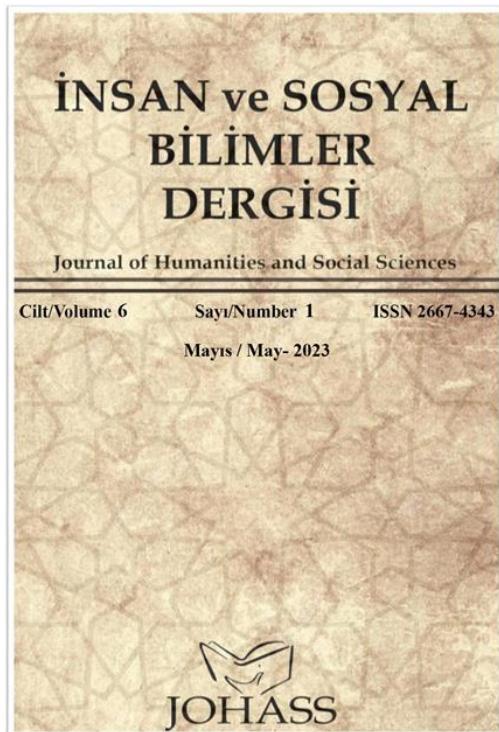


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The Maternal Body and Reproductive Imagery in Milton: A Kristevan Analysis of the Birth and Womb Images in Paradise Lost

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The Maternal Body and Reproductive Imagery in Milton: A Kristevan Analysis of the Birth and Womb Images in *Paradise Lost*

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Abstract

Research Article

This article analyses Milton's reproductive imagery and the images of birth and womb in *Paradise Lost* by deploying Kristevan concepts such as the semiotic chora and the abject. This study draws parallels between the Miltonic dialectic of creation and destruction and the Kristevan dialectic of the semiotic and the symbolic. Hence, it argues that the nativity of Eve and the creation of the universe embody the semiotic chora, while the allegory of Sin and Death, and the description of Chaos represent the abject maternal body. On one hand, positive reproductive images are utilised in the description of the birth of Eve and the creation of the universe. This evokes the impulse to retreat into the semiotic chora, a realm of sheer fullness and opulence, where there is no clear division between self and other. The longing for this realm, this paper claims, corresponds to the fallen human beings' desire to regress into heavenly oneness. On the other hand, negative images of birth and womb are employed in the accounts of the Chaos and the allegory of Sin and Death. This represents, this article asserts, fear and revulsion that one feels because of reverting into the giant nocturnal uterus, where identities are annihilated and boundaries are shattered as the engulfing and choking womb deforms all distinct forms, shapes, and distinctly defined identities. This dialectical oscillation between a yearning to relapse into the semiotic chora and a deep anxiety over losing one's autonomy in the devouring womb characterise *Paradise Lost*.

Keywords: Milton, *Paradise Lost*, kristeva, the semiotic, the abject

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Introduction

Milton's *Paradise Lost* revisits the biblical account of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the disgraced angel Satan and their banishment from the Garden of Eden. Milton's complex epic has puzzled generations of readers and literary critics. Some have seen it as a Christian tale that champions submission and redemption, while others have regarded it as a revolutionary poem that celebrates Satan's energy and defiance. What these various interpretations have in common is the materiality of Milton and his corporeal language that intermingles the spirit and the body. This critical focus on Milton's materiality leads one to concentrate on the concreteness of the maternal body and the physical images of birth and womb in his epic. The maternal body and the related images of birth and womb mark *Paradise Lost*, which is an endeavour to write "*Scripture as an epic poem*" (Stevens, 2014, p. 95) in order to "*justify the ways of God to men*" (I. 26). The dialectic of creation and destruction, fall and redemption, allegiance and disobedience, corruption and regeneration, liberty and tyranny pervades *Paradise Lost*, designed as "a Genesis tragedy as the foundation of a great biblical event" (Fallon, 2014, p. 5). This paper argues that this Miltonic dialectic dovetails with the Kristevan dialectical interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic emerges in the positive side of this Miltonic dialectic, whilst the abject appears in the negative side. This study explores the nativity of Eve and the creation of the universe as the two accounts, in which the semiotic is discharged into the symbolic. In contrast, the abject maternal body, this article asserts, lurks in the allegory of Sin and Death, and the description of Chaos. A yearning to relapse into the maternal semiotic and a fear of losing one's subjectivity and thus of being annihilated in the devouring uterus are essential to this reading of *Paradise Lost*.

Method

As for the methodology employed in the writing of this paper, the practice of close reading is utilised, and the Kristevan theory is applied to the analytical interpretation of images of reproduction and evocations of human birth. These images are closely read and carefully interpreted; this methodology pays close attention to the minute aspects of poetic language and the particularities of theoretical approach. Therefore, it dwells upon the nuances of language, individual words, their etymological suggestiveness, the disruption of the syntax and the unfolding of the lines in addition to demonstrating how Miltonic images manifest the Kristevan notions of the semiotic and the abject.

