

The Critical Outlook to Eleni Sikelianos' Body Clock: Poems with the Theoretical Backgrounds from Theorists Julia Kristeva and Susanna Egan

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes *Body Clock: Poems*² in the perspective of *Julia Kristeva's Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. It explicitly sheds light on Eleni Sikelianos's poems in *Body Clock* with two different theorists such as Kristeva and Egan. Eleni Sikelianos' (1965-) both visual and verbal narrative style attribute an authentic outlook for readers, and they see the power of her performative style. The process of giving birth is narrated so creatively that when people read her poems, they will understand how life is a meaningful thing. The study will start with the life of Eleni Sikelianos, who is the author of *Body Clock* which reveals the idea of birth, womanhood, imaginative mind, and so on. Secondly, *Body Clock* is explained with its main concepts such as time, biology, motherhood including the growth of body and birth, and her drawings. The third part of the study will examine the poems of *Body Clock* from the perspective of *Julia Kristeva's Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. This analysis will concern four theoretical backgrounds: "the speaking/split subject," "semiotic chora & symbolic device," "maternal body/ drive," and "poetic language/carnivalesque." In the fourth section of the paper, *Body Clock* is analyzed in terms of three concepts such as the mirror conception, body status and language in control of meaning in *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography written by Susanna Egan*.

Keywords: *Julia Kristeva, The Speaking/Split Subject, Semiotic Chora & Symbolic Device, Maternal Body/ Drive, Poetic Language/Carnivalesque, Susanna Egan, The Mirror Conception, Language.*

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Research Article - Submit Date: 03.03.2021, Acceptance Date: 08.06.2021
 DOI: 10.17932/IAU.IJMCL.2015.014/ijmcl_v07i2002

² The poems of Sikelianos will be written in an original way like using gaps or irregular syntax order, and so while reading them, it can be considered that Sikelianos is a completely authentic artist with her different writing skills and experiences. It is important to understand the pattern of Sikelianos' poems and see each term within the contexts of theoretical perspectives like Kristevian and Susanna Egan's theories.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Eleni Sikelianos'un *Body Clock* şiirlerini Julia Kristeva'nın *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* başlıklı kitabı ile Susanna Egan'nın *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* isimli eserlerindeki teorilerle inceler. İki farklı teoriyi kullandığı için çalışma, Sikelianos'un şiirlerine farklı bir bakış açısı kazandırmaktadır. Eleni Sikelianos'un (1965 -) hem görsel hem de sözel anlatım tarzı okuyucuya otantik bir bakış açısı kazandırmaktadır. Kendisi hamilelik ve doğum süreçlerini o kadar başarılı bir şekilde aktarır ki okuyucu bu süreçleri onun şiirleri ile yakından görür. Bu makale doğum, annelik ve yaratıcılık konularını ele alan Eleni Sikelianos'un yaşamı ile başlar. İkinci kısımda, Sikelianos'un şiirleri zaman, biyoloji ve annelik kavramlarına vurgu yapılarak incelenir. Üçüncü kısım teori alanını oluşturan Julia Kristeva'nın *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* başlıklı kitabına yer verir. Sikelianos'un şiirleri Kristeva'nın teorisinde 4 terim ile analiz edilir. Bunlar, "ana/bölünmüş özne," semiyotik *chora* & sembolik araç," anneye ait beden/ dürtü," ve şiirsel dil/carnivalesque"dir. Dördüncü kısım ise, makaledeki şiirleri çalışmanın diğer ayağını oluşturan teorisyen Susanna Egan'in *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* adlı kitabıyla inceleyerek ele alır. Egan'in teorisine göre de üç ana başlık görülmektedir. Bunlar, ayna konsepti, beden durumu ve anlamsal kontrolde dildir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Julia Kristeva, "Ana/Bölünmüş Özne", Semiyotik Chora & Sembolik Araç", Anneye Ait Beden/Dürtü, ", Şiirsel Dil/Carnivalesque", Susanna Egan, Ayna Konsepti; Dil.

INTRODUCTION

Tracing 'the story of how we fell from timelessness to time' is Sikelianos's project in these lyrical flights. A master of contingency, she weaves intricate nets of association that connect newborns to watermelons to polar bears. And at the base of it all is the body, the human body, but also the bodies of minutes and hours, which she sketches as she times them, creating marvelous portraits of the otherwise invisible. This book is a tour-de-force of sound and hope, a brainy unraveling of an enigma to reveal the enigmas underneath. (Sikelianos, 2008, the back cover of *Body Clock: Poems* by Cole Swensen)

Eleni Sikelianos' *Body Clock* is the great manifestation of her own body with the use of diverse techniques such as drawing or sketching inside her poems. This authentic genre creates a new perspective in literature, and this study has a close look into her poems in terms of theories from Julia Kristeva and Susanne Egan. These poems reflect how Sikelianos uses both biological and scientific approaches in her poems in addition to her drawings emphasizing the cyclic nature of time. Both

words and images used by Sikelianos in her poems construct an interdisciplinary field. *Body Clock* poems mainly focus on the motherhood in which Eleni Sikelianos experiences her own pregnancy and after-the-birth processes. She emphasizes the integration of poetry and scientific materialism like her reference with the name ‘Body Clock.’ Eleni Sikelianos’s fourth book of poetry, *Body Clock* was published in 2008. The human body, like time, is an alive and on-going thing. Time animates with seconds, minutes, and hours while body is formed of cells which are the representations of these time particles in Sikelianos’ perspective. In addition to time, nature and biology are seen as the essential subjects of *Body Clock* because Sikelianos studied biology and during her academic career in this department, her professor John Matsui, who now runs a program at Berkeley, was an inspiring source for her as he provides that she merges with science and literature together in her poems. While writing these poems, she deals with many diverse issues such as time, nature, biology, science, mythology, and so on. Therefore, the study is based on multi-issues which direct readers into various thoughts in their minds. *Body Clock* is so important masterpiece for Sikelianos herself because she welcomes her baby Eva Grace after the process of writing this book. Thus, it consists of emotional statements like being a mother. Moreover, Eleni Sikelianos uses her manuscripts, sketches, and drawings in order to show time and body conceptions. Among these drawings, she illustrates not only biological and scientific references but also the experiments with time such as her hour’s residues and minutes. In order to understand better the context of her poems, it is important to take a close look into the life of Sikelianos because her life shows how she is involved in the poetic experiences and heritage. She was born on 31 March 1965 and raised in California, and earned her MFA from the Naropa Institute. She is the great-granddaughter of the Nobel Prize in Literature-nominee, Greek poet Angelos Sikelianos, as well as the niece of distinguished “Outrider” poet and scholar, Anne Waldman. Sikelianos is the author of eight poetry collections, including *Make Yourself Happy* (2017), *The Loving Detail of the Living & the Dead* (2013), *Body Clock: Poems* (2008), and *The California Poem* (2004). She is also the author of the hybrid memoirs *You Animal Machine (The Golden Greek)* (2014) and *The Book of Jon* (2004). Sikelianos has received numerous honors and awards for her writing and translations, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fulbright Commission, and Princeton University. She now teaches and directs the Creative Writing program at the University of Denver. She also lives with her novelist husband Laird Hunt and their daughter. (*from poetryfoundation.org*)³

