

# Subjects-in-Process: A Kristevan Reading of Semiotic, Symbolic, and Abject Identities in *The Lollipop Shoes* and *The Strawberry Thief*

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## Abstract

This study performs a Kristevan reading of Joanne Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes* (2007) and *The Strawberry Thief* (2019) to demonstrate that identity is precarious, processual, and continually reconstructed. Using qualitative close reading, the analysis applies Kristeva's key concepts, namely, the semiotic, the symbolic, abjection, and the subject-in-process, to show how rhythm, affect, and memory traverse and rework social forms. The first part of the discussion maps the semiotic/symbolic dynamics: respectability suppresses semiotic impulses, yet they return through expressions, nonverbal rhythms, gestures, and images. In Harris's food poetics, cadence and texture re-materialize signification. The second section examines abjection across registers: the double's mimetic intrusion collapses the self/other; the corpse stages death-as-contamination, which disrupts communal order; and the revenant memory corrodes symbolic promises. The third and final part synthesizes these pressures as a subject-in-process: Vianne's iterative selves, Rosette's creative semiotic, and the maternal negotiation of attachment and separation keep identity open, provisional, and continually remade. The findings position Harris within debates on fluid identity, gendered space, and the materiality of signification and contribute a reproducible heuristic: semiotic/symbolic mapping, abjection across registers, and integration as a subject-in-process for applying Kristeva to contemporary fiction. This study shows how affective rhythms and abject shocks repeatedly reconfigure symbolic forms, making identity a practice of ongoing becoming rather than a fixed, settled state.

**Keywords:** Julia Kristeva, psychoanalytic literary criticism, *The Lollipop Shoes*, *The Strawberry Thief*, Joanne Harris

## 1. Introduction

While psychology and cultural theory have long examined identity (Erikson, 1968), poststructural accounts reconceive it as fluid, relational, and socially produced (Hall, 1990). Erikson (1968) notes that, "Everybody has heard of 'identity crisis,' and it arouses a mixture of curiosity, mirth, and discomfort" (p. 15). It is a midcentury coinage that later theory radicalizes. For Hall (1990), identities are "not an essence but a positioning," articulated within discourse and difference rather than discovered as an inner truth (p. 225). Butler (1988) further reinforces this concept: identity takes shape performatively as "a stylized repetition of acts" that are sedimented through norms rather than derived from a prior core (p. 519).

According to Julia Kristeva, identity is not a possession but an ongoing negotiation at the shifting border between the semiotic (rhythm, affect, drive) and the symbolic (law, grammar, social order), further shaped by abjection and the subject-in-process. Building on *Powers of Horror* (1982) and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), this study adopts this framework. Signification arises from the tension of these registers rather than from one aspect alone: "When the semiotic chora disturbs the thetic position by redistributing the signifying order, we note that the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 108). A second crucial concept, abjection, names the psychic operation by which the subject expels what threatens identity and order—corpses, bodily waste, uncanny doubles—producing both disgust and fascination while exposing the unstable boundaries between self/other and subject/object. "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Extending to the social domain, Kristeva (1991) considers identity as a negotiation with the foreign within and without: the subject moves between belonging and estrangement.

Within this framework, the present study reads Joanne Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes* (2007; U.S. title *The Girl with No Shadow*) and *The Strawberry Thief* (2019) to examine identity. In the former work, Vianne Rocher's carefully managed anonymity in Montmartre is unsettled by Zozie de l'Alba's seductive mirroring. In the latter, a contested bequest, village conflict, and new arrivals (notably Morgane Dubois) reopen questions of belonging and self-definition (Harris, 2007, 2019). Across both novels, identity appears as a Kristevan subject-in-process: precarious as abjection continually pressures it and generative as semiotic rhythms—gesture, affect, memory, and sensory "food poetics"—repeatedly traverse and rework symbolic forms.

## 2. Methods

Grounded in Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic framework, this study employed a qualitative close reading of *Powers of Horror* (1982) and

*Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) to analyze Joanne Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes* (2007) and *The Strawberry Thief* (2019). Four Kristevan concepts structured the analysis: the semiotic (rhythm, affect, bodily drive; maternal chora), the symbolic (law, grammar, social order), abjection (what is cast off yet returns at the border of the self), and the subject-in-process (identity as ongoing becoming).