The technique of close reading and the meticulous attentiveness to the workings of language help one to examine the images of reproduction and evocations of human birth that are fundamental to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "*a poem that imagines the beginnings of all things*" (Kilgour, 2014, p. 57). Since beginnings are definitely related to reproduction and birth, analysing the maternal body and its chain of associations within a Kristevan framework might prove fruitful to help understand Milton's conception and representation of the maternal body. This paper expounds Milton's interest in the maternal body by means of utilising Kristeva's notions of the semiotic and the abject. Milton's employment of reproductive imagery and womb-like symbolism resonates with Kristeva's approach to the maternal body in the semiotic. Kristeva posits that signification transfuses the living body (read as the semiotic) into the symbolic language. Milton's deployment of bodily images, whether spiritualised and sublimated or perverted corporeal, points to the transfusion of the living, feeling, breathing and pulsating body into language. Fowler (1998) notes that Milton's universe seems "instinct with life" in every part: "*Like the universe in Plato's Timaeus it is alive: animate throughout, it moves, engages in metabolic exchanges...and exhales,*

transpiring fragrant spirit to God in prayer" (p. 33). In response to this, Schwartz (2009) states that Milton's universe "*also reproduces life; it conceives, gestates, and gives birth*" (p. 246). This description of Milton's universe evokes Kristeva's semiotic *chora*, which she also borrows from Plato's *Timaeus*. The Platonic *chora* has maternal implications and it is translated as womb (*Timaeus*, 2008, p. 42). This junction between Plato, Milton and Kristeva urges one to examine the corporeality of Milton's universe and the substantiality of the maternal body in his universe by deploying Kristeva's notions of the semiotic and the abject that display the significations of the maternal body in the symbolic. Accordingly, Milton's language that abounds in corporeal signification is redolent with the instinctual living body. The living body, whether physically monstrous or ideally nourishing, appears to be distilled into Milton's language. The distorted bodily imagery of womb and birth, creation and destruction is also manifest in the twisted syntax of Milton, "*a deformer of the English language*" (Gardner, 1965, p. 1). Milton's language conceives, gestates, and gives birth. Kermode (1973) speaks of the materiality in Milton, arguing that his "intellectual passions were fervent and strong; but [...] rested upon a basis of preternatural animal sensibility diffused through all the animal passions (or appetites)" (p. 185). Similarly, Milton's intellectual power appears to be predicated on his animal sensibility, which communicates the idea that the living body, as the reservoir of the semiotic, is transfused into his poetic language via his animal sensibility.

Kristevan Theory: The Semiotic, The Abject, The Symbolic

Kristeva contributes to literary studies by dint of the boundary she draws between the semiotic and the symbolic aspects of signification. The symbolic refers to the linguistic structures whilst the semiotic is what transgresses these structures. Owing to the dynamic interplay between these two modes, the subject is always in process (Kristeva, 1984, p. 22). Kristeva, who elaborates "the dialectic of a process within plural and heterogeneous universes," claims that there is a perpetual dialectical vacillation between these two elements of language (p. 14).

The semiotic transgresses the denotative purpose of language. The semiotic is associated with the pre-Oedipal period; therefore, it is akin to the preverbal, the prelinguistic and the maternal; it is devoid of structure and predates linguistic signifiers and syntax (Kristeva, 1984, p. 34). The semiotic element coincides with a poetic, enigmatic, unfettered, endlessly suggestive, connotative word that springs from the non-differentiated maternal space of the pre-verbal. The pre-linguistic semiotic as an undercurrent in the symbolic realm cannot be reduced to "its intelligible verbal translation" and it is "musical, anterior to judgement, but restrained by a single guarantee, syntax" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 29). In contrast, the domain of the symbolic register guarantees that structures and laws construct and govern the subject. The symbolic corresponds to other linguistic categories such as syntax and signifiers. Differing from the semiotic, the symbolic is an "inevitable attribute of meaning, sign, and the signified object" for the consciousness of a speaking subject (Kristeva, 1980, p. 134). Because it is affiliated with the pre-Oedipal, pre-castration body, the semiotic "logically and chronologically precedes the establishment of the symbolic" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 41).

The semiotic is "an evocation of feeling or, more pointedly, a discharge of the subject's energy and drives," but the symbolic is "an expression of clear and orderly meaning" (McAfee, 2004, p. 15-6). Words with clearly demarcated boundaries are manifestations of the symbolic; a syntax that defies order is reminiscent of the semiotic element of signification. The semiotic is distilled into the symbolic; likewise, the symbolic intrudes upon the semiotic; the interrelatedness between the symbolic and semiotic guarantees "a relationship between body (soma) and soul (psyche)" (Oliver, 2002, p. xvi). The transmission of the living, pulsating body to signification is achieved by means of the

semiotic aspect of signification; the semiotic is unearthed in poetic language, as “poetic language cannot be contained within the aforementioned strictures because it is inseparable from language’s materiality” (Lechte, 1990, p. 94). The semiotic is the pre-verbal way by which affects, drives and energy that reside in the body suffuse language; the living body permeates signification by dint of the semiotic element.

Kristeva borrows the word *chora* from the ancient philosopher Plato, who utilises it to refer to a receptacle that is redolent with maternal implications (2008, p. 42). Kristeva uses the Platonic *chora*, “an ambiguous mi-lieu at the borders between Form and Matter, the intelligible and the sensible” since she is preoccupied with “opening both the biological and the social to a mediating space/spacing before the violent break introduced by ‘the Word’” (Margaroni and Lechte, 2004, p.14). The *chora* is characterised by an “uncertain and indeterminate articulation” and it is different from a symbolic “disposition that already depends on constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 25). The articulations of the semiotic *chora* are uncertain and volatile, for it antedates the constitution of the symbolic and therefore is not based on structure, position and identity. Therefore, “subject and object positions are missing from the *chora*” (Beardsworth, 2005, p. 39). The energy charges in the semiotic *chora* are written on the body before the constitution of the subject in the symbolic register. These disconnected drives are nonexpressive since these energy charges do not transform into words in the symbolic realm of syntax and structure, yet in the prelinguistic realm of the body, in “the locus of the drive activity underlying the semiotic” (Lechte, 1990, p. 129).