BODY CLOCK: POEMS

Body Clock deals with various issues and each of them creates an authentic point of view because Sikelianos’ own experiences during her pregnancy form these poems. The visuality integrates with time and the body of a woman in many references from biological and scientific illustrations. This part of the study explains the

³<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/eleni-sikelianos>[retrieved 25.05.2021]

following notions: time, biological and scientific references, the growth of body and birth in motherhood, and her drawings. The first and most important concept here is time. It is a complex and uncertain phenomenon throughout history in that many people try to analyze this notion. Additionally, time's vitality is emphasized in every period of life just like *Body Clock*. In relating to this idea, J.B. Priestley expresses his thoughts in *Man and Time*, “[...] we saw and heard far more of the clocks. They cleared their throats, so to speak, before announcing the hours. They seemed to be keeping an eye on us. Their gravely deliberate tick-tock, tick-tock, which seemed much louder when we were alone with them, made us wonder what it was that was being tick-tocked away, made passing time significantly audible” (Priestly, 1989, p. 22). This quotation shows the personification of time as if it is as much as alive, and so it supports the main idea of *Body Clock* poems because this liveliness is also emphasized in *Body Clock*. Time is an ongoing process and Sikelianos relates to time and body each other as the body can be a perfect example for showing the vitality of time. Sikelianos mentions that minutes, seconds, and hours form time just like cells which constitute the human body in biology. This link illustrates the importance of the title *Body Clock* as she states the reconstruction of the body in the process of pregnancy; therefore, it constructs human-beings in time.

Time is also considered as a cyclic concept in *Body Clock* because its fluidity and circularity show the entity of time just like a body; for example, in the book Eleni Sikelianos experiments with minutes and she indicates this process with her drawings which involve in points inside the circle. These points symbolize seconds in a minute. Furthermore, these sketches can symbolize the nature of time because a circle, which is a geometric figure, shapes the idea of time's circularity. In *Body Clock* Sikelianos (2008) states that:

In this conception a minute is a round though not perfectly — its lines disconnect in the drawing of it to meet up with the next / past minute. You might see the small freckles of scattered seconds at the interior (heart-meat) of the minute.

This is a big-meat minute, true to its actual size, but only took 34 seconds to draw. (p. 36)

These expressions show both the notion of circularity and its connection to the body. Biological time is emphasized with the use of 'big-meat minute' which is the most important metaphor for the integration of body and time. Moreover, time is also seen as the particle structure because it consists of seconds just like references to this statement. Sikelianos shows this process with her drawing of the circle and it illustrates the process of Sikelianos's pregnancy as she was pregnant while drawing this sketch. It also symbolizes the pregnant body with cells, and so it can be also the representation of her own life.

Another significant point which closely relates to the fluidity of time is its changeable nature and it is shown with the following lines in *Body Clock*:

When does time be vertical

when it be horizontally laid

when it be spiky or round

a human so shaped like an hour (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 34)

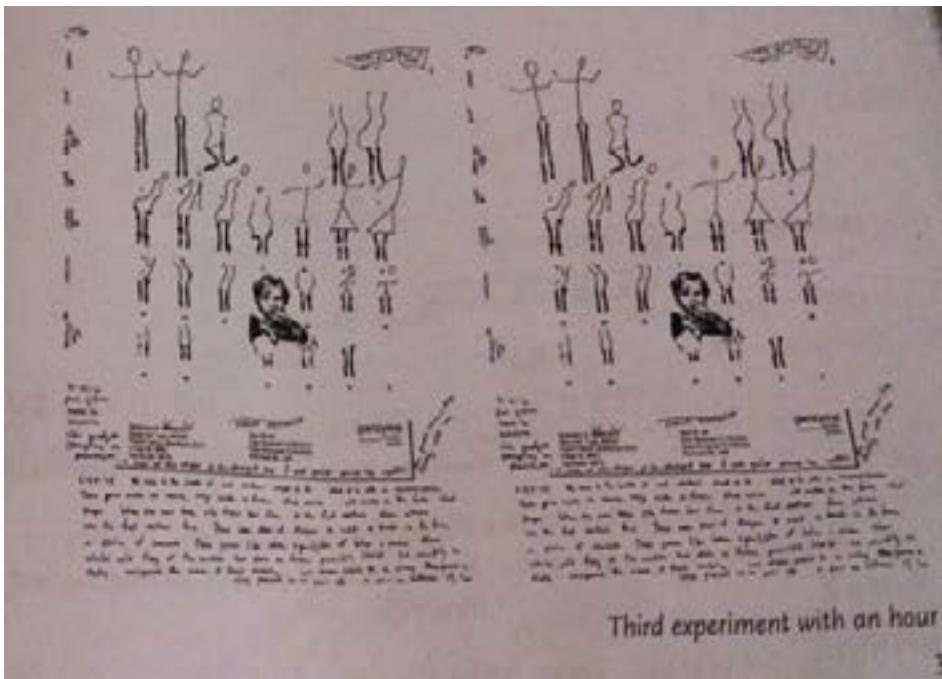
Time is flexible and changeable as mentioned in these lines so Eleni Sikelianos emphasizes that it can change according to the context, period, or any other circumstances. Throughout history, human beings react to time differently. For example, some create shadow clocks or some invent ‘sand glasses’ according to their circumstances. Furthermore, human can change like an hour in time; thus, the resemblances between time and human strengthen the idea of continuity and alteration between each other. Sikelianos also indicates her own pregnancy experiences with these statements. She states that time appears as a completely new concept when a fetus is growing inside the body and this image symbolizes the rate of growth.

The second important reference is biology itself because Eleni Sikelianos studied in the department of biology in her early education and it shows her interest in both science and biology. Therefore, she integrates biology and literature with each other. Her poems include many references and examples from biological statements. For example, the most significant reference which is related to biology is the epigraph of *Body Clock*. This epigraph is from D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson (1860- 1948) who is a Scottish biologist and mathematician. In the epigraph, Thompson states, “of spatial magnitude, or of the extension of a body in the several dimensions of space and “growth involves the same concepts of magnitude and direction [as] ... the ‘dimension’ of Time.”⁴ These expressions emphasize the growth of time and body in the process of Sikelianos’s pregnancy. Thompson tells the dimensions of time and space in order to show the flexible and multi-layered nature of time. In addition, the growth of body is seen with the biological illustrations and Sikelianos uses many biological and scientific references just like the epigraph of *Body Clock*.