The discussion proceeds in three phases. First, the semiotic/symbolic mapping identifies passages where rhythm, tone, gesture, synesthesia, and sensory food poetics operate as semiotic pressures that traverse or strain the symbolic discourses of grammar, institution, law, and respectability; manual coding flagged self-fashioning/naming, nonverbal expressiveness, and stylistic excess that foregrounds prosody over denotation. Second, abjection across registers, guided by *Powers of Horror*, traces abjection externally (the alluring double and mimetic intrusion), corporeally (contact with death, contamination), and psychically (recurrent memory, anticipatory loss), where the maternal body is foregrounded. Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (2007) outlines how leakage, reproduction, and embodiment intensify the abject. Annotations recorded boundary failures (self/other, life/death, clean/unclean) and their spillover into the communal order (inheritance, law, and belonging). Third, integration as a subject-in-process synthesizes these findings to model identity as contingent and continually remade at the semiotic/symbolic border, with motherhood treated as a privileged site of attachment and separation. This study, therefore, applies Kristeva's theory to demonstrate how semiotic and symbolic dynamics, abject pressures, and maternal negotiations shape the identities of the female characters.

### 3. Literature Review

In the last two decades, academic discourse on Harris has unified a common critical framework for her narrative technique. Critics often position the *Chocolat* series at the intersection of magical realism, home enchantment, and gendered space, viewing Harris's food-centric settings as venues for negotiating identity and social power (Adhikary, 2023). Recent studies suggest that the sequels intensify the challenges associated with care, constraint, and communal order, heightening ethical considerations and providing insight into the influence of gendered practices and culinary rituals on subjectivity (Rajeswari & Anitha, 2025). This literature review unfolds chronologically, documenting Harris's critique from the earliest investigations to the most recent additions.

Brooks (2007) revealed that *The Lollipop Shoes* is "another gothic ganache" with a darker premise. Brooks's review contends that Vianne renounces magic in Paris until a shape-shifting, credit-card-stealing witch targets Anouk's emerging powers, and it states that the sequel lacks the "pleasing bittersweetness" of *Chocolat*. In this reading, Brooks (2007) positions the book as an ominous, genre-tilting continuation that foregrounds masquerade and threatens the earlier novel's tonal balance.

Petrulionė (2012) foregrounds Harris in translation studies as a sustained case for culture-specific items—terms whose meanings are tightly bound to local context. She argues that Harris's culinary and local references resist one-to-one equivalence and carry symbolic as well as affective weight.

Sasser (2014) expands upon this line of inquiry by introducing the concept of "strategized belonging" to illustrate how magical realism negotiates community and agency. This perspective aligns with Harris's combination of common life and uncanny excesses. These methodologies foreshadow subsequent food/affect analyses by illustrating how Harris's tactile, gustatory prose transcends mere referentiality and serves as a platform for negotiating social power and identity.

Beckerman (2019) examines *The Strawberry Thief* as a return to Lansquenet that mirrors *Chocolat*'s Lent-season tensions but shifts the thematic center from church versus individual to intrafamilial conflict. The plot revolves around Narcisse's bequest to Rosette and the arrival of Morgane Dubois, a tattoo artist whose uncanny practice stirs up the village's memories and fears; the motifs of the wind and mirror visions reinforce the book's mystical register. Beckerman praises Harris's evocative atmosphere and treatment of mother-child bonds, grief, and change while noting pacing issues. Overall, the review presents the novel as a sensuous, magical family drama that likely satisfies fans of *Chocolat*, despite some structural weaknesses.

Law (2019) evaluates *The Strawberry Thief* as a delicately paced return to the *Chocolat* universe, woven with an underlying darkness and "a hint of magic unleashing powers difficult to control." The series' recurring tensions are rekindled in Lansquenet during the Lent season; she interprets it as a coming-of-age story spanning two generations: the narrative centers on a daughter's suppressed independence and a mother's protective dread. Overall, Law frames the novel as a quietly unsettling, magic-tinged family drama rather than a church-versus-individual polemic, emphasizing constraint, care, and change.

Interpreting *Chocolat* through the lenses of gender and food studies, Stewart (2021) argues that culinary activities negotiate culture and tradition by defining identity. The psychoanalytic aspect examined in this research has been neglected by critics, who have focused on food, emotion, and empowerment since 2021. Citing the proverb "Tell me what you eat, I'll tell you what you are," she asserts that food imagery in women's literature mediates domesticity, patriarchal tyranny, and suppressed desire while facilitating self-expression. In Harris's novel, chocolate serves as a revolutionary force, challenging religion and community traditions and rewriting collective identity (Stewart, 2021).