Even though theory allows one to describe it in the symbolic domain, the semiotic *chora* resists expression as it precedes sign and structure, and therefore semiotic articulations are anterior to “evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 26). The semiotic resists signification in the symbolic realm since it precedes symbolic representations of time and space. Nonetheless, Kristeva (1984) emphasises that the symbolic discourse “moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it” (p. 26). She notes that the symbolic is predicated on the semiotic; “this motility [of the semiotic *chora*] is the precondition for symbolicity, heterogeneous to it, yet indispensable” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 240).

The semiotic corresponds to the realm of asymbolia; it is “not yet a position that represents something” for a subject; nor is it “a position that represents someone for another position” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 26). Thus, the semiotic implies a realm that has no linguistic signifiers; it is “pre-syllable, pre-word” and pre-linguistic; as this realm is anterior to “numbers and forms,” it is “amorphous” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 239). Hence, it is unsignifiable in the domain of symbolic structures and positions; the semiotic *chora* “can never be definitively posited” (Kristeva, 1984, 26).

Kristeva asserts that bodily drives are represented through corporeal signification before the speechless infant is able to express himself/herself through linguistic signifiers: “First significations occur when the child is still immersed in the semiotic *chora*, the psychic space in which its early energy and drives are oriented and expressed” (McAfee, 2004, p. 27). The semiotic *chora* evokes the maternal body which Lechte (1990) describes as “the focus of the semiotic as the ‘pre-symbolic’ – a manifestation – especially in art, of what could be called the ‘materiality’ of the symbolic” (p. 129). The *chora* is the prelinguistic realm where the infant is nested and the division between signifier and signified does not emerge yet; this realm predates the detachment of the subject from the object. Symbolic boundaries between subject and object, the dependent infant and the nourishing maternal body do not exist in this semiotic realm of fullness of being and plenitude.

Abjection is another essential process in the construction of the Kristevan subject. The abject not only unsettles symbolic order, but it is also an indispensable precondition for the

symbolic domain. Separation from the semiotic chora and the maternal body is vital for the subject to establish an autonomous selfhood. This is the positive consequence of the dialectical interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic. However, the negative consequence of this dialectical oscillation is the threat of the semiotic to unravel the symbolic register.

The unrepresentable and the unsignifiable characterise the abject. The abject is far from being an object named by the symbolic or established as a subject in the symbolic register. Kristeva (1982) notes that the person who is “beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts [...], does not have, properly speaking, a definable object” and adds that the abject is “not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine” (p. 1). Hence, the abject is that which transgresses the boundaries of the symbolic register. The abject spoils the subject’s attempt to be “more or less detached and autonomous” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1). Harassed by abjection, the infant is unable to accomplish the process of individuation and thus fails to establish himself/herself as an autonomous subject.

Kristeva (1982) stresses that the abject is “the jettisoned object” (1982, p. 2). That which is abjected is expelled from the subject because the part of oneself that one casts off is abjected. The abject is “radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). As it transgresses the symbolic domain of the nameable and knowable, the abject challenges the symbolic law. Identities, positions and structures dangle once they confront the abject that hovers on the periphery of these symbolic signifiers. The abject looms in the blurry distance which is paradoxically very close and intimate; nevertheless, it threatens the symbolic register from where it is exiled. Unsymbolised and banished, the abject “beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Thus, the abject corresponds to that which is rejected, but is never expelled completely, for it constantly violates the precarious boundaries of the subject.

Abjection is the state of expelling what is other to oneself and thus establishing borders of a vulnerable selfhood. Whatever is banished from one’s subjectivity does not entirely vanish since that which is abjected is “radically excluded but never banished altogether” and that which is abjected looms on the margins of one’s subjectivity, perpetually threatening the tenuous borders of one’s existence. Kristeva concentrates on the affinity between the mother and the speechless infant during the process of abjection. The abject is the maternal body that is jettisoned to establish independent subjectivity; abjection emerges when the speechless infant is still “in imaginary union with its mother, before it has recognized its image in a mirror, well before it begins to learn language” (McAfee, p. 47). The primary thing that the infant needs to jettison is his dependence on the mother to construct autonomous subjectivity; the mother-infant symbiosis is to be abandoned in order to become a distinct subject. Hence, abjection denies “the primal narcissistic identification with the mother, almost” (McAfee, p. 48).

The abject “beseeches and pulverizes the subject” at once according to Kristeva (1982, p. 5). The abject not only undermines the subject, but also permits the subject to be instituted by dint of detaching itself from others. As McAfee (2004) argues, the infant establishes boundaries between subject and object by “a process of jettisoning what seems to be part of oneself” (p. 46). Thus, Kristeva (1982) claims that “I abject myself within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself” (p. 3). Abjection is not only a crisis that violently breaks down the border between self and other, but also “a precondition of subjectivity itself, one of the key dynamics by which those borders of the self get established in the first place” (Becker-Leckrone, 2005, p. 151).

We spit out the abject from ourselves. For instance, Kristeva (1982) says that curdling milk, excrement, dung, vomit, and rotting corpses are the concrete manifestations of the abject. She notes that one becomes sick, for example, when “the eyes see or the lips touch that

skin on the surface of the milk” and one experiences nausea, dizziness and “a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly” (pp. 2-3). As Kristeva asserts, the abject causes retching, convulsions and nausea. The subject that is challenged by the abject suffers from dizziness that blurs his sight. The gagging sensation and the spasms in the stomach stems from the obliteration of the boundary between clean and filthy, between pure and impure.

