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Desire to Die in Poems of Anne Sexton and Stevie Smith

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Abstract: *This study aims at analyzing Anne Sexton's and Stevie Smith's obsession with death as established in their poetry, concentrating mainly on Freud's psychoanalysis of the death drive. Examining the writers' personal life and psychological state of mind, revealing the main reason behind their desire to die, and describing the way they reflected this death wish in their poems are the major concerns of this study. The first part presents a brief introduction to the concept of death, explaining Freud's theory of death drive and presenting the main reasons for wishing to die and how the unconscious mind develops this desire. The second part discusses the American confessional poetess Anne Sexton and how she confesses her death wish in her poems. Evidently, revealing her personal experience enables the reader to discover the inner reason behind this lust for death. The third part deals with the English Poet Stevie Smith who successfully admits her death wish in her poems. She reveals her struggles in life and views death as a god who can save her. In short, it could be asserted that death became Sexton's and Smith's greatest muse; they depict death as a welcome release and a gift for man which provides a peaceful end to life. The psychoanalysis acts as a mean of self-analysis, where both writers confess their desire to 'return to an earlier state', thus presenting death as a kinder and desired friend to be with. Finally, the study concludes that both poets desire death because they want peace and relief from their miserable life.*


Keywords: *Modern English Poetry, Anne Sexton, Stevie Smith, death wish, confessional poetry.*

Anne Sexton ve Stevie Smith'in Şiirlerinde Ölüm Arzusu

Öz: *Bu çalışma Anne Sexton ve Stevie Smith'in şiirlerinde yer almış olan Freudun pskoanalizindeki ölüm arzusunu temel alarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın başlıca konuları; yazarların kişisel hayatını ve zihnin psikolojik durumunu incelemek, ölüm arzusunun arkasındaki nedenini ortaya çıkarmak ve bu arzuyu şairlerin şiirlerinde nasıl yansıttıklarını göstermektir. İlk bölümde Freud'un ölüm arzusu teorisini açıklanmış, ölüm isteğinin ana sebeplerini ve bilinçdışı zihnin bu isteği nasıl geliştirdiğini ortaya koyarak ölüm kavramına kısa bir giriş sunmaktadır. İkinci bölümde ise*

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Amerika'da bir akım olan itiraf şiiri, Anne Sexton'ı ve Stevie Smith'in ölüm arzusunu, şiirlerinde nasıl itiraf ettiğini ele almaktadır. Ayrıca açık bir şekilde şairin kişisel deneyimlerini ortaya çıkarmak ve okuyucuya ölüme olan bu isteğin ardındaki içsel nedenini keşfetme olanağı vermektedir. Sexton, hayattaki mücadelelerini ortaya koyar ve ölümü kendisini kurtaracak bir tanrı olarak görmektedir. İkinci ve üçüncü bölümlerde ise şairlerin seçilmiş şiirleri, ölüm arzularının nedenlerini ortaya koymak için Freud'un pskoanalitik teorisi ışığında analiz edilmiştir. Kısacası Sexton ve Smith'in ölümün en büyük ilham perisi olduğu söylenebilir. Onlar ölümün hoş karşılanan bir teslimiyet olduğunun yanında, insan hayatını sona ulaştıran huzurlu bir hediye olarak göstermişlerdir. Psikanaliz, her iki yazarın da "önceki duruma dönme" isteğini itiraf ettikleri kendi kendini analiz etme yöntemi olarak işlev görmektedir. Böylece onlar, ölümün kendileri için iyi bir arkadaş olduğunu tavsir etmektedirler. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, her iki şairin de sefil ve berbat giden bir yaşantıdan kurtulmanın, rahata ve huzura kavuşmanın tek yolunun ölüm olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Modern İngiliz Şiiri, Anne Sexton, Stevie Smith, ölüm arzusu, itiraf şiiri.

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I. Introduction:

The poetry of the fifties in America and England managed successfully to manifest the poet's anguish, personal suffering, and trauma with the misery of the whole nation. The two poets, Anne Sexton and Stevie Smith, are obvious representatives of this kind of poetry. Their poems express feelings of disconnection, self-destruction, and agony that lead to an intense desire to die. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to explore the feelings of self-destruction and death wish. death is an omnipresent phenomenon of literature, where the universal appeal of death and its presence in literature can be understood in the poetic language through the poetry of P. B. Shelley:

Death is here and death is there,
Death is busy everywhere
All around, within, beneath
Above is death--and we are death (Shelley, 1905: 14).

Human beings are aware enough of death and its fatal ending because it is inevitable to everyone. Such awareness terrorizes one's conscience and will not allow the mind to relax until one finds ways to make sense of death by any means, such as traditions and tales, religions, and doctrines.