In the interview of Eleni Sikelianos with Megan K. Fernandes, Sikelianos states the quotation of Lewis Thomas reflects her essential thoughts which are about the link between biology and poetry together. Thomas (1984) states, “language is simply alive, like an organism... Words are the cells of language, moving the great body, on legs. Language grows and evolves, leaving fossils behind. The individual words are like different species of animals. Mutations occur. Words fuse, and then

⁴This part is taken from the epigraph of *Body Clock: Poems by Eleni Sikelianos*.

mate. Hybrid words and wild varieties or compound words are the progeny” (p. 106). Eleni Sikelianos’s writing style can be the reflection of Thomas’ quotation because she sees the language as the fluid element, and it reflects this idea about her ‘time’ notion. The statement of ‘Body Clock’ is again the indicator of this liveliness because Eleni Sikelianos tells “what is alive in the body is also ticking”. It refers to her pregnancy process in that the growth of her body needs a definite duration. Therefore, Eleni Sikelianos writes her own pregnancy experiences with the concept of the growth of the body which shows the vitality of nature. Moreover, the drawings of Eleni Sikelianos such as “Third Hour’s Residue” focus on the biological references. These drawings are shown below:



“Third experiment with an hour” (Sikelianos, 2008, p.106)

Sikelianos uses many biological terms like the statements below and her drawings in the poem. She states these references with the following pattern and so she indicates how her style is an authentic perspective with the use of many diverse fields together:

part of an hour is erasure like genotype stomping on phenotype
a blur at the edges of the thought box & wet paint around the caption

her macroscopically visible aspects (46,xx) in her haploid cell she sneezes to show she's

(the quote marks keep falling off her)

ghosted the teeth of radiance

/petals /letters like

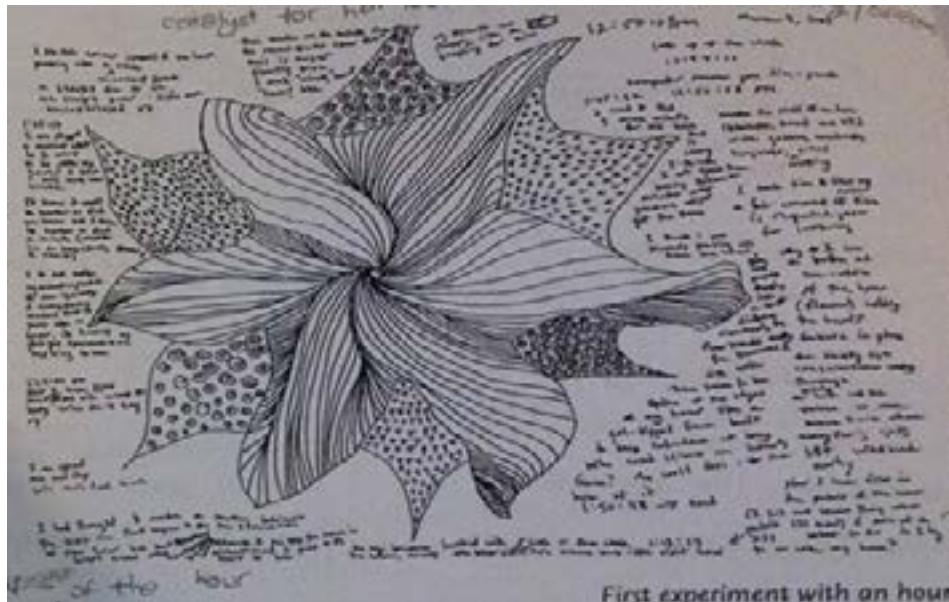
the hour takes tweezers

to its hairs 4:46:35 (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 106)

Many words illustrating the biology itself create an interdisciplinary area in the context of the poem because it reflects the integration of literature and science together. In terms of this integration, Sikelianos experiments a new kind of poetry in literature. It can be also a great manifestation of ekphrastic poetry because of constructing the image with words in the minds of readers. Besides the visuality, Sikelianos does not write the poem in the regular structure here and it indicates her free and democratic writing style. For instance, her statements emphasize the construction of the biological chromosome and its occurrence for the baby. These creative lines symbolize the growing body in time. She also states her belief about animism in the interview with Megan K. Fernandes: "I think maybe I'm an animist at heart. I know I'm an animal, and am part of a lineage of animals. I tend to see commonality and exchange between species and beyond (say, rocks and bones) rather than demarcations." (from *californiapoetics.org*)⁵ These statements strengthen her animistic idea and biological references in the poem.

Motherhood is another important theme in Body Clock because Eleni Sikelianos narrates her own motherhood experiences and her poems are not only the literary texts, but also the life of herself. She writes her feelings and expressions about the process of pregnancy and after-the-birth status with the use of language, drawings, and manuscripts. Sikelianos also uses many references about motherhood and maternity in her poems. For example, she mentions the mythological character 'Venus' who is the goddess of fertility. In addition, motherhood creates a new identity for women and Sikelianos emphasizes the motherhood with her feminine drawings. The "First Hour's Residue" in the poem demonstrates her maternity and motherhood with the image of a flower which is the representation of femininity. This drawing is shown below and it can be also the representation of her body because it shows the organic and systematic form just like the body.

⁵<http://www.californiapoetics.org/interviews/4251/scientific-materialism-and-poetics-an-interview-with-poet-eleni-sikelianos-with-an-introduction-by-megan-k-fernandes/> [retrieved 25.05.2021]



“First Experiment with an hour” (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 99)

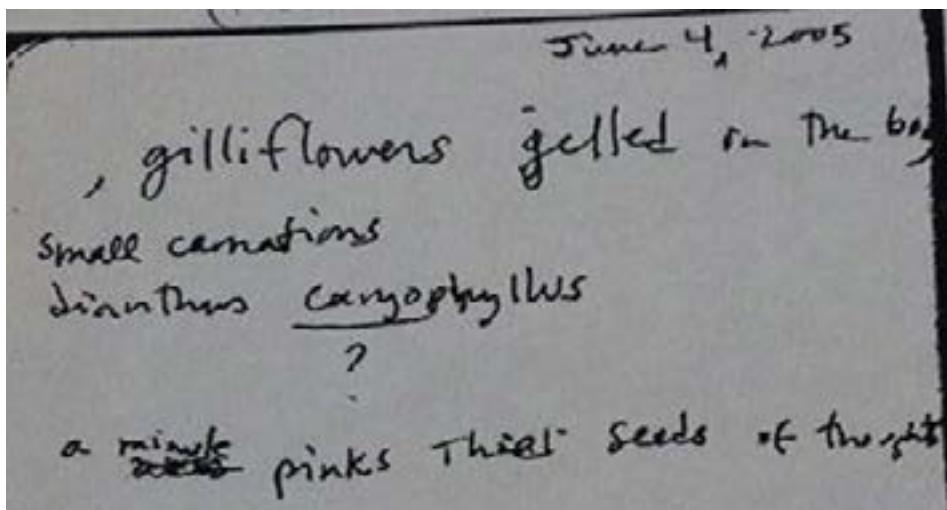
The growth of body is the process of pregnancy and it is so hard and effective duration for mothers in many aspects. Eleni Sikelianos reflects this process with different techniques such as drawings, and manuscripts. Firstly, the biological references are the main indicators for the growth of body as they are the most important elements in biology. Another significant point which Sikelianos mostly emphasizes in *Body Clock* is the concept of time in the growth of body. This process resembles the totality and unity of parts just like the construction of time which is formed with minutes and hours. Eleni Sikelianos mentions the growth of body with these lines:

As she grows from me to her this
is a field of symmetry
...
touching all the quantum fields you walked through to
greet me (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 41).