Death is another fundamental issue in Kristeva’s discussion of the abject. The sight of a corpse causes abjection as it embodies the dissolution of the boundary between the pure, proper, clean body of the living and the rotting, disintegrating body of the dead. The corpse is the concrete manifestation of our corporeality and mortality. Kristeva (1982) argues that the corpse stands for “what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (p. 3). We seek to expel bodily fluids such as a “wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay” and these defiling fluids are “what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death” (p. 3). We need to cast this rotting corpse off to live cleanly and properly. The corpse is a revolting waste that dissolves the boundary between the living and the deceased. Kristeva argues that death contaminates life (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Life is infected by death, as the decaying corpse is “both human and non-human, waste and filth which are neither entirely inside nor outside the socio-subjective order” (Lechte, 1990, p. 160). Seeing a corpse, we become aware of the precariousness of our living bodies; seeing a cadaver is upsetting because it threatens to break down the vague distinctions of our symbolic existence.

The expulsion of the mother’s body which “gives life, but also death” (Lechte, 1990, p. 165) is fundamental for the establishment of symbolic existence. Kristeva (1982) claims that the abject threatens us “with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language” (p. 13). She also notes that abjection is “a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling” (p. 13). The maternal body has to be annihilated for the infant to learn language and thus to enter the symbolic domain. The pre-linguistic symbiotic oneness of the mother and the speechless infant has to be renounced in order for the symbolic register to function. The speechless infant’s symbiotic unity with the maternal body has to be eliminated for the symbolic self to appear.

The abject mother is never utterly thrust aside since it is not entirely repressed in the human psyche. The anxiety of relapsing into the pre-verbal chora leads to a “massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome” and this feeling causes a “weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). The uncanny horrifies us as the unsymbolisable provokes anxiety. The uncanny transgresses the boundaries of the knowable and representable in the symbolic domain. Hence, it threatens to destroy the symbolically registered subject. The uncanny and the abject force the speaking subject to perpetuate and preserve the distinction between what is me and what is not me.

Abjection is fundamental in Kristeva’s discussion of symbolic subject formation. Abjection is simply the separation from the pre-linguistic maternal body, which leads to the progress from the asymbolic to the symbolic. The abject points to the expulsion of the unsymbolisable in order for a clean and pure subject to be constituted. The abject does not completely disappear, but it goes on to haunt the subject and challenges the tenuous borders of subjectivity.

Findings

The fact that the semiotic chora is translated as womb and evokes the maternal body resonates with the notion that the maternal body is fundamental to Milton's epic; the reproductive imagery and womb-like symbolism indicate the importance of the maternal body in this poem. Therefore, Milton's employment of the birth and womb images is examined in this study within the Kristevan dialectic of the semiotic and the symbolic. Her idea of the semiotic chora is employed in the explanation of the episode of the nativity of Eve and the creation of the "firm opacous globe" (III. 418), whereas her concept of abjection is utilised to explore the allegory of Sin and Death and the Chaos as a giant uterus.

The Semiotic Chora in *Paradise Lost*

Kristeva believes that language has two components: the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic aspect of signification corresponds to corporeal signification in Milton. Corporeal signification allows the transfusion of the semiotic, pre-verbal, breathing body into the symbolic component of language. This transfusion becomes manifest in Milton's fusion of the body and the mind, which are considered to be "co-substantial" (Reisner, 2011, p. 40). That the body and the spirit are intertwined in *Paradise Lost* is, for example, suggested by Milton's account of the nature of angels given by Raphael:

Therefore what he gives
(Whose praise be ever sung) to man in part
Spiritual, may of purest Spirits be found
No ingrateful food: and food alike those pure
Intelligenital substances require
As doth your rational; and both contain
Within them every lower faculty
Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste,
Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,
And corporeal to incorporeal turn. (V. 404-13)

These angels, "intelligenital substances," need real food like rational human beings do. Hence, Milton's angels have "an intellectual, sociable, sensual life" (Raymond, 2014, p. 150). What is corporeal transubstantiates to incorporeal. Likewise, that which is insubstantial morphs into that which is substantial. Believing that all creation is of one matter, that "one Almighty is, from whom / All things proceed, and up to him return" (V. 469-70), Milton denies the established dualism that argues that angels are purely spiritual, believing that they have a material substance. All that stems from one matter is endowed with "various forms, various degrees / Of substance, and in things that live, of life" (V. 472-74). Milton's monist view that emphasises the materiality of angels shatters stark contrasts between angels and humans, soul and body, arguing that all beings are of one material substance.

Milton's employment of the plant figure in Raphael's speech also attests to the materiality of the spirit:

So from the root
Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More airy, last the bright consummate flow'r
Spirits odorous breathes: flow'rs and their fruit
Mans nourishment, by gradual scale sublimed
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the Soule
Reason receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive, or intuitive; discourse

Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same. (V. 479-90)

The plant figure in the shape of root, leaves, flowers, and fruit clarifies why Raphael is able to consume fruit. Food is metamorphosed into the life-sustaining blood that allows one to have bodily sensations, an intellectual existence, imagination and rationality, which shows that the spirit is also material. Raphael also tells Adam that “from these corporal nutriments perhaps / Your bodies may at last turn to all spirit” (V. 496-97).