II. Freudian Psychoanalysis Theory

When relating Death to psychoanalysis, Freud summarizes his ideas in a paper entitled *Thoughts for the times on War and Death*. In its second section in *Totem and Taboo*, he

asserts that man could not admit the finality of death when he is confronting its reality, therefore imaginary ways are constructed by individuals to admit death's reality and at the same time to deny its finality. Freud added the idea of human guilt to his construction:

Man could no longer keep death at a distance, for he had tasted it in his pain about the dead; but he was nevertheless unwilling to acknowledge it, for he could not conceive of himself as dead. So, he devised a compromise: he conceded the fact of his own death as well, but denied it the significance of annihilation . . . In this way his train of thought ran parallel with the process of disintegration which sets in with death. His persisting memory of the dead became the basis for assuming other forms of existence and gave him the conception of a life continuing after apparent death (Freud, 1915: 294).

Initially, death wish, and death instinct may appear similar because violence, aggression, and death are apparent in both, but they do not accurately mean the same thing. The Death wish is closer to a psychological disorder than an instinct, while the death instinct is inherited within all human beings. The Death instinct described by Freud as 'Thanatos' is a death drive manifested as a desire to return to the previous state, lifelessness and stasis, and the state of none-existence in which individuals no longer experience anxiety, stress or tension. Besides, the death wish is generally expressed when life events conduct severe troubles and place the person under pressure and depression. Freud was dedicated to the idea that the human mind seeks a return to an earlier state. This return is a motivation towards annihilation, and it generally leads to suicidal desire and death wish (Mills, 2006).

Freud explained the construction of human mind based on two different sets of terms: conscious, unconscious, subconscious and Id, Ego, and Superego. the conscious mind serves the purpose of what the person is aware of. for example, of reading a material, hearing music or a conversation. the subconscious is the stuff from which dreams are formed. It may be called a storehouse for experience, impressions that these experiences create in the mind, and behaviors that are awakened or reinforced by such impressions. The last level of consciousness is known as unconsciousness. This consists of emotions, memories, and primitive instinct impulses hidden within the person. While the individual is not aware of their presence, they affect his/her behavior. Freud introduced three components of human identity or psychology called id, ego, and superego. The id is part of the unconscious, and it is guided by the principle of pleasure, which means that it seeks to make everything happy and satisfied, without considering anything and anyone. The ego is the aspect of personality, which is influenced by the open control of the outside world. However, unlike the id, it is not born with individuals, and it does not function on the unconscious level of the mind only. The superego is an agency that seeks to enforce the striving for perfection (Lapsley & Stey, 2011).

Consequently, if someone has a strong sense of ego, the stress created by Superego can be managed easily and efficiently. Although people with little ego power are torn between these demands, it can be logical for those with too much ego power. The ego must be able to balance the three powers to maintain a balanced personality and mental health. When the id is dominant, the individuals will act according to their desires and instincts without considering other people and regardless of the acceptability of action or behavior. On the contrary, if the Superego is dominant, it can lead to an attitude that is rather moralistic and over-judgmental, which causes the individuals to reject something that they find unethical, for instance, to be more like a saint.

The theory of drives is formulated by Sigmund Freud during his life. In his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which was published in 1920, he divided the human instincts into two major parts which he called: life instincts (Eros) and death Instincts (Thanatos). He assumed that these drives are responsible for many of individuals' behaviors. Life impulses are often referred to as sexual instincts, dealing with the basic survival, pleasure, and reproduction. Such instincts are important to maintain the individual's life and continuing the species. Cooperation, love, and other pro-social actions are commonly associated with this instinct. The concept of the death instinct was initially described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which Freud (1961: 32) proposed "the aim of all life is death". Freud found that those who have experienced a traumatic incident often re-enact it in support of his philosophy, they occasionally recreate these experiences. Freud (1955) stated that Thanatos is a bunch of negative and destructive forces. They should be in harmonious with Eros; they coexist together so that the person can work properly.