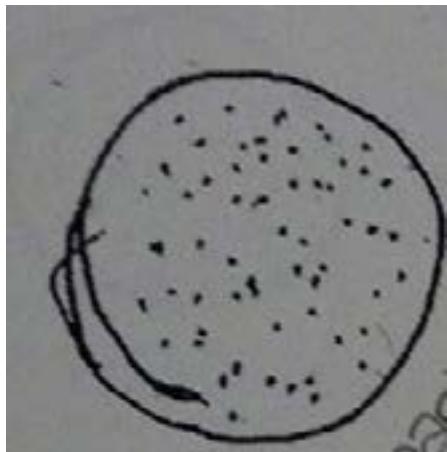
These lines show the act of baby in the author's womb and the effect of ‘touching’ symbolizes the feeling of the child spiritually and emotionally. This growth is represented with the use of ‘symmetry’ and it shows the perfection of this moment. In the poem, Sikelianos experiments with minutes during her pregnancy and even after-the-birth, and so time is integrated with the growth of her body. For instance, she states:

In the dark we hour it In the half-light of a veiled world I minute by minute it
 while you collect
 & tend to day the hours instead
 • • •
 the baby breathes metonymically
 • • •
 between two hands of the clock
 the world assembles
 second hand signs out:
and and and (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 45).

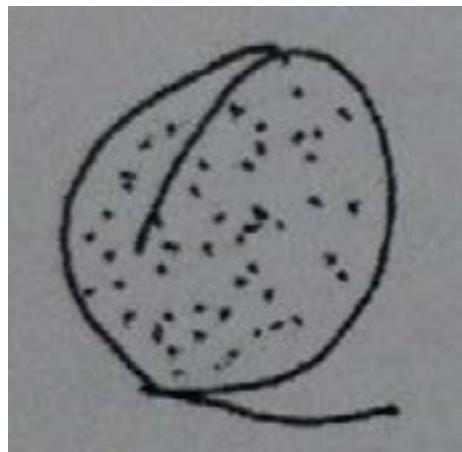
The growth of her body is indicated within an order; for example, ‘the baby breathes metonymically’ or ‘a field of symmetry’ expressions point out the perfection of this growth. Therefore, the process of pregnancy is the symbolization of both physical and emotional growth for the motherhood. Birth is a significant moment for the motherhood because the new human being comes into the world. This process is the separation of the baby from the body of a mother, and so after this situation, the baby is considered as the new entity that is apart from the mother. Besides the poetic language, Eleni Sikelianos uses many sketches, drawings, and manuscripts while writing *Body Clock* poems. One of them is the “Experiment with Minutes”. These illustrations emphasize Sikelianos’s manuscript and her authentic manner such as the experimentation of minutes. This manuscript and drawings are shown below:



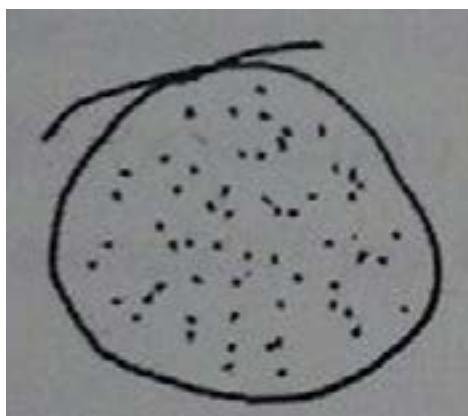
The manuscript of Eleni Sikelianos (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 35).



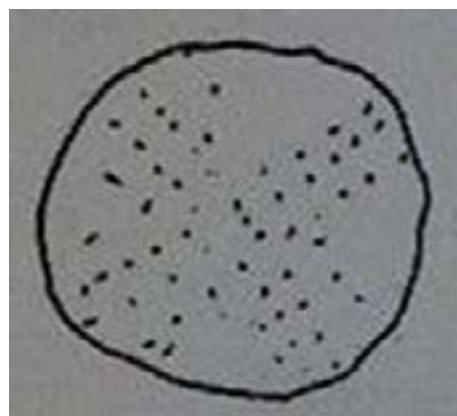
First experiment with a minute (p.36)



Second experiment with a minute (p.37)



Third experiment with a minute (p.38)



Fourth experiment with a minute (p.39)

These drawings attribute a new aspect to the poetry because Eleni Sikelianos does not only use the words, but also the visuality for expressing her thoughts. For instance, these experiments with minutes consider the concept of time differently because she draws these sketches while keeping time and calculates what time she drew them. This calculation brings time into a measurable concept and it opens a perspective on the minds of readers. Moreover, the integration of words and images illustrates readers see time concretely thanks to Sikelianos's sketches, and so she indicates the time from different perspectives with her drawing style. Furthermore, the manuscripts of Sikelianos symbolize her free expressive style as this style shows that she is not involved in the patriarchal and strict patterned language structure.

THE CRITICAL LOOK AT *BODY CLOCK*: POEMS WITHIN THE PERSPECTIVE OF JULIA KRISTEVA'S THEORY

Julia Kristeva (1941-) is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, psychoanalyst, and feminist theorist and her theories are so important to understand better the context of Sikelianos's *Body Clock*: Poems. Because of her birth and pregnancy experiences, Sikelianos's poems are considered important examples for carrying out the Kristevian theory. The poems will be seen within the perspective of Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* and they are analyzed in terms of four main principles such as "the speaking/split subject", "semiotic chora& symbolic device", "maternal body/ drive" and "poetic language/carnivalesque".

"The Speaking/Split Subject"

In Kristevian theory, the speaking subject is seen as the split subject because it is shown as a divided subject. This term is explicitly stated in *The Kristeva Reader*:

[...] this 'speaking subject' turns out in fact to be that transcendental ego which, in Husserl's view, underlies any and every predicative synthesis, if we 'put in brackets' logical or linguistic externality. This subject, not only expresses the truth of language which structuralism describes as a system but creates for itself the opportunity of describing, better than its predecessors, the logic of this thetic act, starting out from an infinity of predication which each national language subjects to strict systems of rules. (Kristeva, 2002, p. 27)

This subject involves both the conscious and unconscious mind; for example, the conscious status can be the family relations or social orders. On the other hand, the unconscious mind is included in bio-psychological situations such as drives, emotions, or desires. In this perspective, *Body Clock* is considered to be written in the speaking/split subject position because Sikelianos is seen as both the narrator and mother. Being narrator is the consciously constructed identity as a person chooses to write his/her opinions; on the other side, being mother is the instinctually fluid process because its instinctual features come to the motherhood naturally after she becomes a mother. Thus, she is split into two different roles in that one of them is the mother of Eva Grace, and another is the author of *Body Clock* poems. Another important statement related to the speaking subject in *Body Clock* is expressed with the emphasis of a link between body and language like the main issue of Sikelianos in her poems and the following statements summarize this relation perfectly:

Word-presentations would then be doubly linked to the body. First, as representations of an 'exterior' object denoted by the word, as well as representations of the pressure itself, which, although intraorganic, nevertheless relates the speaking subject to the object. Second, as representations of an 'interior object,' an internal perception, an eroticization of the body proper during the act of formulating the

word as a symbolic element. This bodily “duel,” thus coupling the inside and the outside, as well as the two instinctual pressures linked to both, is the matter upon which repression is set-transforming this complex and heterogeneous pressure into a sign directed at someone else within a communicative system, i.e., transforming it into language. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 217)

This quotation states both the self and (m)other's self are interrelated between each other, and the ‘object’ which is expressed in this context can be the baby of Eleni Sikelianos because after the birth the baby started to shape her own identity as an independent being from her mother. The ‘instinctual pressures’ mentioned in the quotation of Kristeva indicate the drives of mother and the baby’s situation in the womb of Sikelianos. This doubleness demonstrating the speaking subject of Kristeva is presented with these statements in *Body Clock*:

The poem can be as risky as the body. Male & Black, Female& White. The body lies quivering with self and self-doubt. The body covered with question marks. (Each pore punctuated by it.) Lick it all over with your mirrored tongue. I mean there is another body in the bed. This adds and subtracts doubt. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 107)

‘Male& Black, Female& White’ express both the historical and social duality in that they imply two different gender groups in the process of giving birth. It is an interesting point that these two various groups are expressed with two oppositional statements such as black and white colors. Furthermore, ‘self and self-doubt’ indicate the split subject who is Eleni Sikelianos herself in *Body Clock*. Except for Sikelianos’s own status, her baby with herself forms another speaking subject position because her baby starts to acquire a new identity after the departure from Sikelianos’s body. At that point, the mother can be a stranger towards her own baby as the baby’s new identity will be a separated being after the birth. Julia Kristeva’s (1988) following quotation refers to this issue from the perspective of strangeness, “[...] a stranger inhabits us: it is the hidden face of our identity, the space that ruins our resting place, the moment where understanding and instinctive fellow feeling become swallowed up” (p. 9). This aspect can be another side of baby-mother relationship according to the context of Kristevian theory. However, Sikelianos is not in favor of this conception for emphasizing the unifying and mutually beneficial between mother and baby. It is important to see how Sikelianos’ thought is shaped with the instinctual motherhood status and she approaches her baby affectionately.

“Semiotic Chora & Symbolic Device”

Semiotic chora and symbolic device are other significant definitions in Kristevian theory. Kristeva explains semiotic *chora* as an instinctual concept in that drives and desires are included in this definition. In *Body Clock*, Sikelianos’s instinctual drives

as a mother and the process of her pregnancy are great examples of semiotic *chora*. On the other hand, symbolic device indicates the shared cultural meanings in *Desire in Language*, and in the terminology of Kristeva, the symbolic device is explained as “a domain of position and judgment,” and she continues genetically speaking, “it comes into being later than the semiotic, at the time of the mirror stage; it involves the thetic phase, the identification of subject and its distinction from objects, and the establishment of a sign system” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 19). The use of language can be a symbolic device for emphasizing the dominant cultural heritage because language is the representation of an authoritative patriarchal society. Moreover, the syntax and grammatical structure are included in the symbolic devices. However, Sikelianos does not exactly use the rules of grammar in her poems. In terms of this feature, Eleni Sikelianos can be defined as a free expressionist poet, but she is still in the patriarchal world order as she uses the language in order to express her feelings and thoughts. In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva (1980) explains these two elements as follows:

Kristeva has posited two types of signifying processes to be analyzed within any production of meaning: a “semiotic” one and a “symbolic” one. The semiotic process relates to the *chora*, a term meaning “receptacle,” which she borrowed from Plato, who describes it as “an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible.” It is also anterior to any space, an economy of primary processes articulated by Freud’s instinctual drives (*Trieben*) through condensation and displacement, and where social and family structures make their imprint through the mediation of the maternal body. While the *chora*’s articulation is uncertain, undetermined, while it lacks thesis or position, unity or identity, it is the aim of Kristeva’s practice to remove what Plato saw as “mysterious” and “incomprehensible” in what he called “mother and receptacle” of all things-and the essays presented in this collection also proceed in the direction of such an elucidation. The symbolic process refers to the establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, symbolic law (pp. 6-7).

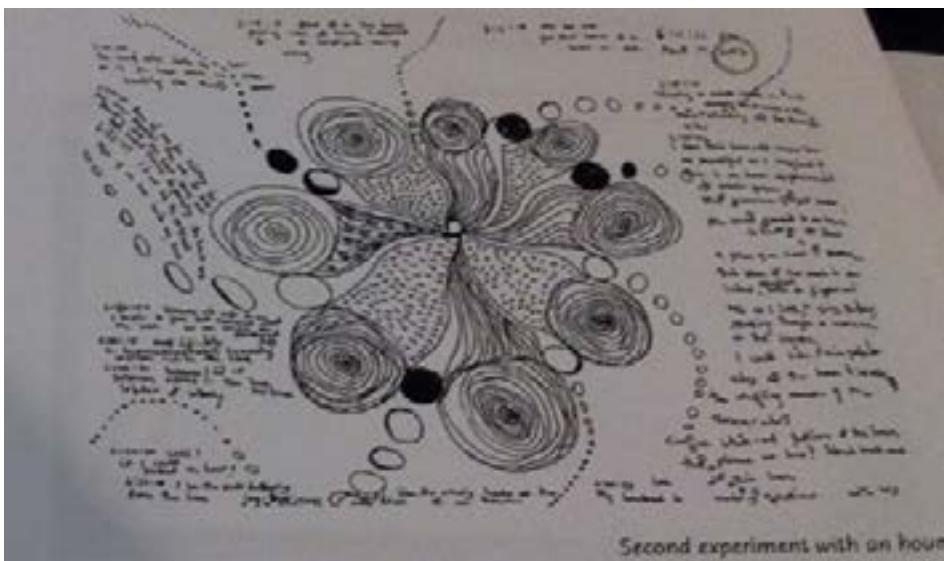
These statements summarize the idea of semiotic *chora* and symbolic device. The semiotic *chora* is about feelings and this abstraction creates a mysterious state of mind. Thus, the motherhood is included in the semiotic *chora* according to Kristevian theory. Furthermore, time is considered as the indicator of the semiotic *chora* because it is in uncertain status with the on-going process of life. Sikelianos’s pregnancy moment is also seen as the semiotic *chora* in *Body Clock*. She states this process with the use of diverse depictive illustrations:

Now the day has a membrane around it slimy and womb-
like that closes at night with perforations, breathing
holes where the dream rises to the surface;

& opens again in the morning; to begin; to encompass all the things we do again
changing clothing unclothing singing not
singing breathing
meaning has shifted like jumping color fields on a strip
of button candy when I say “baby,” “the baby,” in Colorado’s season
of 14 tons of peaches it means
something new. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 41)

These lines show the time of her baby’s growth in Sikelianos’ womb and the expressions of Sikelianos are timeless for herself. This moment can be the example of semiotic *chora* as it is the instinctual process of the mother Sikelianos. Moreover, the line of “holes where the dream rises to the surface” indicates the exact moment of birth because this miraculous event is described with dreamy-like depictions such as this statement shows.

