of an autonomous subject" (Leckrone, 2005, p. 26) and realizes that it is actually a separate being from the mother, which causes the child to make the distinction between 'self' and 'the other'. In *the symbolic stage*, the child is exposed to the language and the "law of the father" who is the source of authority. As a result of facing the social norms and rules of the father, the child begins forming its identity and individuality to secure its position in the family and society.

Nevertheless, Kristeva claims that rather than the role of the father, maternal role is far more influential in the psychological development of the child. In order to clarify her argument, Kristeva creates three concepts: *semiotic*, *chora*, and *abject*. She claims that when the child falls into language in the symbolic order, the pre-linguistic desires and emotions are not left behind. Instead, these primal feelings continue to exist in an anarchical dimension called "the semiotic". Therefore, Kristeva asserts the process of growth consists of two modes of signification: the ordered "symbolic" and the chaotic "semiotic". According to Kristeva while the symbol is associated with masculinity, the semiotic belongs to femininity and maternity. She finds this semiotic extent highly encouraging and suggests that the semiotic and the symbolic are interconnected; hence, the signification happens as a result of the interaction between the two. Basically, what Kristeva claims is that "the subject is both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic" (Kristeva, 1941, p. 24). Accordingly, she describes the pre-linguistic, formless, and fluid realm with the term *chora* belonging to the pre-symbolic space. She suggests that *chora* is associated with creativity and competence existing beyond the limits of language. She claims that even though *chora* is highly important for the child's early development, it becomes repressed with the entrance into the symbolic realm. Furthermore, Kristeva argues that before the child establishes any form of signification, it must experience the 'loss' of the mother, of whom it has been an integral part of becoming a subject. Kristeva calls this first psychological separation from the maternal object "abjection", which involves the intense rejection of the abject. In other words, "for the self and the object to be represented, the mother

must be lost, separated from” (Widasky, 2014, p. 63). Basically, abjection encompasses not only the physical attempt of the child to release itself from the overwhelming maternal bond between the mother and the child and the psychological separation which brings excitement and fear.

Kristeva explains that the first separation actually begins at birth when the two biologically connected beings become physically dissociated. This creates anxiety for both the mother and the child; therefore, she claims that since all human beings go through the process of birth all psyches actually carry the traces of this separation. Later on, in one’s life, this sense of abjection re-emerges. Kristeva uses the term *narcissistic depression* to refer to the wound coming from within. People suffering from this kind of depression consider themselves flawed or not “good enough”. The only feeling familiar to them is sadness which results from a hole inside. Therefore, the person clings to that one and only empty feeling.

Kristeva particularly associates narcissistic depression with motherhood. She claims that motherhood brings ambivalence regarding the love for the child and loss of the pre-maternal self. Accordingly, the mother experiences a huge psychological change which may result in depression. While lamenting for the lost pre-maternal condition, the mother endeavours to find a place for her maternal identity in the symbolic order as well. Consequently, Kristeva asserts that mothers suffering from narcissistic depression may demonstrate excessive maternal role, which actually leads to the abjection. Namely;

*Kristeva develops the concept of the abject to describe and account for temporal and spatial disruptions within the life of the subject and in particular those moments when the subject experiences a frightening loss of distinction between themselves and objects/others. The abject describes those forces, practices and things which are opposed to and unsettle the conscious ego, the ‘I’.* (Tyler, 2009, p. 79)

Accordingly, the abject is described by the utmost dependency of the child to the mother and maternal body during infancy, obsessive mothers prevent their children from becoming autonomous subjects.

In this respect, this paper will have a closer look at the mother-daughter relationship in the play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996) by Martin McDonagh and the novel *The Lambs of London* (2004) by Peter Ackroyd in order to reflect the flexibility, validity, and adaptability of Kristeva’s assertion that maternal bond is highly significant in the formation of the daughter’s subjectivity, which reflects and strengthens the fact that what Kristeva puts forward is clearly applicable in different mediums.