Milton’s poetic vision based on the interpenetration of the body and the spirit is testimony to the Kristevan idea that language is not dissociated from the body. Language is energized by the bodily sensations and impulses, which are manifested through the corporeal aspect of language. Indicative of the fusion of the semiotic and the symbolic, Milton’s corporeal signification is particularly manifested in the two accounts of the creation of the Paradise and the nativity of Eve. These two episodes exemplify the positive side of Milton’s reproductive vision as the images of the womb and birth are fleshed out through the semiotic aspect of language.

The womb imagery employed in the depiction of the creation of Paradise, portrayed as “a very intimate domestic space” (Reisner, 2011, p. 97), is another example of the positive side of the dialectic of creation and destruction, and another instance, which evinces that the semiotic is discharged into the symbolic. The description of the globe of the prelapsarian creation is connotative of the maternal body and the womb. Milton’s universe “reproduces life” as it “conceives, gestates, and gives birth” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 246). The description of the creation of Paradise is evocative of “the great, fertile womb of creation that serves as a central metonymy for the bright side of Milton’s reproductive vision” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 248). This fertile, opulent and luxuriant Paradise is marked by “its sensuous richness and particularity” (Loewenstein, 2004, p. 79).

The created universe, the outside of which is imagined as “a nonspatialized, nontemporal totality, or, better, an uncircumscribed totality” (Edwards, 2014, p. 119), is described as a great womb. This uterine image is beyond the symbolic registers of time and space; therefore, it is not spatial or temporal since this semiotic realm precedes the symbolic signifiers of temporality and spatiality. It is imagined as the semiotic chora as it is visualized as “the firm opacious globe / Of this round world, whose first convex divides / The luminous inferior orbs, enclosed / From Chaos and th’ inroad of Darkness old” (III. 418-21). The globe of creation is “surrounded by what looks and feels like and functions as a shell” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 249). The “blissful seat of Paradise” (III. 527) seems like a “land embosomed without firmament” and has a “bare outside” (III. 74-5). The purpose of the shell is “to enclose the luminous orbs within it, the nine concentric spheres of the created universe and the earth itself” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 249). The globe of the creation is attached to the bottom of Heaven, “hanging in a golden chain” (II. 1051). This golden chain suggests “an umbilical cord” that suspends from Heaven, and “the foetus/womb of the creation develops in the half embrace of heaven’s light and warmth, precariously suspended over chaos and waiting to give birth upward to creatures” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 253).

The earth was formed, but in the womb as yet
Of waters, embryon immature involved,
Appeared not: over all the face of earth
Main ocean flow’d, not idle, but with warm
Prolific humour soft’ning all her globe,
Fermented the great mother to conceive,
Satiate with genial moisture, when God said
Be gathered now ye waters under heav’n
Into one place, and let dry land appear. (VII. 276-84)

Schwartz (2009) points out that this firm globe surrounds “the whole of creation as a kind of uterine wall” and “gives form to the entire creation as a womb suspended within the upper reaches of chaos, protecting what is inside it, allowing the creation to gestate peacefully in the waters of crystalline ocean” (p. 251). This womb imagery is “suggestive of an embodied religious eros” since it is described as though “the fluid were welling up as a response of fullness to the creator, the womb of the creation opening itself at the gate from which He first emerged to circumscribe her disordered material from the rest of chaos, and then to infuse her with His creative warmth” (p. 252). The idea of an embodied religious eros is connected with Milton’s spiritualized corporeality. Milton discards the antipodal understanding of the body and the spirit, the chasm between eros and logos. The intermingling of the body and the spirit demonstrates the semiotic element discharged into the symbolic. Milton’s corporeal signification is in accord with the idea of an embodied eros and a spiritualized corporeality. Kermode (1973) explains that Milton does not allow a difference of kind between body and soul: “Matter, the medium of the senses, is continuous with spirit; or ‘spirit’, being the more excellent substance, virtually and essentially contains within itself the inferior one; as the spiritual and rational faculty contains the corporeal, that is, the sentient and vegetative faculty” (p. 184). Therefore, in Milton, the body is not considered to be in disjunction from the spirit. The co-existence of the body and the spirit suggests a fullness of being.

Kristeva believes that one’s primary experience is of a space of opulence, of oneness within the semiotic chora. This sense of wholeness and perfection is reflected in Milton’s poetic language as a fleshing out of the semiotic chora as the senses are intermingled in his description of paradise as a bower of fullness and dream of plenitude. Paradisal images reflect “the mingled beauties of sight and of scent (and of sound too)” (Ricks, 1973, p. 210). The image of “flowering odours” (V. 291-3) is an example of the poet’s prelapsarian and semiotic imagination, which “treats scents as if they were as solid and visible as flowers” (Ricks, 1973, p. 211). The substantiality of the scents is a reflection of the semiotic drives released into the symbolic. The bodily image of flowering and the incorporeal sense of scent are fused in order to produce a vision of fullness and perfection.