The drawings of the author can be given as examples for semiotic *chora* because they represent the feelings of Sikelianos about time which is an abstract concept. For example, the “Second Experiment with an Hour” stated-below, is drawn in the form of a flower that is the allusion of femininity and emotions. The dots reflecting the fluidity of visual senses construct the bridge between words and images in that the readers can see the experiments with hours. These sketches also illustrate Sikelianos’s imaginative world with the combination between visuality and verbality.



“Second Experiment with an Hour” (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 103)

Eleni Sikelianos reflects the symbolic device with the examples of authoritative language, and she states this notion with her following statements in *Body Clock*:

We suddenly began to act
like TV (sitcom) characters, though
we couldn't say why

Someone suggested we had forgotten
how to handle our minutes. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 40)

These statements demonstrate the language of patriarchal society because it emphasizes the robotic behaviors of people inside their systematic world order. Therefore, it can be said that patriarchal society creates the system of time and it emphasizes we are being shaped according to time. Language and time that are the essential figures of symbolic devices are produced by the patriarchal society, and so they restrict the acts of people. Sikelianos deconstructs this idea to create her authentic expressive style with her drawings and quotations together.

“Maternal Body / Drive”

Maternal body and *drive* are other terms in the Kristevian theory, and *Body Clock* emphasizes these two notions in its context because her poems are narrated by herself as a mother who experienced the pregnancy process and after-the-birth. Therefore, the term of maternal body can be the main element of her poetry. Kristeva (1980) states this term in *Desire in Language* as follows: “cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is another. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on.” (p. 237) It explicitly indicates how Sikelianos’s body will grow and Kristeva claims the body is in the living form and it changes continuously in her theory. The baby acquires its own identity after birth, and so it is seen as an ‘other’ apart from the mother. Sikelianos also emphasizes this maternal status with the use of biological references and drawings in her poems. In this context, she points out Venus among the mythological characters as it is the goddess of fertility and it symbolizes the motherhood. Sikelianos states the maternal body status with these expressions:

watch a yellow
curve, curve yellow — can you? and a
pool of shadow. How the lemon
dives into its own (shadow), or is birthed
from an umbilicus

of it like
Venus on a darker wave.
Two pools of shade intersect. You learn
that the lemon has a half-life
of light. This lemon might
hurl itself from space
torpedoing like a sun-field into
the baby-sphere. Yellow [f]lies down in the bed
of the lemon, wakes
the baby who was sleeping there
like a hard bar of sunlight. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 42)

This lemon can be a metaphor for the cell for the construction of a baby, and so it carries full of references to the birth. The yellow-lemon movement and light image illustrate the elements of ‘Venus’ and the baby. Furthermore, the ‘baby-sphere’ shows the area in which Sikelianos writes in. The acts of ‘lemon-yellow’ reflect the baby’s actions inside the womb of Sikelianos, and so the position of the baby in her womb expresses how the narrator mentions her feelings about the birth and pregnancy in a sincere mood. As Kristeva states in *Desire in Language*, the mother’s other starts to be formed after the birth, and it acquires the new entity for the child because of her new identity status which is apart from the mother.

Kristeva mentions that the instinctual drives are dominant in the maternal body because the baby inside the womb creates the emotional link with her mother, and this process is explained with the use of drives which Kristeva states in her terminology. This instinctual status is narrated by Kristeva (1980) “a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her own psychosis, and consequently, more negatory of the social, symbolic bond” (p. 239). In the context of maternal body, Kristeva also emphasizes the importance of drives and it shows how they lead the status of mother. For example, she states, “it is also anterior to any space, an economy of primary processes articulated by Freud’s instinctual drives through condensation and displacement, and where social and family structures make their imprint through the mediation of the maternal body. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 6) She also refers to Freud’s theory about the maternal body and drives. Besides, maternal passion comes from the status of being mother, and it is highly related to human passion. The following quota explicitly reveals this issue:

Maternal passion is quintessential to human passion because it can be a form of working through conflicting emotions of attraction and aversion, which are the result of animal drives, by turning them into the human passions of love and

hate. [...] feelings require reflexive consciousness and expression in language and therefore go beyond mere feelings in the technical sense in which emotions are opposed to passions. (Oliver, 2008, p. 5)

“Poetic Language / Carnivalesque”

Poetic language and ‘carnivalesque,’ which should be recognized in the context of Kristevian theory, and there will be seen the analysis of *Body Clock* poems with the understanding of Kristeva as Sikelianos’ poetic language show many similarities from diverse aspects. For instance, Kristeva emphasizes a double and dynamic process of poetic language in her theory and she states: “I have in mind that particular literary practice in which the elaboration of poetic meaning emerges as a tangible, dynamic gram” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 64). The fluid nature of poetic language refers to time concept of Sikelianos in *Body Clock* as according to her, time is the living organism just like body, and this notion indicates its dynamic process of poetic language in the poem. Furthermore, Sikelianos does not use the patriarchal language system and its literary rules because *Body Clock* poems reflect irregular syntaxes, broken sentences and fragmented structures. Therefore, it can be said that Eleni Sikelianos creates her own expressive world with the poetic language in addition to the visual examples. The disordered structure in her poems is shown with the following lines:

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she      calls      I
answer    swer    a swerve    a
brush of air    I swear    a scarf
a scarving her answer
answer me. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 108)

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Sikelianos uses spaces between the words in order to imply the lack of language in her expressive world, and she mostly constructs fragmented words for creating harmony with alliteration and assonance. In these lines, the subject of ‘I’ reveals her baby’s identity who is the mother’s other and it also shows the protest against the patriarchal language system with its disordered structure. Sikelianos also points out the fragmented nature of her poetry like Kristeva who explains the fragmented structure of poetic language as follows:

The notion of double, the result of thinking over poetic (not scientific) language, denotes “spatialization” and correlation of the literary sequence. This implies that the minimal unit of poetic language is at least double, not in the sense of the signifier /signified dyad, but rather, in terms of one and other. It suggests that poetic language functions as a tabular model, where each “unit” acts as a multi-determined peak. The double would be the minimal sequence of a paragrammatic semiotics to be worked out starting from the work of Saussure and Bakhtin. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 69)

Doubleness in the poetic language is seen in the poetry of Sikelianos as the position of mother and her baby. Sikelianos emphasizes this duplicity with the occurrence of 'I' subject which refers to the new identity of baby Eva Grace. Besides, the statement of Kristeva Sikelianos stresses the importance of 'parts' for both poetry and time that are presented with the body itself. For instance, she states this pieced structure in *Body Clock*:

Here, spicules were built. Assembled
into a needle-like house. Transparent. Airy. Gorgeous. Constructed.
to withstand all time.