### **Examining the Daughters Who Defy In order to Form Their Own Subjectivity**

*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, written in 1996, depicts the dysfunctional bond between a mother and daughter, Mag and Maureen Folan. Set in an isolated village in Ireland, the play takes place in a claustrophobic house where the two women torture each other physically and psychologically. Mag Folan, in her 70s, is physically handicapped in her left-hand and mentally deranged. On the other hand, Maureen Folan, a virgin in her 40s, is a frustrated woman constantly manipulated by her mother. Even though Mag has two other daughters who are married, she completely depends on Maureen’s care. Maureen’s only desire is to get away from this house and her mother. At this point, she gets a chance of escape with the coming of her former neighbour, Pato Dooley. Nevertheless, his coming causes several conflicts between the mother and daughter

because Mag prevents Maureen starting a relationship with Pato. The fear of losing her only carer makes Mag so selfish that she cruelly manages to interfere and sabotages Maureen's future. As a result of all the cruel deeds of Mag, Maureen does atrocious things leading to the tragic outcome of killing her own mother. Having led a life full of restrictions and responsibilities, Maureen violently commits matricide to unleash herself from the situation she has been trapped for so long. In this respect, it can be suggested that McDonagh "shatters the idea of the idyllic home and family and offers a horrific portrait of the dysfunctional and destructive relationship between Mag and Maureen" (Russel, 2007, p. 57). Thus, it is not possible to see a caring mother and a loving daughter in this play. Instead, what is depicted is a relationship based on violence, humiliation, torture, and hatred.

On the other hand, *The Lambs of London*, written in 2004, is an intriguing novel focusing on the themes of love, family, passion, deceit, and literature. Set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century London, the novel portrays the lives of two families, the Lambs, and the Irelands. The main characters are the siblings Mary and Charles Lamb, and an ordinary boy working in his father's bookstore William Ireland. Mary and Charles live together with their parents, but while Charles is an educated and working man, Mary led a relatively domestic life filled with responsibilities towards her family. Besides taking care of the family members, "in the little leisure time she had, instead of her beloved reading, she did needlework and took up the trade of mantua making in order to augment the family income" (Chalupsky, 2012, p. 187). Her only joy in life is discussing and reading Shakespeare with her brother. As a result of all the stress and burden, she suffered from mental breakdowns and during one of her fits of madness, she stabbed her mother through the heart and killed her. When this tragic incident happened, there were other people in the room as well, yet Mary Lamb chose to kill the person who had brought her to life. The novel is actually based on the historical events related to the Lamb family and the famous Shakespeare fraud William Ireland. Even though Ackroyd changed the course of the events a bit, the tragic ending based on matricide by Mary Lamb is clearly exposed.

Written in different centuries, both the novel and the play share common points regarding the issue of matricide. Accordingly, not only Mag in *Beauty Queen* but also Mrs. Lamb in *The Lambs of London* can be considered to be suffering from narcissistic depression since they do not give their daughters enough freedom and autonomy. In the case of Mary Lamb, she does not feel any compassion towards her mother; "Mary did not like her mother very much. She was a prying and inquisitive woman, or so Mary thought; her mother's watchfulness seemed to be a form of hostility. It never occurred to Mary that it was a form of fear" (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 6). Basically, when her mother is around, Mary cannot live her childhood because of her strictness and over-control. Mrs. Lamb constantly gives orders to Mary to do various house chores which prevents Mary from following her own desires; "It was as if she were performing a form of sacrifice – but to what strange god? Could it be the god of childhood?" (2005, p. 8). Mrs. Lamb interferes with everything in Mary's life, her behaviours, and her decisions. She even spies on Mary behind the windows while she talks to William Ireland.

Similarly, throughout *The Beauty Queen*, the ongoing conflict between the self-centred mother, Mag, and her neurotic daughter, Maureen is dominant. The mother is obviously suffering from a narcissistic disorder which causes her to feel that Maureen is an extension of herself; "she is like a child: her comfort and very survival depend on Maureen's continuous care and she is

prepared to betray her daughter to maintain this ruthless routine” (Russel, 2007, p. 49). Therefore, Maureen’s every attempt to gain her own subjectivity fails; they become trapped in a devastating loop of abuse. Mag expects Maureen to do all the work and take care of herself. What Mag does is sitting on her rocking chair and listening to the radio. As a result of her demanding attitude, Maureen shows no mercy towards her mother, which makes Mag to be afraid of her. Maureen’s sense of imprisonment gradually increases because she thinks Mag has always been the reason for her alienation and spinsterhood. Mag is so dominant that when Maureen’s old friend Pato comes to Leenane, she does everything to prevent them from getting closer.