Norfolk (2021) considers *The Strawberry Thief* a magical return to Lansquenet. The author praises Harris's "lyrical writing," "unique brand of magical realism," and atmosphere while focusing on plot twists such as Narcisse's death and gift to Rosette, Reynaud's confession, and the arrival of the tattoo artist Morgane Dubois. Norfolk focuses on themes such as the wind as a sign of change and presents Rosette as a major protagonist who affirms difference. The review discusses Harris's synesthetic writing, describing the book as a "visual, verbal, and sensual delight" that explores the themes of immigration, rejection, racism, and fear of outsiders with "deep

humanity." Norfolk sees the novel as a pleasant continuation of the *Chocolat* series, where family, religion, and community come together with somewhat strange components.

Adhikary (2023) characterizes *Chocolat* as a magical-realist critique of clerical and patriarchal authority. He reads the novel as a blend of magical realism and social reformation in a village steeped in Christian orthodoxy, arguing that Harris uses the confectioner's shop to challenge restrictive norms and model a more humane and accepting community. Using literary analysis, the study shows that Vianne, who is cast as a witch, outsider, and atheist, exposes clerical hypocrisy and catalyzes social change. Adhikary contends that Harris balances magical and realist explanations: Vianne's near-preternatural attunement to the customers' desires serves as the text's mystical hinge, inviting readers to experience the marvelous alongside rationality. Overall, *Chocolat* emerges as a "unique blend" in which food-centered enchantment enables ethical and communal transformation while challenging orthodox authority.

Sruthi and Karpagavadi (2024) analyze The *Lollipop Shoes* as an exploration of self-identity, feminine empowerment, bullying, and motherhood. They examine Vianne's conflict between her magical legacy and yearning for normalcy, Anouk's quest for independence, Rosette's role in familial caregiving, and Zozie's duplicitous charm. The authors contend that Harris emphasizes women's resilience through maternal duty, portraying motherhood as both a burden and a source of strength while advocating authenticity and self-acceptance as transformative responses to societal conformity and compulsion. The authors present Harris's sequel as a story in which female agency evolves in response to bullying and patriarchal oversight, illustrating how the acceptance of one's "true self" constitutes an ethical and liberating stance through character interactions (Sruthi & Karpagavadi, 2024).

Bozorova (2024) analyzes *Chocolat* from the perspective of magic realism, contending that Harris amalgamates the magical with quotidian village life, primarily through food, particularly chocolate, to examine gender norms, religious conservatism, and societal conformity. In this narrative, magic serves not only as embellishment but also as a medium for social criticism, challenging entrenched traditions and envisioning the potential for collective reform. This analysis situates the book within the larger context of magic realism, emphasizing Harris's impact on modern English literature and the enduring significance of her ideas.

While the existing scholarship has illuminated important aspects of Harris's fiction—such as food, community, religion, and gender—from feminist, cultural, and postcolonial perspectives, it has paid relatively little attention to the psychoanalytic dynamics of identity in the *Chocolat* sequels. In particular, previous studies tend either to privilege *Chocolat* itself or to treat identity in broadly thematic or static terms. This study contributes to the existing literature by applying Kristeva's concepts to these novels. It reconceptualizes the chocolate shop as a semiotic influence on symbolic order, interpreting Zozie and death/grief as forms of abjection, and delineates Vianne and Rosette as subjects-in-process. Employing psychoanalytic theories in literary works, this study distinguishes itself from other criticisms by emphasizing the continuous search for oneself.

#### 4. Analysis and Discussion

This discussion reads Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes* (2007) and *The Strawberry Thief* (2019) through Kristeva to trace identity as a subject-in-process. Part 1 maps the semiotic/symbolic dynamics via (1) Suppression, (2) Expression, and (2) Style; Part 2 treats abjection through (1) the Double, (2) the Corpse, and (3) Revenant Memory; and Part 3 synthesizes these concepts in (1) Becoming (Vianne), (2) Creative semiotic (Rosette), and (3) Maternal negotiation. Together, these sections show how Harris's narratives enact Kristeva's categories in terms of the scenes, sentences, and styles.