The death wish is an expression used when the individuals cannot succeed in dealing with life's problems or difficulties. Extreme proportions of misery and anxiety lead the individuals to desire death as they cannot deal with the reality of their lives. Several reasons exist behind self-destruction and death wish as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and psychosexual development. McLeod (2015) illustrates depression as a mood disorder which restrains the individuals from living a normal life, within their family or at work. Because of the frequency of diagnosis, Seligman (1973) refers to depression as the 'common cold' of psychiatry. In his book *Mourning and melancholia* (1917), Freud mentioned that the loss of a parent or loved one could be linked directly to some cases of depression. Trauma can be defined as a disturbing and shocking experience, whereby a person can never overcome it (Joseph, 2012). The bipolar disorder is a kind of manic depression. It is a mental illness that might bring a complete change in the life of the person who suffers from it. A sudden mood change is one of the obvious remarks of this illness; the person's mood can change from the highest point of happiness and hopefulness to the lowest point of depression, sadness, and hopelessness (Teixeira, 1992). Freud claimed that when growing up, every child goes through what he called the psychosexual stages of development. He assumes five phases of psychosexuality: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital (Adrian, 2007). If the person moves from one psychosexual stage to

another without any difficulties or problems, the person is healthy. If not, it will be fixated at that stage.

III. Confessional Poetry and Anne Sexton

Confessional Poetry is a postmodern branch that emerged in the United States in the 1950s. The most significant aspect is the blatant autobiography, often viewed as self-deprecation. Taboo topics such as sexuality, alcoholism, mental health, and family relations are also discussed. Anne Sexton is considered one of America's most influential poets in the 20th century. Sexton revealed her personal feelings in her poetry, and confessed the agony of depression, death wish, and suicidal mother's emotions for her daughters. She filled her poems with characters and plots about death, myths, and ordinary tales in a supernatural way. After she gave birth to her second child in 1955, she began to suffer from postpartum depression. She slides into terrible spells of depression as she describes, and she became perplexed, agitated and under the control of feeling 'unreal' and 'lost' (Middlebrook, 1991: 31). Sexton took medications but with no progress. On the contrary, she was suffering from anxiety and anger. Despite the support provided by her family, her state got worse, and she was finally hospitalized for treatment in July 1956.

Writing Poems helped Sexton cope with her personal problems and escape from the reality. She expressed her trauma in different ways, thus releasing her suppressed feelings. In *Her kind* which Sexton wrote in 1960 for the manuscript of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, she stands against the social norms that women suffer from. She identifies three major roles women have been throughout history, 'a possessed witch, housewife, and adulteress' each one is alienated, feels depressed, and seeks death. In her essay *Confessing the Body*, Elizabeth Gregory (2006: 41) mentions the fact that Sexton is out of the older ways of life through "indicating a more general willingness to be public about things the culture usually shames its members into silence about". She also adds "their kind does not die of shame; instead, they contest the rule of shame that has enforced the age-old silence about female experience" (2006: 41).

Sexton imagined death as a way that leads to liberation and tried to illustrate the reason that makes women feel persecuted and she found out it easy to identify herself with women who died because of the conventions of her society. *Her kind* is a recollection of all what Sexton experienced in the past. She remembers all the roles she used to assume in her life and all the miseries that she passed through. The poem is a portrayal of women who used to struggle in a society that regards her as an outcast, such as a possessed witch, a housewife and a prostitute. These women feel consistent insecurity and psychological stress, which leads to death wish. This struggle indicates that these female figures are not afraid of death. These female characters are no more than reflections of Anne Sexton herself, since the poet uses the persona 'I' in order not to leave her readers confused about the identity of the speaker in the poem. The ideas of death and abnormality loom large in the poem and take control of

the speaker's mind. Thus, Sexton describes three types of women who suffered and rebelled against the social constrictions. Each stanza in the poem ends with the refrain "I have been her kind" (Sexton, 1981: 15) which refers to the speaker's identification with the female characters described.

Sexton describes herself as a 'possessed witch' in the first stanza, referring implicitly to her drastic experience in life. "I have gone out, a possessed witch/ haunting the black air, braver at night" (Sexton, 1981: 15), She calls women in general as witches and states that all what they get from the society is oppression and condemnation. She emphasizes the idea of being powerful, strange, and extraordinary. These traits reveal the absence of fear of death. The allusion to witches and the witch trials that took place in Salem in sixteenth-century America recalls the agony and punishment these witches faced at the hands of their persecutors. Despite the pain that the witches suffer from, the poem does not indicate any fear of death. These witches suffered for being misunderstood by their society and accused of being devilish powers of seduction to men. The suffering led to their alienation from the rest of the society, which resulted in deep depression that made even death itself a better option than living. Sexton fantasizes herself as soaring over houses as if she has already been taken by death. She dwells in a dream world that constitutes her glimpse of hope quite isolated from the living, thus achieving her death wish. Her isolation from the social community expresses her wish to escape from a society she cannot fit in. Despite various description of characters provided in her poem, she is often depicted as alone writing to express her deep desire to escape from the world through death (Middlebrook, 1991).