Kristeva thinks that such an overprotective mother is trying to protect her daughter from feeling the pain while she separates from her without experiencing the phase of abject. However, this act of protection creates a barrier for the daughter as she cannot initiate her own subjectivity. Hence, there appears to be a conflict between the mother and the daughter, who desperately wishes to get rid of her mother’s control. Such antagonist mothers, with their excessive attitude, suffocate their daughters leaving long-lasting scars on their psyche. Like Mary Lamb and Maureen, an excessively controlled child is not able to shape their own independence or subjectivity. In that sense, having failed to form a boundary between the “self” and the “(m)other”, the child experiences psychological discomfort. Kristeva underscores the importance of the act of being separated from the mother;

*Abjection what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be-maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out.* (Kristeva, 1982, p. 10)

At this point, the notion of abjection portrays the possible psychological defects that the child may experience because of the incompetency in setting the boundary between the self and others.

Kristeva considers abjection as the first act of revolt against the mother. Besides, females find it difficult to have access to the symbolic order of language and the male authority. She claims that “if language, like culture, sets up a separation and, starting with discrete elements, concatenates an order, it does so precisely by repressing maternal authority” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 72). Consequently, female children experience a more intense connection to the semiotic and the chora, “the mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*” (Kristeva, 1941, p. 27). In other words, the maternal body being the object of pre-oedipal language acts as an intermediary between the developing individual as a subject and the symbolic realm. That is why, the maternal body is considered to be repulsive because unless a child successfully dissociates itself from the mother, it cannot move onto the symbolic order.

In that sense, both Mary and Maureen find it difficult to run away from their mothers because they are still in the process of abjection in order to gain subjectivity. Since, “the abject is related to the evolution of the psyche and the socialisation of an individual” (Alarcos, 2010, p.30), they cannot form their sense of self, marking wounds in their psyche. Kristeva utters that the fear of being controlled by the mother who validates this desire with the maternal instinct of protection is associated with the notion of abjection, so the daughter wishes to abject the mother experiencing this narcissistic drive physically and emotionally. Therefore, the maternal body portraying the

feminine body in its most disturbing form becomes the abject that threatens the daughter's individuality and independence. They cannot develop a healthy self during their lives because they are still connected to their mothers in the psyche, not being able to pass on the symbolic order successfully.

Maureen hates her mother so much that she has a disturbing dream, "I have a dream sometimes there of you, dresses all nice and white, in your coffin there, and me all in black looking in on you" (McDonagh, 1996, p. 20-21). Seeing her mother dead is what Maureen wants from the very beginning of the play. She even daydreams about killing her mother. Due to "Mag's constant viciousness and hostility towards her daughter" (Golban, 2022, p. 197), it is not so unexpected that the issue of matricide has always been in Maureen's mind.

Moreover, "Mag uses food as a means to keep her daughter 'tied' to the kitchen sink" (Morrison, 2010: 114). However, Maureen feeds her mother with certain kinds of tasteless food her mother hates to torture her. She either prevents Mag from eating when she feels hungry or overfeeds her when she does not want to. Similar to Maureen, in *The Lambs of London* Mary holds hatred towards her mother as well and she is often in conflict with her; "This is not a house of correction, Mother. We are not your prisoners" (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 123). Basically, Mary feels that she is already dead lying in the family grave as she is fed up with "the role of the dutiful daughter who rarely goes out into the city unaccompanied and remains for most of her time closed in the household ... in the uninspiring company of her scornful and narrow-minded mother" (Chalupsky, 2012, p. 183). In such an environment, which she cannot escape from, Mary feels depressed and fragmented.