##### 4.1 The Semiotic and the Symbolic

Drawing on Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), this study distinguishes between two interdependent modalities of signification: the symbolic and the semiotic. These modalities are not mere opposites; their ongoing tension produces meaning and shapes subjectivity. Following this framework, this study examined how semiotic pressure traverses and disturbs symbolic structures within the constitution of identity. Accordingly, the analysis is organized around the themes of suppression, expression, and style, as developed in Joanne Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes* (2007) and *The Strawberry Thief* (2019).

###### 4.1.1 Suppression: the Symbolic Policing of Semiotic Excess

According to Kristeva (1984), suppression is the symbolic policing of semiotic excess, which is a containment that leaks. In *The Lollipop Shoes*, respectability scripts Vianne's self-effacement with the precision of a grammar lesson: she refashions herself as "Yanne," vows "no more magic," and seeks urban "invisibility" to conform to law, grammar, and propriety (Harris, 2007, p. 22). The diction of camouflage—"a city confers a kind of invisibility on those who seek it... we now wear the colours of the native birds—too ordinary, too drab for a second glance"(p. 22)—labels suppression as mimicry: a styled ordinariness that promises safety at the price of rhythm and desire (p. 22). However, even at the height of compliance, the text predicts its undoing. The mask falters—"something else has slipped away. I don't know what, but I know I miss it"—and with that admission, the semiotic returns as felt lack, an unease that the symbolic cannot domesticate (Harris, 2007, p. 25). Kristeva describes the dynamic as follows: the symbolic promises stability through rule, title, and tone, but it excludes the pulsions of affect, maternal care, and bodily cadence, which return as a "latent gesture" and an unquiet memory (Kristeva, 1984). In this light, Vianne's vow of "no more magic" reads not merely as renunciation but as a technique of self-editing: a reduction of rhythm ("no more"), a thinning of sensorium ("drab"), a careful management of voice and gesture such that the subject may be legible to the city's law. However, the price of legibility is a diminished self, and the text's sentences record the price. Thus, suppression reads as performance rather than essence, exposing the brittleness of the symbolic order. "Harris demonstrates that

gender roles are socially constructed and can be resisted through performative acts that transform ordinary practices into tools of empowerment" (Rajeswari & Anitha, 2025, p. 76). Based on this breach, the analysis turns to how expressions persist within the structures that attempt to contain them.

#### 4.1.2 Expression: Semiotic Persistence within the Symbolic

Expression refers to the persistence of the semiotic within the symbolic, where rhythms, gestures, and images traverse form and are quietly rewritten. Rosette embodies this persistence: her humming, signing, and drawing make meaning through rhythm and gestures rather than propositional speech—"Bam-bam-bamm..." with the thump of a sandalled foot (Harris, 2007, p. 88); "She is learning sign language, and is fast acquiring vocabulary" (p. 23). These paired details establish two "lexicons": a prosodic one (song + thump) and a manual one (sign + vocabulary). Neither is a deficit: both are semiotic routes through which significance gains pressure and contour. *The Strawberry Thief* extends this pressure to its normative form. In one charged image, "The little girl had a wolf with her... and [she used] the pencil to fill in his giant shadow, a shadow so long that it filled half the page" (Harris, 2019, p. 56). The elongating shadow literalizes the overflow: the semiotic expands until the frame accommodates the differences. Rosette's stance clarifies the ethics of this expressivity: "I signed: I get it. That sucks... I shook my head. Why bother? This works" (Harris, 2019, p. 71). Her refusal to abandon signing—"This works"—is not oppositional for its own sake but rather a defense of a communicative mode that honors rhythm and embodiment. In Kristeva's terms, these energies do not exit the symbolic; they traverse and reconfigure it from within, warping their edges into new permeable shapes (Kristeva, 1984). Hence, the critical point is that nonverbal expressivity is not ancillary to meaning but constitutive of it. "The interpretation of a text, whether oral or written, does not necessarily require verbal interpretants, and even less so written interpretants" (Petrilli, 2003, p. 42). Thus, Harris's style enacts internal reworking at the language level.