In addition to Milton’s depiction of the created universe, his description of the nativity of Eve in the Garden of Eden also evokes the sheer fullness and opulence of the semiotic. The prelapsarian fullness of being realised through Miltonic “material concreteness” which relies on “tactile and material imagery” (Reisner, 2011, p. 40) is similar to Kristeva’s understanding of the semiotic chora as a realm of fullness and plenitude. “Imparadised in one another’s arms” (IV, 506), Adam and Eve are immersed in the prelapsarian bliss, in “a garden space of boundless fruitfulness and joy” (Shullenberger, 2014, p. 126). The semiotic element discharged in Milton’s depiction of the prelapsarian state of being is especially reflected in the nativity of Eve. Adam describes Eve’s birth in the following lines:

Mine eyes he closed, but open left the cell
Of fancy my internal sight, by which
Abstract as in a trance methought I saw.
Though sleeping, where I lay, and saw the shape
Still glorious before whom awake I stood;
Who stooping opened my left side, and took
From thence a rib, with cordial spirits warm,
And life-blood streaming fresh; wide was the wound,
But suddenly with flesh filled up and healed:
The rib he formed and fashioned with his hands;
Under his forming hands a creature grew,

Manlike, but different sex, so lovely faire,
That what seemed fair in all the world, seemed now
Mean, or in her summed up, in her contained
And in her looks, which from that time infused
Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before,
And into all things from her air inspired
The spirit of love and amorous delight. (VIII. 460-77)

This account of prelapsarian birth is “a fantastic vision of what birth might have been like had the Fall not occurred” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 195). The wide wound evokes an image of birthing; the substance from which Eve is fashioned stems from within Adam’s body. This prelapsarian image is suggestive of a perfect, painless birth; “Adam conceives of, and gestates, in colloquy with God, an idea of the creature to whom he finally gives birth to” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 205). Adam gives birth to Eve; he suffers no pain, and he does not undergo the experience of having another human being develop within his body. This image of birthing could be taken to be an instance of prelapsarian perfection imagined by a postlapsarian poet. This poetic impulse to imagine prelapsarian perfection from a postlapsarian point of view may be an indication of the fact that the semiotic is discharged into the symbolic. Milton’s idealized reproductive imagery (a human being giving birth to a human child regardless of the distinction between the male and the female) is fuelled by the semiotic energy, which springs from the semiotic chora where no boundaries are recognized and a harmonious state of mother-infant fullness is achieved. The fact that a male poet assumes female creative power through reproductive imagery is a manifestation of the idea that the maternal body as a semiotic dimension energizes the imagination of the male poet; the bodily perception is never cut off from the cognitive understanding of language. The male poet appropriating female creative power is suggestive of the conflation of the conceiving of a child in the maternal body and the conceiving of an idea in the male poet’s mind. This conflation of two forms of conception is demonstrative of the fact that the semiotic and the symbolic are intertwined. The nativity of Eve “constitutes an ambivalent nostalgic fantasy, a dream of perfection” as it is evocative of “the perfect, painless birth of a human child to a human mother untainted by curse” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 209). This prelapsarian perfection corresponds to the semiotic realm which is pre-symbolic, therefore knows of no boundaries, no binary oppositions introduced by the symbolic aspect of language. Eve is Adam’s likeness, his other self, his desire (VIII. 450-1). That Eve is Adam’s likeness is suggestive of the prelapsarian and semiotic fullness of being. Eve is “bone of my [his] bone, flesh of my flesh, my self / Before me” (VIII. 495-6). This description might be taken to be a poetic representation of the sense of prelapsarian wholeness and perfection in the semiotic chora.

As opposed to the life-affirming womb imagery in the creation of the globe and the positive account of the nativity of Eve, *Paradise Lost* presents the life-threatening womb imagery in the depiction of Chaos and the grotesque account of the monstrous birth of Death. The depiction of Chaos and the allegory of Sin and Death that represent the dark side of Milton’s reproductive vision can be investigated in light of Kristeva’s theory of abjection. The dark side always threatens to dissolve the bright side. Therefore, Milton’s paradise “possesses an abundance and fecundity that tends towards excess and wanton growth” (Loewenstein, 2004, p. 79). This semiotic realm of fecundity and opulence is threatened by the undercurrent of the abject: “A wilderness of sweets; for Nature here / Wantoned as in her prime, and played at will / Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet, / Wild above rule or art; enormous bliss” (V. 294-7). To defy the abject, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden have to be engaged in “the immense georgic project of turning wilderness into a sustainable and habitable environment” (Shullenberger, 2014, p. 131). If they do not control this wilderness, they will be choked by its fecundity. Besides the creation before the Fall that is “permeated by

a vibrant, ever-moving life-force, a great spirit, at once vividly sensual and spiritually pure, that rolls through all things,” Eden combines “the wild profusion of nature with the richly ordered design of a work of art” (Hopkins, 2013, p. 45). The sensually and spiritually pure vibrancy in “Earth’s inmost womb” embodies the bright side of Milton’s reproductive imagery, whereas the uncultivated profusion of nature represents the dark side of his reproductive vision (V.302). This Miltonic dialectic between creation and destruction dovetails with the Kristevan tension between the life-affirming opulence of the semiotic *chora* and the abject wild profusion that threatens to annihilate life.

The Abject in *Paradise Lost*

In contrast with the life-affirming womb imagery in the depiction of the created universe, Chaos as a devouring, threatening giant uterus represents maternal abjection. Belial’s speech in Book II reflects the fear over the vast abyss of Chaos, “the unformed space between Hell and the created universe” (Shoulson, 2014, p. 71). This uncreated space threatens to swallow up the intellectual being: “for who would lose, / Though full of pain, this intellectual being, / Those thoughts that wander through eternity, / To perish rather, swallowed up and lost / In the wide womb of uncreated night, / Devoid of sense and motion?” (II. 146-51). Hence, womb imagery is evoked to define chaos and the anxieties it causes. This image of uterine night is characterised by the tendency to “confound / Heav’n’s purest light,” to corrupt, contaminate, pollute and stain it (II. 136-40). Yet, the heavenly “ethereal mold” is said to expel the pollution of the fallen angels’ “blackest insurrection” (II. 136-42). This speech introduces the tension between the incorruptible substance of heaven and the polluting, contaminating influence of hell. Hence, this tension between the two is expressed through the dialectical clash between purge and repulsion (II. 140-42). This Miltonic dialectic between filth and cleansing dovetails with the Kristevan dialectic between the revulsion of the abject and the abjection, thus expulsion of corruption.