Kristeva claims that the child must identify with an "imaginary father" to leave the maternal bond behind without any harm. The presence of a third party helps the child channel the feeling of love from the mother to another being; in other words;

*The child can serve its mother as token of her own' authentication; there is, however, hardly any reason for her to serve as go-between for it to become autonomous and authentic in its turn. In such close combat, the symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject, the more so if it happens to be endowed with a robust supply of drive energy, in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject. Repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Abjecting.* (Kristeva, 1982, p. 13).

With the exposure to the law of the father, forming a bond with the father and separation from the mother prevent the child from having incestuous feelings towards their mother. For the child to pass on the symbolic order, it must see the mother as an abject and the representative of the pre-linguistic *chora* and leaves the maternal bond behind. In other words, the subject can fill the emptiness and feeling of loss by loving the imaginary father.

In *Beauty Queen*, there is no reference to Maureen's father. It is as if Mag has raised Maureen on her own. They do not even talk about the father figure, which creates the absence of a third party. On the other hand, in *The Lambs of London*, the father figure exists, but he is a null character who has no authority in the house since he is mentally deranged. The father does not even have a name, he is called Mr. Lamb. Mary is aware of her father's inadequacy and submissive nature as with her mother's orders she herself takes care of him as if he is her child; "He had been Mary's

father, then he became her friend and, finally, her child” (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 5). From time to time, Mary feels pity towards her father, who cannot talk properly and logically or behave like an adult. Apparently, it has not been possible for Maureen and Mary to pass on the symbolic order and abandon the maternal bond due to the absence of a powerful, loving, and caring father figure. They are stuck in the semiotic phase and with the mother.

Mag does not approve of Maureen hanging out or having sexual intercourse. As a virgin, Maureen has only kissed two men, which Mag finds quite excessive;

**Maureen** *I'll tell you, eh? 'Young girls out gallivanting.' I've heard it all now. What have I ever done but kissed two men the past forty year?*

**Mag** *Two men is plenty!*

**Maureen** *Finish!*

**Mag** *I've finished! She holds out the mug.*

**Maureen** *washes it.*

**Mag** *Two men is two men too much!*

**Maureen** *To you, maybe. To you. Not to me.*

**Mag** *Two men too much!*

**Maureen** *Do you think I like being stuck up here with you? Eh? Like a dried up owl ...*

**Mag** *Whore!*

**Maureen** *laughs.* (McDonagh, 1996, p. 20).

Besides, Maureen feels quite miserable for herself because her femininity is not appreciated or acknowledged by men. After Pato's farewell party, Maureen brings him home, and they have some intimacy. The following day, Maureen acts as if they have had intercourse, which makes Mag aggressive. However, it has been revealed towards the end of the play that all is just an illusion, as Pato writes in the letter, “And that night we shared, even if nothing happened, it still makes me happy just to think about it” (1996, p. 41). Basically, she cannot embrace the reproductive responsibilities through sexuality because it is completely avoided by her mother. Mag's aggression and aloofness to sexuality repress the individuality of Maureen. Maureen cannot stand her mother's interfering in her life. When Maureen learns that her mother has destroyed the letter Pato has sent, she gets furious and in a fit of madness she holds her mother's arm and pours hot boiling oil on her to learn what has been written in the letter. Likewise, in the novel since Mary is not familiar with the outside world as much as her brother, she does not have many friends. Therefore, when she meets William Ireland, she falls in love with him. However, whenever Williams comes to their house, Mrs Lamb constantly keeps her eyes on them trying not to let them get too close. However, Mary's feelings for William are unrequited. While William and Mary are wandering in London, William utters that he knows there is nothing between them, upon which Mary feels quite disappointed “She was subdued, perhaps, by his open acknowledgement that there was ‘nothing’ attached to their friendship” (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 115). Throughout the novel, William is the only person Mary feels for, yet he does not feel in the same way.