#### 4.1.3 Style: Food Poetics as Semiotic Cadence

Style marks the point where the semiotic moves through the symbolic, namely cadence, texture, and sensory excess to make meaning. Harris's food poetics stages this at the level of diction and syntax through sentences that carry "mouthfeel." In *The Lollipop Shoes*, the chocolatier's lexicon heightens the reader's awareness of the body: "The rich dark truffle, flavoured with rum; the hint of chilli in the blend; the yielding smoothness of the centre and the bitterness of the cocoa-powder finish ..."—a texture that sharpens sensation in "the mouth, the throat, the sensitive tongue" (Harris, 2007, p. 142). The semantics of taste are incorporated into the sentence's rhythm (list + apposition + elongating cadence) such that the description becomes prosody. Similarly, *The Strawberry Thief* converts method into meter: "Add a double handful of chopped dark chocolate pieces ... stir until the chocolate melts" (Harris, 2019, p. 100). Verb-initial imperatives ("add... stir...") beat akin to a recipe-drum; procedure becomes cadence. Kristeva's vocabulary helps fix what is happening: rhythmic excess rematerializes signification—it interrupts the referential chains, regounds language in sensation, and renders subjectivity as a felt shifting process (Kristeva, 1984). Read alongside the accounts of bread and chocolate as cultural grammar (Steel, 2008), style operates in a dual manner—at once code and pulse—such that taste and memory circulate as meaning even before (or beyond) denotation. In practice, this implies that the novel's sensory surplus performs political work. The textures of the truffles and choreography of stirring are not ornamental. Rather, they are arguments lodged at the level of syntax and mouthfeel: arguments about whose senses count and how knowledge moves. As a cultural locus, food is particularly apt for this work as it encompasses economies, hierarchies, and bonds: "Food ... is the foundation of every economy, marking social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions—an evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships" (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013, p. 3). Harris's sensuous style retains the semiotic within the sentence, where it can recode the symbolic from within and return the reader to the body as the ground of meaning.

Overall, these moves dramatize a Kristevan dialectic in which the characters navigate repression, desire, and creative articulation, and identity emerges as a subject-in-process rather than as a settled essence (Kristeva, 1984). Vianne's masking demonstrates how symbolic scripts become legible through self-editing; Rosette's rhythms and images illustrate how the semiotic traverses the same structures and amends them from within; and the food poetics reveal how language participates in this re-making, turning cadence into critique. Thus, the three strands of suppression, expression, and style are not discrete topics but phases of a single process: the semiotic pressing against, seeping through, and finally reorganizing the symbolic.

In this manner, Harris dramatizes how the semiotic continually destabilizes the symbolic order from within. However, identity is not only unsettled by the inner rhythms and drives but also by external disruptions. This directly leads into Kristeva's notion of abjection in which boundaries collapse under the force of the other. The next section turns to abjection to show how encounters with others push this inner disequilibrium to the point of crisis.

#### 4.2 Abjection and the Collapse of Boundaries

Abjection in Harris's oeuvre is expressed via three interrelated forms: the double, the corpse, and revenant memory. Each obscures the boundaries between the self and the other, as well as between life and death, resulting in an unstable identity. Kristeva posits that the abject must be rejected for the subject to achieve coherence; nonetheless, it remains at the periphery, provoking simultaneous attraction and repulsion (Kristeva, 1982).

##### 4.2.1 The Double (Zozie): Abjection as Mirroring/Usurpation

Zozie embodies abjection as a seductive double: she mirrors Vianne and begins to take on her roles as a mother and chocolatier. The domestic/maternal incursion is explicit—"in my kitchen, preparing my coffee, speaking with my daughter as if she were her own child"

(Harris, 2007, p. 263)—and culminates in Vianne watching herself “reborn … using my methods, speaking my lines” (p. 326). Zozie’s identity fluidity (“I’ve had more names than I can count,” p. 29; “At any point in time, I can assume the identity of any person. That is the source of my strength,” p. 201) makes the double’s allure and threat legible as a psychic invasion that both entices and repels. As Freud observes, “from having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death” (1955, p. 235). Creed clarifies the gendered charge—“the presence of the monstrous-feminine … speaks to us more about male fears” (2007, p. 17) while Rajeswari & Anitha note that “Harris demonstrates that gender roles are socially constructed and can be resisted through performative acts…” (2025, p. 76).

#### 4.2.2 The Corpse (Narcisse): Abjection as Death/Contamination

Narcisse’s body stages death as a sensory and juridical disturbance. Perceptually, “He lay so still, as if carved from wax, yet the room smelled of damp earth and endings” (Harris, 2019, p. 89); socially, the will “the oak wood … to be held in trust … to pass to Mademoiselle Rocher” (p. 22) reorders inheritance and belonging, exposing communal classifications as fragile. Neither fully subject nor object, the corpse persists as a liminal presence that unmoors Vianne and the village; for Rosette, the moment resonates semiotically—“to sing, to shout … my shadow-voice” (p. 12)—registering what language cannot. Kristeva names the limit: “the corpse … is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (1982, p. 4). Douglas extends the logic socially as “dirt is matter out of place” (2002, p. 44), explaining why the will’s fallout scrambles categories; Creed shows how such boundary panics are culturally gendered (2007, p. 46).