As mentioned in chapter one, Freud emphasized on the idea that id and ego should be in a balanced state, and if they are not, it will lead to an imbalance in human psyche which is obvious in Sexton's case. the ego which oversees dealing with reality is not capable of moderating between the requirements of the reality and Sexton's unconscious desires. This imbalance within her psyche leads to a maladaptive personality as indicated by Freud. Sexton could not cope with the reality of the society, and thus she tries to rebel against the norms and traditions by isolating herself. After providing the image of women as 'a possessed witch' Sexton moves on to present women as 'a housewife' to show the traditional role of women in the society. Her wish was to live happily with her kids and husband, but she could not gain all her desires, but rather she experienced lots of depression.

All I wanted was a little piece of life, to be married, to have children.
[...] I was trying my damndest to lead a conventional life, for that was how I was brought up, and it was what my husband wanted of me. But one can't build little white picket fences to keep nightmares out. The surface cracked when I was about twenty-eight. I had a psychotic break and tried to kill myself (Sexton, 1985: 84).

Sexton refers to traumas and sufferings that she experienced in her life as nightmares, namely her unsuccessful marriage and her troubled relationship with her parents. In *her kind*, she describes how she has “found the warm caves in the woods” (Sexton, 1981: 16). Warm caves located in the woods could stand for wooden coffins. Since she lost all her hopes, these caves can be the only place where she can achieve her dreams. While sitting in her home, she imagines herself within a safe space which is distant from her old miserable place where she felt pain. Instead of being the conventional housewife who cooks for her family and does the usual household chores, she portrays herself fixing “the suppers for the worms and the elves” (Sexton, 1981: 16). She creates a sense of strangeness in the poem when she mentions that she prepares food for worms, showing that the human body decays after death and is consumed by worms. This quotation could refer to her death wish which would render her body as food for worms after her death. In this sense, her resurrection would be seen as a subterranean continuation of her life after death. Besides, she explains that this type of women ‘the housewife’ is misunderstood by the society.

According to Sexton, this type of woman ‘the housewife’ is misunderstood by society. The third image of woman presented in this poem is a prostitute. This image serves as a metaphor the speaker identifies with in the terms of loss and empathy. The general assumption held about prostitutes is that they are good looking and carefree. Psychologically, however, they often feel lost and condemned by the society. The poem refers to them as waving their nude arms at villages going by to show their carelessness and mindlessness of what people around think of them. In the line “learning the last bright routes, survivor” (Sexton, 1981: 16), Sexton reminisces all her old days and roads that she passed through. Death is envisaged as liberation from her imprisoned life. This last type of woman that Sexton describes in the poem is not quite distinctive from the image of the witch mentioned in the second stanza since both types of women were socially misunderstood. Witches are accused of belonging to pagan times when the devil was thought to control the human mind. Similarly, Prostitutes are likewise misunderstood by the society as engaging in wrongdoing and pleasure fulfillment (Pollard, 2006)

These three types of women described in the poem and discussed above are manifestations of the death wish that serves as a relief from the social injustice they are bound to face. This injustice makes them unashamed to face death.

First, this poem can be understood on the ground of the theory of drives formulated by Freud. According to him, if death instincts ‘Thanatos’ dominates, an individual starts thinking of self-destruction. Hence, this poem can be put under the subject matter alienation and estrangement. Sexton was fixated at a very young age, where she went through many traumatic events that implanted in her strong sense of alienation and estrangement. The line “a woman like that is not ashamed to die” (Sexton, 1981: 15) reflects Sexton’s wish of dying and insisting desire of fulfilling her death instinct.

Second, this poem can be interpreted based on of the Freudian psychoanalytical concept of conscious, unconscious, subconscious. Her mental distress and trauma are the outcome of the conflict between the unconscious mind and the conscious one. Sexton in this poem justifies the Freudian concept of unconsciousness and the belief that the Freudian unconscious is relevant in the light of the modern-day consciousness. The plight of women in the society is already there in the mind of the poet, which she presents through three personas: witches, a housewife, and a prostitute. The past becomes the unconscious mind of the poetess, which guides her present situation. In the unconscious mind, there are images of witchcrafts and their trials in the 16-17th century Europe and in Salem USA, lonely suburban housewives, who feel like trapped in a cage, and finally a defamed and disrespectful prostitute or an adulterous woman. These three important personas that the poetess presents through a series of images define the life of women. The poetic persona in the poem through the embodiments of a witch, a cave-dweller, and a rustic woman contrast with her conscious mind: her femininity and existence in the society. The poetess confesses it at the end of all three stanzas: "I have been her kind" (Sexton, 1981: 15). This contrast leads her to the death wish. This sort of the psychological trauma leads her whining for death as a better option than living in her social environment. This poem examines the attempts of Sexton to meet the social expectations and standards imposed on women in the early to the mid-20th century. Women had to live in a certain way during this period-becoming females, moms, and homemakers, with little room for wiggle to be something else. In other words, a woman's path was paved, but it was extremely narrow, luminous but hard lit, waiting at the end for a lobotomy. However, the voice of women in *Her Kind* does not want, or perhaps cannot, reduce itself to the strict concept of women in the society.