Namely, Maureen desperately tries to find a partner to leave the house to form her own subjectivity, separate from her mother. Similarly, in the novel Mary tries to find the hope in having a life other than the one attached to her mother in William. Both Maureen and Mary are struggling to find their own identity through other male figures. However, both Mag and Mrs Lamb set restrictions and constantly control and observe their daughters as they do not want them to have their own lives. This clearly shows that the daughters and mothers are still connected to each other on the unconscious level. Since the daughters do not have a male role model to look up to, they still define themselves in relation to the mother, which affects them in the most extreme way. Both Mag and Maureen become the exact image of their mothers from whom they try to distinguish themselves so hopelessly. Regretfully, this unbreakable attachment leaves unrepairable wounds in their psyche. Towards the end of the novel, because of her unsettled behaviour, Charles resembles Mary to Ophelia, a female character in *Hamlet* who goes mad and commits suicide;

*Mary's fits of temper, and her evident unease, had become more pronounced in recent weeks. But Charles had explained this to himself as the strain of their father's advancing senility. He knew that she was protective of Ireland—and even regarded him with affection—but secretly to love him? “So she is Ophelia,” he said. “Wasting.”*

*“Why must you see everything as drama, Charles? Mary is not a character in a play. She is suffering.”* (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 183)

This reference to Ophelia, who drowns herself in the river, is a signal of Mary's unhealthy state of mind. Her resemblance to Ophelia is even heightened in the scene where she falls into the Thames and almost drowns. While Mary walks by the river with William, she hears a mother and daughter having an argument, which makes her tremble violently. Upon witnessing the mother hitting the daughter repeatedly, Mary has a fit of hysteria and faints and ends up in the river. After William takes her out of the water, Mary vomits. This scene is quite significant to reveal what is going on in Mary's “oversensitive and unstable psyche” (Chalupsky, 2012, p. 182). The sounds of a mother and daughter having a row reminds of her own struggle with the mother in her subconscious, which is why she cannot act properly and falls into the water. The comparison of frail-minded Mary and Ophelia, who is suicidally insane in a way, foreshadows the tragedy Mary is going to experience. The reader might think that she will also kill herself like Ophelia. Nevertheless, instead, she kills her mother who causes all the unrest in her mind.

Kristeva describes *chora* as the pre-linguistic and pre-symbolic realm which is associated with the semiotic aspect of signification preceding symbolic language. Therefore, *chora* is associated with the maternal realm, where instincts and emotions play a greater role, challenging the ordered space of the symbolic aspect of language. Besides, Kristeva claims that it is possible for the semiotic to disrupt the symbolic realm with non-verbal actions such as laughs, cries, sounds, touches, or gestures which symbolize the pre-symbolic aspect of signification. They refer to the symbiotic bond between mother and child creating the space of *semiotic chora*.

In this respect, it can be claimed that Maureen is still in the *semiotic chora* which is governed by “bodily interdependence, shared smiles, crying, and the abstract rhythms, sounds, and touches of the symbiotic mother-child interaction set up and intimate a space, without interior or exterior” (Leckrone, 2005, p. 28). This is reflected by the dysfunctional communication between Mag and Maureen. This might prove that they cannot enter the symbolic order governed by the rules of

language; when they are together in the house, the radio is always on, and when she leaves home, she switches it off. Therefore, most of the time, it is possible to hear music or other people talking. Namely, they cannot communicate through verbal utterance but non-verbal drives and affects. Whenever they try to communicate, it is a non-verbal communication which is mostly through violence in the presence of music. After Maureen comes from shopping, Mag immediately continues to give orders, which makes Maureen aggressive. That is why, instead of talking, she expresses her emotions by banging the doors of the cupboards, aggressive body gestures etc. Basically, since Maureen is still attached to her mother and in the process of abjection, the house they live in can be taken as the realm of semiotic *chora* where both women act according to their affects and where the laws of language cannot be fully applied.