#### 4.2.3 Revenant Memory: Abjection as a Haunting/an Anticipatory Loss

Abjection also returns from within as memory and guarded loss, blurring the past/present and presence/absence. Vianne hears the lost beloved “in the wind and in the rattle of the shop door” (Harris, 2019, p. 146) while the earlier flight and concealment recur despite Parisian respectability (Harris, 2007). These traces, which are felt more than spoken, erode the boundaries from within, persist at the threshold of the self, and are neither assimilated nor expelled. Kristeva’s *Black Sun* (2008) locates this inner corrosion of symbolic activity: “the artist consumed by melancholia … struggle against the symbolic abdication” (2008, p. 9). Gordon (2008) reframes it as haunting: “to study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it” (p. 7).

In conclusion, if the semiotic undermines identity from within, abjection strikes from without, forcing the characters to confront mortality, duplicity, and psychic haunting. In both cases, the result is the same: the collapse of a stable identity. This lays the foundation for Kristeva’s third key idea, the subject-in-process, which treats identity not as fixed but as an ongoing process of becoming. In Harris’s sequels, this process is staged through repeated crossings of moral, spatial, and relational boundaries that unsettle any stable sense of self. The following section, therefore, examines how these crossings accumulate into an ongoing renegotiation of identity for Vianne, Rosette, and the wider community.

### 4.3 Subject-in-Process: Identity as an Ongoing Becoming

Part Three theorizes identity in Harris’s sequels as a subject-in-process: a speaking, desiring self continually negotiated at the shifting border of semiotic affect and symbolic law (Kristeva, 1984). On this account, identity is not a possession but rather a practice that is produced in and through representation and social relations (Hall, 1990) while drawing coherence from narrative self-articulation and intersubjective expectations (Benhabib, 1992). The paper develops this claim in three phases. (1) *Becoming (Vianne)* shows how iterative self-fashioning emerges under the pressures of doubling and abjection. (2) *Creative semiotic (Rosette)* traces how rhythm, image, and sensory “surplus” exceed mere denotation yet rework symbolic forms. (3) *Maternal negotiation* examines attachment and separation as sites where both the mother and the child remain in flux, and their identities are shaped by care, differences, and communal demands.

#### 4.3.1 Becoming (Vianne): Iterative Selves Under Pressure

In Harris’s sequels, identity unfolds as a Kristevan subject-in-process: semiotic pressures and abject shocks unsettle the symbolic forms; therefore, the characters persist in becoming rather than stabilizing as fixed essences (Kristeva, 1984). Vianne’s sequential self-fashioning from a traveling magician to “Yanne” to a rooted mother dramatizes this flux: “Vianne Rocher is long dead” (Harris, 2007, p. 19). The Parisian turn promises safety but feels brittle: “I wanted safety and normalcy… Still, it seemed like living behind glass” (Harris, 2007, p. 23). The double’s intrusion exposes the mask: “that uncomfortable feeling of watching myself—the Vianne Rocher I used to be—reborn in the person of Zozie de l’Alba, using my methods, speaking my lines, daring me to challenge her” (Harris, 2007, p. 326). Following Kristeva’s formulation of “No longer a transcendental ego nor a Cartesian cogito, the speaking being is rather a subject-in-process/on-trial [sujet en procès]” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 37), Hall urges that “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact… we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1990, p. 222). Benhabib (1992) cautions that “the identity of the self is constituted by a narrative unity, which integrates what ‘I’ can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of ‘me’” (p. 15).

#### 4.3.2 Creative Semiotic (Rosette): Meaning-Making Beyond Denotation

Rosette’s humming, gestures, and images function as a semiotic practice that is neither outside the symbolic nor fully contained by it, but continually reshapes it. In *The Strawberry Thief*, “Rosette spoke in colors and sounds, in ways that words could not encompass” (Harris, 2019, p. 134); the mural’s “swirls of blue and green… birds and flowers that appeared to shift with changing light” (Harris, 2019, p. 112) embody rhythmic surplus rather than closure. The text repeatedly marks her “shadow-voice” and rhythmic self-expression (Harris, 2019, pp. 12, 25, 28). Kristeva’s account makes the mechanism explicit: “when the semiotic chora disturbs the thetic position by redistributing

the signifying order, we note that the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 108). Similarly, Barthes reveals textual production through sensual excess: "what [writing aloud] searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh ... the grain of the throat ... that is bliss" (Barthes, 1975, p. 39). As a counterpoint, Eagleton (1983) cautions that such emphases can drift from history: "post-structuralism became a convenient way of evading such political questions altogether" (p. 133).