What? says Body. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 105)

These lines strengthen the process of 'being' for the baby and it is mentioned as a birth miracle. In this process, cells constitute the baby in the womb of Sikelianos just like the construction of poetry with words throughout the writing poems. This fragmented structure is also stated with time concept by Sikelianos. Therefore, the poetic language is analyzed in *Body Clock* with the reference of fragmented status which mostly appears with various issues such as time, biology, and language in her poems. In addition to the poetic language, Kristeva shows the term 'Carnivalesque' which is mentioned with Bakhtin in the theory. She explains this notion in *Desire in Language*:

The poetic word, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture. Bakhtin was the first to study this logic, and he looked for its roots in carnival. Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 65)

This quotation presents the main idea of *Body Clock* because Sikelianos does not use the laws of language and she creates her own discourse in the poems. This free expressive narrative is integrated with the instinctual drives of motherhood, and the poetic language is considered as the best device for her narration. Therefore, 'Carnivalesque' is exactly the projection of her expressions as she creates her own grammatical order and rules in the poems. At that point, Kristeva and Sikelianos express similar ideas in the frame of poetry and poetic language.

THE CRITICAL LOOK AT BODY CLOCK: POEMS IN THE ASPECT OF SUSANNA EGAN'S THEORY

This part will present the critical point of *Body Clock*: Poems from the perspective of Susanna Egan's *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*. This theoretical source is mainly about autobiography and its style, but some notions can be perfectly analyzed in the poems of Sikelianos because *Body Clock* is also considered as an autobiographical literary text in terms of revealing the life of Sikelianos. Her poems reflect the pregnancy and after-the-birth processes of Sikelianos, and so it carries the autobiographic features. Susanna Egan reveals, "several new categories for understanding autobiographies and autobiography as a whole. She wants it to include as many different kinds of self-referential writing as it can, invoking Whitman's "I am large, I contain multitudes" as an appropriate presiding spirit for the genre" (Smith et al., 2001, p. 275). Sikelianos' poems will be examined in three aspects which are the mirror conception, body status, and language in control of meaning.

The Mirror Conception

The mirror is discussed as a problematic issue in *Mirror Talk* as it creates the double image and Susanna Egan (1999) states in *Mirror Talk*:

The mirror metaphor can be problematic precisely because it does not acknowledge the freestanding nature of the other. The intersubjective perspective identifies 'the need for mutual recognition, the necessity of recognizing as well as being recognized by the other. The idea of mutual recognition... implies that we actually have a need to recognize the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct'. (p. 8)

Sikelianos uses the mirror image in her poems because they reflect her motherhood experiences and the baby's other status refers to this mirror doubling. As Egan stated in her book, the metaphor of mirror can be problematic in that it does not allow the other's freedom. It is still thought of as a part of the whole, but it also needs to be considered as the separation from an 'other'. Therefore, it creates duplicity and emphasizes the complex structure. After-the-birth, the baby acquires its own identity, but it still adheres to the mother in terms of its needs. As a result, mutual recognition appears. It is seen that Eva Grace is Sikelianos' other and they are mutually recognized between each other. However, the processes of time and identity cause them to analyze as separate beings. The context of mirror is examined in terms of this aspect, and Egan continues to state this double relation with her statements in *Mirror Talk*. For example, she mentions, "the 'real presence,' furthermore, of speaker or writer is confirmed by the responsiveness of each to the other and by the fact that their dialogue is comprehensible only in terms of the involvement of both" (Egan, 1999, pp. 8-9). It illustrates the mother-baby relationship in *Body Clock* because the link between the mother and her other self is seen as the 'real

presence' only when their connection is responded from each other. For instance, Sikelianos' motherhood and her baby's new identity are the best projections of this situation as in this context Sikelianos has a desire to achieve her motherhood in an emotional way that is seen with her drawings and writing style. Sikelianos states the double status of the mother-baby relationship in *Body Clock*:

The poem can be as risky as the body. Male & Black, Female& White. The body lies quivering with self and self-doubt. The body covered with question marks. (Each pore punctuated by it.) Lick it all over with your mirrored tongue. I mean there is another body in the bed. This adds and subtracts doubt. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 107)

These lines indicate the double condition of Sikelianos as the mother of Eva Grace and the author of *Body Clock* poems because she sheds light on her complex self-status with the expressions of 'self and self-doubt.' Additionally, Sikelianos emphasizes the construction of her baby's identity revealing another double situation within the baby's own conscious, and this occasion is explained via Lacan's theory as the mirror stage because when the baby recognizes herself in the mirror, its identity starts to come into existence gradually. Therefore, Sikelianos also refers to the mirror stage of Lacan in her poem. Furthermore, Sikelianos expresses time issue with the mirror concept in *Body Clock*; for example, she examines the reflection of time with the mirror metaphor in the following lines:

shattered across the bed: baby,
bodies
gods above their counterparts
below scattered
across a mirror of time. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 111)

Time is another complex notion in *Body Clock*, and so this reflection of time implies the separateness of Eva Grace from her mother Sikelianos. However, at the same time, the integration of both entities instinctually happens. This situation creates complexity like the problematic status of mirror in *Mirror Talk*.

Body Status

It is a highly significant point to look at the mirror concept within the relationship between words and images in *Mirror Talk* and Susanna Egan (1999) presents this issue as follows: "one effect of the relationship between words and photographs is their ability to fix and to release each other in the representation of the flux of experience. So the written caption limits speculation on the picture, and the picture specifies the subject of language" (p. 20). Sikelianos uses both language and drawings so as to transmit her thoughts, and so this quotation is considered

in *Body Clock* poems because they are the representation of Sikelianos' life. This quota also examines the mirror concept in terms of the reflection image in that it creates harmony and integration between images and words from this perspective. Therefore, these elements strengthen the idea of life reflections. Sikelianos achieves this notion in her poems while not staying inside the borders of language. Rather, she draws her ideas in her representative world, and it can be said that the essence of Egan's expression is seen in *Body Clock* poems.

Susanna Egan also analyzes the body status in the section of "Contemporary Elements: the Politics of Crisis and the Body" in *Mirror Talk* and she states her thoughts about the body with the reference of Paul Ricoeur: "Paul Ricoeur, for example, writes of 'the absolutely irreducible signification of one's own body,' suggesting that its dual status, as a fragment of one's experience of the world and as one's own, enables it to provide 'the limiting reference point of the world' (54)" (Egan, 1999, p. 6). This statement presents the construction of the body with its dual and fragmented notion because according to Egan, the body is the representation of the self and this self-status reflects experiences in a limited way as it is also restricted by the other's self in this context. Sikelianos emphasizes the dual status of the body between the identities of mother and author. She also shows the fragmentation of time with her body image. When analyzed in terms of the body, *Body Clock* poems stress the growth of the body in the pregnancy moment of Sikelianos. Thus, it can be said that the dual status of Sikelianos' body comes from the status of her baby as Eva Grace continuously grows up inside her mother's womb. It is seen in the following lines:

Here, spicules were built. Assembled
into a needle-like house. Transparent. Airy. Gorgeous. Constructed.
to withstand all time.