Similarly, Mary is still under the influence of the mother, and “although Mary had lived in London all her life, she was unclear about any area beyond her immediate neighbourhood” (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 114). Therefore, the house she lives in can be taken as a representation of *semiotic chora* because she cannot adapt to the symbolic order and her only escape is literature. She “only lives through her independent reading and studying” (Chalupsky, 2012, p. 183). She even acts the plays she reads. She is full of potential, and this is the way she expresses herself and feels her own individuality. Moreover, Mary also plays the piano, and draws. Apparently, since Mary feels like she is in a prison at home, she takes refuge in art and literature. At this point, Kristeva claims that one way for females to abject their mother is forming “a defence against the mother” (Oliver, 1991, p. 50) which can be through politics, art, literature, science etc. In Mary's case, she feels safer dealing with all these materials. She even helps her brother and his friends by directing a play by Shakespeare. Mary feels quite happy when she deals with anything related to art and literature “It was a refuge from her misery. To dwell in another time—if only for a moment—offered her proof that she need not be confined or constricted” (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 81). Nevertheless, since Mary cannot verbalize her inner suffering, her body does through cries, sleepwalking and headaches.

Kristeva claims the child establishes an “impossible mourning for the maternal object” (Kristeva, 1987, p. 9). Behind the depression and mourning, there is also anger towards the lost object, which Kristeva calls “the thing” because it is not signified because it is not a real object of desire. Thus, she claims one way to overcome depression is by conveying emotions through non-verbal approaches such as music, dance, art etc. In this way, individuals can form meaning which may help them heal by finding meaning in language. In the case of Maureen and Mary, what a daughter can do to free herself from the control of the mother is cutting the relation and attachment with her and establishing her own identity. However, in this case, the daughter is still in the process of abjection, where the boundary between self and the (m)other is blurry. The overprotective mother's control and love might seem to be “devouring” for the daughter; therefore, they both choose to abject the mother in the most extreme way.

As Kristeva mentions, to form its own being and identity, the baby needs to abandon or abject the mother and her body becomes the biggest abject. That way, the baby can create the distinction and the border between self and the (m)other. In a way, the abject provides the child with boundaries. Kristeva explains the notion of abjection with the example of facing a corpse. When an individual sees a dead body, they realize the vulnerability of their lives;

*The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.* (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4)

In a way, the abject corpse reminds one of the things beyond their borders. Abjection is the rejection of something that is unbearable but still has to be endured.

In that sense, the house of Mag and Maureen most of the time “does smell of pee” (McDonagh, 1996, p. 46) because of Mag’s urine infection. When their guests asks about the smell, Mag lies and blames the stray cats for polluting the house. However, it is actually herself pouring her urine in the kitchen sink. According to Kristeva, abjection is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Apparently, instead of a joyful and healthy image of a mother, Mag is portrayed as an abject element of shame and disgust. Similarly, in *The Lambs of London* when they are eating something as a family, a piece of potato sticks in Mary’s throat. Her mother roses to help, yet Mary waves her away. She cannot stand her mother even touching her to save her life. Obviously, her body reacts because she is in the process of abjection.

In *The Beauty Queen*, no matter how hard Maureen tries to get away from her mother’s hegemony, she fails. One time, Maureen goes to England to work, but she cannot understand the people there, which leads her to have a psychological breakdown. Basically, she found it hard to leave her mother’s influence behind. As a result, this prevents her from forming her own identity and sense of self. She cannot save herself from this vicious cycle and she comes back home, to her mother. On the surface, Maureen could not handle the difficulties of being Irish in England. She stayed in a mental hospital for a while and then she was released from the hospital. When she left the hospital, she felt alienated in England. She could not even communicate with people and have healthy relationships with them. Thus, she collapses psychologically and mentally only to return to her mother. This incident clearly shows that Maureen’s subjectivity is mentally unstable. She can only be with her mother. She is under the control of her mother so much that she cannot acquire a distinct individuality. In a similar way, Mary lives in a house that she feels she must get rid of. She even tells this urge in one of her conversations with Charles. She tells him that she “must get out this house” (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 78). When Charles asks why, she answers him by saying “Can’t you see? It’s killing me” (2005, p. 78). She cannot even stand family dinners, which causes weariness. Namely, the house does not make Mary feel at home because she feels alienated and dying here. She can neither live healthy in the family house nor leave the house.