#### 4.3.3 Maternal Negotiation (Attachment/Separation): Subjects in Flux

Motherhood is the arena in which attachment and separation continuously redefine identity, establishing both the mother and child as evolving subjects. Vianne confronts the temporality of the role: "Anouk no longer requires me; Rosette will soon follow... Motherhood is merely a temporary state, not a lasting condition" (Harris, 2019, p. 178). Domestic scenes sharpen the anxieties of displacement—"I was in the kitchen fixing Rosette's snack, and I swear Zozie knew before I even—" (Harris, 2007, p. 221)—while Rosette's difference both enables expression and intensifies maternal vigilance: "She is learning sign language, and is fast acquiring vocabulary" (Harris, 2007, p. 23). Community norms pressure belonging "Why am I not like the others?" (Harris, 2019, p. 248), which continually reshape maternal identity from without. Kristeva considers maternity as a privileged scene of love, loss, and signification, in which separation inaugurates subjectivity yet never seals it: "the self-denial implicit in making oneself anonymous in order to transmit social norms" (Kristeva, 1985, p. 18). In melancholia's register, "the artist consumed by melancholia is at the same time the most relentless in his struggle against the symbolic abdication that blankets him" (Kristeva, 2008, pp. 8–9).

Chodorow emphasizes that early caregiving shapes identity via connections, stating, "Good-enough mothering requires certain relational capacities which are embedded in personality and a sense of self-in-relationship" (Chodorow, 1999, p. 33). In the meantime, Benjamin emphasizes intersubjective agency and recognition, stating that "the psychic repudiation of femininity, which includes the negation of dependency and mutual recognition, is homologous with the social banishment of nurturance and intersubjective relatedness" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 185).

In both novels, Vianne's refashioning, Rosette's semiotic creativity, and the maternal scene's negotiations show identity as fractured, provisional, and continually remade—Kristeva's subject-in-process in action. This completes the argument initiated in Part 1 (semiotic vs. symbolic) and intensified in Part 2 (abjection) and points to a broader conclusion about how Harris's style and scenes of care turn cadence, image, and gesture into engines of becoming. By combining semiotic rhythms, abject disruptions, and shifting maternal roles, Harris shows that identity is not a settled achievement but an ongoing negotiation; the semiotic, the symbolic, and the abject converge to reveal the subject-in-process not as a deficit but as a condition of being: fragile, unstable, and generative. In doing so, the sequels figure identity not as coherence finally secured at narrative closure, but as a rhythm of ongoing adjustment. The following section consolidates these insights and shows how a Kristevan lens can reframe critical understandings of Harris's sequels.

### 5. Results

This study demonstrates that in both *The Lollipop Shoes* and *The Strawberry Thief*, moments of composure rely on symbolic performance and are rather short-lived. Semiotic pressures, gestures, rhythms, and sensory surplus recurrently unsettle this composure and reinscribe meaning from within. Abject encounters (mimetic intrusion, contact with death, and haunting memories) destabilize identity, both within and without. Mother–child relations render identity an iterative negotiation between attachment and separation. Collectively, the corpus exhibits a precarious, processual, and continually remade identity, which is in line with Kristeva's model. Analytically, the semiotic, symbolic, abject, and subject-in-process jointly account for the texts' unstable subjectivities, showing how affective rhythms and abject shocks repeatedly reconfigure symbolic forms. Conceptually, the findings position Harris within the debate in psychoanalytic and feminist theories concerning fluid identity, gendered space, and the materiality of signification. Methodologically, the three-phase technique (semiotic/symbolic mapping, abjection across registers, and integration as a subject-in-process) provides a reproducible heuristic for applying Kristeva's theory to contemporary fiction. Harris's novels illustrate plastic subjectivity while foregrounding situated responsibility and communal constraint. Overall, the findings indicate how semiotic drive, symbolic law, and abject remainder intersect to produce a Kristevan subject-in-process without reducing the texts to theory, thus clarifying Harris's contribution to the current identity debates.