What? says Body. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 105)

These lines emphasize the inquiries of body with the question mark 'What?' because it tries to create a doubtful expression. In the poem, the new 'being' starts to be formed with cells and it appears as a miracle in the eyes of Sikelianos. Therefore, this questioning is considered as a critical point in that the duality which Egan mentions in *Mirror Talk* is seen with the growth of Sikelianos' body and the separation of Eva Grace from her body. The illustrations of a doubling body open a great examination to understand the relation between Egan and Sikelianos. Another important quotation reflecting the status of body in *Mirror Talk* is presented with the image of Möbius strip. Egan explains this issue:

...from Lacan the image of the Möbius strip in order to describe embodied subjectivity/psychical corporality: The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other (xii). (Egan, 1999, p. 6)

Möbius strip refers to the relationship of Sikelianos and her baby as this image is in the shape of a spiral and this spirality illustrates the representation of the link between the mother and her baby. In this spirality, lines are not integrated with each other but they are in a close relationship. Therefore, it can be stated that Sikelianos is not completely integrated with her baby because their identities are separated from each other after-the-birth. However, the shifting nature of these bodies both holds them together and strengthens their separate identities in the process of pregnancy.

Language in Control of Meaning

The language in control of meaning will be analyzed in the context of *Body Clock*. Language is considered as the paternal law in Sikkelianos's poems, so it is expressed with the elements of patriarchal society. Susanna Egan tells this status of language with the expressions of Levi in *Mirror Talk*. For example, she states: "Levi makes what he calls 'an obvious observation that where violence is inflicted on man it is also inflicted on language' (1989a, 97)" (Egan, 1999, p. 162). This statement demonstrates the language appears as the use of power because these kinds of linguistic expressions remind powerful human-beings and their effects continue throughout history. Sikkelianos expresses language as the control mechanism and she refers to the patriarchal society. For instance, she reveals this issue with "Fifth Hour's Residue" in *Body Clock*:

Clouds fall the six-sided hour calls itself hexagonal
orthopedic the hour
limps toward its destination the destination brain corals I mean it
doesn't seem to but it shifts
every hour I saw declared itself as closed system
every hour I greeted had commerce with men every hour I scolded mouthed
its blank
(unprintable) intention
every hour geoded into something weird and good. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 112)

The patriarchal society is stated with the dominant heterosexual temporal reflections here, and it clearly explains how the patriarchy rules over everything including in time. In addition, Sikelianos emphasizes that this kind of language is 'a closed system' which is in favor of the manhood because it restricts various practices and it is against innovations in every area. Egan strengthens the 'connections between language and life' with the expressions of Levi: "Levi's writings elaborate the many and significant connections between language and life: first, because he demonstrates the profound damage caused by language that is stripped of human and imaginative references; and second, because his narrator resists the torpor that this damage includes in order to recreate human interaction" (Egan, 1999, p. 162). The status of Sikelianos is a good projection of this quotation in that she escapes from the strict rule of language as the flow of conscious and emotions are expressed with her drawings in the poems. Sikelianos has common points with Egan in terms of revealing the negative effects of patriarchal language. She tells the use of authoritative language in *Body Clock*:

What thing time can't shatter

what thing time can time shatter. (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 34)

The first statement of these lines is written in an italic form and this form refers to the general expression in literary texts. For example, novels, famous quotations, or important terms are written in italics in literature, and so the italic form emphasizes the dominance of the language. Moreover, Sikelianos uses the italic form in the context of time in order to show the wholeness of time inside the patriarchal system. Egan stresses language is shaped with experiences and she presents this issue with the example of a German camp in *Mirror Talk*: "Levi's text is 'intensively aware,' as Epstein puts it, 'of how the German of the camp deprives language of its meaning' not only because it distorts experience but also, one might add, because it erases alternative languages and peoples (33)." (Egan, 1999, p. 163) Language and experience are examined together in this context because the lack of language is seen with experiences which affect language and its use in this context. Sikelianos writes her own experiences in *Body Clock* poems and she expresses herself in a fragmented language structure as the processes of birth and pregnancy create new feelings for the mother. Furthermore, her drawings and sketches closely indicate her emotional status and the inadequacy of language in the narration of birth and pregnancy moments. Language also goes down in flames about expressing the birth, and so Sikelianos prefers to draw and paint her thoughts in addition to the use of language.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Body Clock: Poems* presents the reflection of Eleni Sikelianos's pregnancy and birth experiences in her life. These poems emphasize her personal side, and while narrating them, she integrates her poems with diverse notions such

as time, body, and motherhood. The title, *Body Clock*, constitutes the main idea of her book that is the integration of body and time together. Moreover, they are great projections to reveal the close relations of biology and poetry. Sikelianos considers language as a living concept because of her interest in biology and she shows this liveliness with her drawings that involve in the use of spiral and cambered lines.

Body Clock presents four significant analyses such as “the speaking/split subject”, “semiotic chora & symbolic device”, “maternal body/ drive” and “poetic language/ carnivalesque” in terms of Kristevian theory. Sikelianos is seen as the speaking-split subject in *Body Clock* because of her pregnancy and birth experiences which refer to her maternal and authorial identities. Moreover, semiotic chora is seen as the representation of instinctual and maternal reflections, and the motherhood is examined with this context; on the other side, the symbolic device illustrates the social structures of life such as language and societies’ values. The third point of the analysis focuses on the maternal body and drive which are the main conceptions of *Body Clock* as Sikelianos experiences the motherhood with her poetic life and poems. ‘Drive’ comes from the instinctual situation of mother in Kristevian theory, and so it expresses the fluidity and flexibility of feelings. For example, Sikelianos reflects her own thoughts and feelings with her drawings and manuscripts that present her free style. Therefore, the drawings and visual materials in *Body Clock* are examples of ‘drive.’ In the final part of this analysis, poetic language and ‘carnivalesque’ are examined in *Body Clock*: Poems and Sikelianos uses the creative poetic language in her poems which does not obey the general literary rules. For example, she uses broken sentences, disordered syntax, and new vocabularies in her poetry.

Body Clock: Poems are also analyzed in terms of Susanna Egan’s *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*. In this perspective, the poems are examined with three terms such as the mirror conception, body status, and language in control of meaning. Mirror and body are the most significant terms for *Body Clock* because her poems reflect the duplicity coming from the maternal status and the situation of body in itself. Furthermore, Sikelianos considers language as the control of meaning and she prefers to draw her thoughts instead of writing that is a general system in literature. Therefore, it can be said that visual elements are quite important to understand better the stance of Sikelianos in *Body Clock*.

In the light of these two analyses in *Body Clock* the study explicitly presents Sikelianos’s ideas about both biology and poetry which are formed with the integration of body and time. According to her, time constructs human-beings and body is the indicator of this mechanical process which indicates the reconstruction of body in time. Moreover, time is the ungraspable notion in general, but Sikelianos deals with it as a concrete conception with her drawings and sketches in the poems. Thus, the style of *Body Clock* is different from other poems which carry out the dominant literary rules and regular syntax orders, and so it opens a new outlook into literature with her innovative concepts such as drawings, new vocabularies

such as “swerve” (Sikelianos, 2008, p. 108), and disordered syntaxes.

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