It can be suggested that Mag and Maureen, in their psyches, are devoid of any separation from their mothers, which prevents them from becoming healthy individuals and having a healthy space in the symbolic order. This ambiguous condition disturbs them so badly that eventually, they kill their mothers. After hitting her mother’s head with the poker, Maureen cannot immediately leave the house. She sits on the rocking chair, and acts like her mother because, subconsciously, she is still attached to her. The fact that Maureen shows some of her mother’s behaviour such as forgetting names, giving orders to Ray, listening to the radio, staring into space without doing anything reveals Maureen’s luminal place between sanity and madness, between becoming her mother and forming her own identity. Ray witnesses this behaviour of Maureen in the house and says, “The exact fucking image of your mother you are, sitting there pegging orders and forgetting

my name!” (McDonagh, 1996, p. 65). Apparently, even after physically killing her mother, Maureen cannot entirely break away from her mother and her abject status. Obviously, “Maureen’s revenge in killing her mother will not liberate her from her mother’s haunting ghost” (Pena, 2022, p. 288).

Likewise, towards the end of the novel, before killing her mother, Mary starts acting like her mother; “‘Where is that tea, I wonder? It is so like Tizzy. She is always in a muddle. I wonder that you put up with her, Pa.’ Mr. Lamb continued rocking backward and forward” (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 168). Mary is so attached to her mother in her psyche that she kills her mother by cutting her throat with a fork. Mary did this upon learning that William was actually a fraud. The disappointment and dazzlement led Mary kill her mother at the dinner table. Therefore, it can be suggested that the reason for her madness might be the loss of the only opportunity for her to break free from the mother. Since Mary is revealed to have an unhealthy mind, “I am discharged from life.... after valiant service” (Ackroyd, 2005, p. 204), after killing her mother, she stayed in a mental hospital for a while, then depending upon the responsibility of Charles, she was released from the institution. It is as if Mary has gained her freedom, yet, she continues to have some mental problems. So, even though Mary kills her mother physically, she cannot get rid of the unsettling feeling in her mind because she cannot separate herself from the mother, just like Maureen.

## Conclusion

Considering the information mentioned above, it can be suggested that Kristeva’s “semiotic element of language is also associated with the maternal” (Oliver, 1993, p. 96) and it is characterized by pre-linguistic desires, affects, and urges. She further claims that for a child to form a healthy identity and subjectivity, they need to get separated from the mother so that they can enter the symbolic order, dominated by social norms and patriarchal rules. As Kristeva suggests the transition from semiotic order to symbolic order is not only a one of the steps in the process of development, but also a crucial step shaping one’s mental and psychological health.

Kristeva “grants the maternal a central and formative role within her theory of subjectivity” (Tyler, 2009, p. 81) and asserts that the initial separation from the maternal bond begins at birth when formerly biologically connected the child and the mother become physically apart, causing anxiety for both individuals. Since every individual experience this separation at birth, they all bear the traces of this separation, which later re-emerges. At this point, Kristeva uses the term “narcissistic depression” to describe this inner wound. Moreover, she relates narcissistic depression to motherhood. As mothers mourn the loss of their pre-maternal self, they struggle to form their maternal identity in the symbolic order, which may lead them to overemphasize their maternal role. This results in the child’s extreme dependence on the mother during infancy, preventing obsessive mothers from allowing their children to become autonomous individuals.

Accordingly, the failure of Mary and Maureen to fully break themselves free from the semiotic at the subconscious level leads them to entangle with pre-linguistic impulses that obstruct their full assimilation into the symbolic order. This flaw in their psycho-sexual development manifests itself in the act of matricide as a tragic resolution to their internal conflicts. In other words, Mary and Maureen’s foul highlights the psychological conflict caused by the lack of a healthy separation from the maternal, which leads to a fragmented identity that oscillates between the pull of unconscious desires and the push of conscious obligations. The two characters’ inability to find a balance between these opposing forces results in an existential crisis that culminates in

the drastic act of killing their mothers. This reflects their desperate and destructive attempt to resolve the unsurmountable tension between the semiotic and the symbolic. In this respect, this analysis, based on the formation of one's subjectivity during infancy through the mother-daughter bond, emphasizes the complicated psychological development and offers a relevant commentary on the ongoing influence of maternal bond on one's creation of subjectivity.

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