#### 5.1 Evaluating the Semiotic and the Symbolic (Psychoanalytic Perspective)

Harris stages identity as an unstable interplay between semiotic impulses and the symbolic order. In *The Lollipop Shoes*, Vianne's refashioning as "Yanne" functions as suppression: a performance of respectability that mutes affect, rhythm, and maternal bonding, yet proves provisional and porous. The semiotic reemerges through Rosette's nonverbal rhythms, gestures, and visual communication, which interrupt and refashion shared norms. At the level of style, Harris's food poetics emphasizes rhythm, texture, and experience rather than denotation, producing semiotic excess within symbolic language. Collectively, these patterns substantiate Kristeva's account of the subject-in-process in which meaning is perpetually reconstructed by semiotic forces (Kristeva, 1984; Harris, 2007, 2019).

#### 5.2 Evaluating Abjection (Psychoanalytic Perspective)

Abjection is constitutive of identity formation in Harris across the three registers. (1) The Double (Zozie): mimetic intrusion into domestic and maternal spaces collapses the self/other boundaries and exposes the contingency of respectable identities. (2) The Corpse (Narcisse): contact with death—the "utmost of abjection"—contaminates perception and precipitates crises of communal classification (law,

inheritance, belonging), extending personal disturbance into social disorder. (3) Revenant Memory: lingering memory and anticipatory loss corrode internal certainties, forcing a continual renegotiation of the self's borders. These patterns support Kristeva's thesis that the abject undermines identity by confronting the subject with something unassimilable (Kristeva, 1982, 2008).

### 5.3 Evaluating the Subject-in-Process (Psychoanalytic Perspective)

Identities in the corpus are provisional and revisable and not fixed essences; selves are fractured, reinscribed, and remain open to return and repetition, corresponding to Kristeva's subject-in-process (Kristeva, 1984). Meaning-making repeatedly occurs at the boundary between the semiotic and the symbolic: rhythmic, affective, and material intensities do not exist outside language but reconfigure it from within, corroborating poetic transgression and the materiality of signification. Maternal relations function as a privileged site where attachment and loss recalibrate subjectivity. Motherhood is neither a stable role nor a terminal state but an ongoing negotiation through which the self is constituted, mourns, and is remade, consistent with Kristeva's notions of abjection and melancholia (Kristeva, 2008).

## 6. Conclusion

This study read Joanne Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes* and *The Strawberry Thief* through Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic framework to show how identity in these texts is constitutively unstable. First, it analyzed the semiotic and the symbolic, then the abjection, and finally the subject-in-process. The findings indicated that subjectivity is fractured and fluctuating, continually reshaped by repression and longing, recollection and absence, and encounters with the abject. In both narratives, the interplay of semiotic drives with symbolic order renders selfhood provisional. Vianne's iterative self-fashioning, Rosette's creative liminality, and the recurrent motifs of loss and death demonstrate that identities are produced, unmade, and remade in time.

Abjection functions as a crucial pressure point, disrupting settled norms at personal and communal levels (the double, the corpse, the haunting trace), while Harris's "food poetics" shows how rhythm, texture, and sensory surplus re-materialize signification from within symbolic language. Collectively, these dynamics substantiate Kristeva's subject-in-process: identity emerges not as a stable essence but as an ongoing negotiation among impulse, language, and social law.

Applying Kristeva's concepts to Harris's narrative and stylistic practices revealed how contemporary fiction creates the tensions and ambiguities of becoming felt. The novels reveal a subject that is fragile yet generative—perpetually reconfigured by embodied affect, cultural scripts, and residues of loss. Thereby illuminating the creative potential inherent in the instability of identity. Thus, the study contributes to feminist literary theory by reframing instability and contradiction as conditions of agency rather than signs of failure. It also advances psychoanalytic narratology by showing how Kristevan concepts can be mapped onto narrative voice, focalization, and motifs in contemporary popular fiction. For Harris scholarship and identity studies in fiction more broadly, the analysis offers a contemporary reading of the *Chocolat* sequels that models character not as a resolved essence at narrative closure but as a subject-in-process whose fragility and openness are themselves generative.

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## Authors' contributions

Dr. Arwa Abdullah Alhozaimi solely conceived, designed, conducted the research, wrote, and revised the manuscript; all aspects of the work were carried out solely without external assistance.

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