Dark reproductive imagery marks the description of Chaos, “the indeterminate space that Satan crosses” (Rumrich, 2014, p. 38). As opposed to the fertile womb of creation, *Paradise Lost* presents “a dark and profoundly disquieting vision of a paradoxically ‘abortive’ womb, the gulf from which the other emerged, and the grave to which it might someday return” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 248). The uterine chaos induces feelings of anxiety and worry because it represents the “secrets of the hoary deep, a dark / Illimitable ocean without bound, / Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height, / And time and place are lost” (II. 891-4). This vast and voluminous space is unsettling as it challenges boundaries because it is a limitless ocean without bound. In relation to this feeling of anxiety over the devouring image of Chaos, LeComte (1978) speaks of Milton’s horror vacui. This fear “includes a horror of the filthy and engulfing female, as his language about chaos (Chaos means “to yawn”) also signals, ‘the womb of Nature and perhaps her grave’ (II, 911), ‘the wasteful deep’ (waist-full) (II, 961), ‘the secrets of the hoary deep’ (II, 891) (“secrets” = privy parts, with “hoary” an adjective from whore)” (p. 69). The yawning and engulfing image of the womb-like chaos and its “embryon[ic] atoms” (II. 900) is an expression of the abject as it intimidates and repels. Leonard (200) points out that Milton seeks to banish this darkness “from our universe, but it creeps back in” (p. 213). That which is expelled, yet returns to challenge, represents the abject. What is expelled creeps back in because it is never entirely banished as it wavers at the edges of one’s subjectivity. The uterine void is threatening because it unsettles our existence. The “vast vacuity” is disturbing as it confounds the boundaries of our fragile subjectivity (II. 932).

Satan embarks on “a bold and dramatic voyage through Chaos to get to Paradise” (Forsyth, 2014, p. 18). Satan’s passage through the uterine Chaos also shows the threatening “dark materials” (II. 916) of the “wild abyss” (II. 910). Satan’s voyage through swampy

Chaos is contrasted with the pearly liquid of the sea and the crystalline water in the fertile womb of creation. The image of Satan “Quenched in a boggy Syrtis, neither sea / Nor good dry land” (II. 939-40) shows Satan gorged by the “darksome desert” (II. 973), “the nethermost abyss” (II. 956), the “boiling gulf” (II. 1027). The devouring wilderness of Chaos is strikingly visual as the following lines testify:

So eagerly the Fiend
O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way,
And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies:
At length a universal hubbub wild
Of stunning sounds and voices all confused
Borne through the hollow dark assaults his ear
With loudest vehemence: (II. 947-954)

All these dark images point to the representation of Chaos as an engulfing womb suggestive of the abject maternal body. The nocturnal uterus of Chaos threatens to devour one with “a thousand various mouths” (II. 966). This abysmal vacuity threatens to breed confusion and discord, and thus to eradicate boundaries between light and dark.

The positive image of idealized birthing in the nativity of Eve is contrasted with the “disgusting physical allegory in which Satan gives birth to Sin, then Death rapes her incestuously, and makes war on his perverted father” (Flannagan, 2002, p. 86). With its presentation of terrifying and perverse figures of childbirth, the allegory of Sin and Death, “signifying monsters” (Rumrich, 2014, p. 30), could be taken to be representative of the abject. Besides suggesting fallen human sexuality, the allegory of Sin and Death, Satan’s diabolic offspring, represents “the negative side of a dialectic of creation and destruction, or patriarchal anxieties over the maternal and/or about women in general” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 212).

Imagined as Satan’s daughter, Sin is described as “a formidable shape” (II. 649). The “deformed Scylla-figure” (Rumrich, 2014, p. 31), Sin is a “woman to the waist, and fair, / But ended foul in many a scaly fold / Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed / With mortal sting: about her middle round / A cry of hell-hounds never ceasing barked / With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung / A hideous peal” (II. 650-6). Following the birth of Sin and Death, “infernal hell-hounds incessantly crawl in and out of the womb of Sin” and thus repeat “the incestuous violation of Sin by Satan and by Death” (Flannagan, 2002, p. 86). Milton portrays Sin as a “perversely maternal” sorcerer (Reisner, 2011, p. 40). Sin is viewed as “a perverse image of maternal nourishment and Satanic appetite” (Loewenstein, 2004, p. 64). The voluminous and vast image of a mother is suggestive of the abject mother’s engulfing embrace.

The birth of Death presents us with the images of monstrosity, disfigurement, dismemberment, distortion and perverted copulation. For instance, the “deformed, and shadowy figure of Death has no firm, constant shape or features” (Loewenstein, 2004, p. 63). Envisioned as Sin’s son, Death is an “execrable shape” (II. 681). Death “had none / Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb” and he has a “miscreated front,” a misshapen face (II. 683). This deformed image of Death is in stark contrast to the idealized perfection depicted in the nativity of pre-lapsarian Eve. As “the snaky sorceress” (II. 724), Sin stands for the abject mother. She is a perverse, “incestuous mother” who disrupts the paradisal womb image of Eve (Stocker, 1988, p. 39). Sin suffers from an unnaturally violent and grotesque childbirth: “this odious offspring whom thou seest / Thine own begotten, breaking violent way / Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain / Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew / Transformed: but he my inbred enemy / Forth issued, brandishing his fatal dart / Made to destroy” (II. 781-87). Death rapes his mother, she gives birth to his ghastly beings, and this

is followed by an endless cycle of births and conceptions. Thus, this account of the origin of Sin and Death “culminates in compulsive reproductive seizures as Sin bears the children of Death’s rape” (Rumrich, 2014, p. 33). This is how Sin gives an account of her being raped by her son, Death:

I fled, but he pursued (though more, it seems,
Inflamed with lust than rage) and swifter far,
Me overtook his mother all dismayed,
And in embraces forcible and foul
Engend’ring with me, of that rape begot
These yelling monsters that with ceaseless cry
Surround me, as thou saw’st, hourly conceived
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
To me, for when they list, into the womb
That bred them they return, and howl and gnaw
My bowels, their repast; then bursting forth
Afresh with conscious terrors vex me round,
That rest or intermission none I find. (II. 790-802)

This monstrous account of Sin and Death, “the proper denizens of allegory” in “the cosmic netherworld” (Silver, 2014, p. 45), is an episode of abjection. Milton’s images of Sin and Death “retain some of the force of perverted nurturing and cannibalism” (Schwartz, 2009, p. 224). The prelapsarian image of birthing in the nativity of Eve is contrasted with the pains and fears of the postlapsarian reproductive life, and the “ominous nativity scene recounted by Satan’s daughter” (Rumrich, 2014, p. 31). Evil forces spread “like a plague or infectious disease in *Paradise Lost*, and degenerative diseases are caused by evil living. The analogy works in any generation: degenerative diseases can be caused in part by overindulgence; degradation of the body causes physical, spiritual, or emotional problems; and plagues may be spread by immorality or promiscuity” (Flannagan, 2002, p. 86). The abject is described through the expressions of disgust, ambiguity, amorphousness, disfigurement, infectious diseases; all of these qualities refer to the dissolution of the boundaries because of the revolting impact of the abject.

Discussion and Result

The maternal body and the related images of birth and womb play a key role in Milton’s epic. The dialectic of creation and destruction, fall and redemption permeates *Paradise Lost*, a poem of dialectical oscillations, an “*epic of free will in a genre dominated by fate*” (Creaser, 2014, p. 92). This Miltonic dialectic accords with the dialectical interplay between the semiotic chora and the abject in Kristeva’s theory. The semiotic chora is revealed in the positive side of this dialectic, whereas abjection is reflected in the negative side. The nativity of Eve and the creation of the universe are the two accounts, which are suggestive of the semiotic dimension discharged into the symbolic, while the allegory of Sin and Death, and the description of Chaos are connotative of the abject maternal body.

A profound longing to regress into the maternal chora and a dread of losing one’s autonomy in the devouring womb are two fundamental elements of *Paradise Lost*. The positive reproductive images utilised in the description of the birth of Eve and the creation of the universe evoke the desire to relapse into the semiotic chora, a non-differentiated realm of sheer fullness and opulence, where there is no distinction between self and other, where the borders between subject and object are eradicated. This yearning for such a semiotic realm corresponds to the fallen human beings’ desire to regress into such heavenly unity and oneness. However, the negative images of birth and womb used in the descriptions of the

Chaos and the allegory of Sin and Death represent fear and disgust, which one feels because of falling back into the giant nocturnal uterus, where identities are annihilated and boundaries are shattered. The devouring womb of the night reclaims all and disfigures all distinct forms, shapes and, by extension, clearly defined identities.

Recommendations

This article recommends that Milton's poetry should be read in conjunction with the Kristevan theory. Analysing Milton's work in light of the Kristevan concepts broadens our comprehension of the Miltonic universe. This paper argues that Adam and Eve fall from the paradisal semiotic chora into the symbolic world, where there are established boundaries between evil and good, fair and foul, subject and object, and self is differentiated from other as opposed to the symbiotic oneness of the primary couple in the Garden of Eden. Expelled from the semiotic realm, they have a deep yearning to be nested and indulged again in the fullness and opulence of the lost paradise. They are longing to relapse into the semiotic chora in which distinctions between inside and outside, light and darkness, pure and impure are eradicated. Therefore, positive images of birth and womb are utilised in the scenes of Eve's nativity and the creation of the universe. These positive images correspond to the positive side of the Miltonic dialectic, which upholds submission and regeneration, and to the semiotic side of the Kristevan dialectic. Nevertheless, the fallen angel Satan, this study contends, strives to assert his autonomy and claim his independence from the smothering womb of the Chaos. He resists being engulfed by the nocturnal uterus of the abject Chaos. All the disfigured and grotesque images of birth and womb in the allegory of Sin and Death refer to Satan's defiant desire to tear through the membrane of the uterine Chaos, which threatens to annihilate his distinct identity as Lucifer the lightbearer. Thus, analysing Milton's reproductive imagery, his images of birth and womb in light of Kristeva's notions of the semiotic chora and the abject, this article aims to demonstrate that *Paradise Lost* dramatizes the dialectical vascillation between the fallen human beings' craving to relapse into the prelapsarian semiotic chora, and the abject, disgraced Satan's defiance of non-differentiation, his deep anxiety, fear and disgust in the face of the devouring colossal uterus that threatens to obliterate him.

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