This poem can be also analyzed based on the Freudian psychoanalytical concept of Id, Ego, and Superego. The three women that Sexton presents in this poem share one major thing in common which is the solitary life they live and how isolated and misunderstood they are as women. The first woman is a witch, the perfect manifestation of the Id that is so instinctual and devilish. The second one is the housewife; a woman who is tamed by the society and always follows her superego by fulfilling what is expected and dictated on her, such as taking care of the household and the children. The third one is the adulteress, who for a while followed her Id and sought to fulfill its sexual desires which cause her feelings of guilt, thus leading her eventually to willingly embrace her death without any fears. It is also evident that Anne Sexton was unfaithful to her husband; she had so many affairs with a lot of men, and one of them was her psychiatrist. Her infidelity towards her husband was manifested by the superego through feelings of regret and self-loathing.

IV. Modern English Poetry and Stevie Smith

The word Modern and even the trend called modernism are indefinite terms whose accurate meanings are difficult to comprehend. This movement is associated with many features found in the literary work of the early twentieth century, especially after the First

World War. A rejection of the society, loss, alienation, fear, and the desire to die are the main issues written by modernist writers. In general, Modernism tends to create something new, with new metaphors and a new language, and supposedly a new state of complete destruction. Stevie Smith is a substantial figure in the Twentieth-Century's British poetry. Her publications stretched during the three historical phases of the twentieth century's history. As a British poet, she is well-known for her twelve short lines poem *Not Waving but Drowning*, whereby critics often suppose that she condensed her own experience into the poem. In an interview in *Ivy and Stevie* with Kay Dick (1970), Smith admits "I love Death, I think it's the most exciting thing", she loves and adores life as well, then she adds "but only because I keep myself well on the edge". She uses the word 'edge' to refer to suicide which is the edge between life and death.

. In her poem *Not Waving but Drowning*, which was written in 1953, she reveals the dark side of her life. She wrote the poem during tough times, where England suffered from deep depression. Although Smith gained fame in the 1930s, she was faced by difficulties in publishing her new work. In addition, she felt imprisoned by the routine of her job which she held for many years. As a reason for her gloomy ideas, she slashed her wrist while she was in her office after writing this poem by a few months. Accordingly, this poem seems like a shriek for help (Mokhtari, 2010).

Not Waving but Drowning is Smith's most celebrated poem which had been published for two times: first, in *The Observer* in 1954, and then in 1956 in an essay which is presented by the Medical World. This essay was entitled *Too Tired for Words* and it contains the same text of the poem when presented in the 1957 collection (Smith, 1981). The poem was written in April 1953, and one week later, Smith admits to Kay Dick in a letter "I felt too low for words last weekend but work it off for all that in a poem . . . called *Not Waving but Drowning*" (Smith, 1983: 294). Smith wrote her poem ten weeks before her attempt to commit suicide during a tough period as Spalding (1988) illustrates that Smith had "all the symptoms of the clinically depressed" (213).

In his paper *Mourning and melancholia* (1917), Freud illustrated dynamics of melancholic depression and the reason behind suicide attempts. He asserts "we find the key to the clinical picture: we perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego" (Freud, 1917: 248). The loss of a loved object may not refer to a real object; rather, it is an indication for the loss of a loved person, so a death desire will control the mind of the depressed person. Accordingly, that person will be able to stand aside from himself, he will objectify himself, feel and act upon himself as if he was someone else. Freud states that ego's self-love is great, but as a reason for being depressed, the ego accepts its own self-destruction which is incredible (Freud, 1917). The person tends to feel love and hate simultaneously towards his/her objects, being entrapped between these feelings without any resolution. The result of that loss will increase ambivalence, which means having mixed feelings and contradictory

ideas about someone or something. Leading the sad soul of the depressed person to grieve and think about new object can be addressed as a death wish in Smith's case to avoid old memories and her real life's trauma. Freud noted "the shadow of the object falls upon the ego" (Freud 1917: 249) which implies that the lost object becomes part of the ego and later turns against the self, and at the end is revealed as a lust for death. What happens is that the superego uses all the obtainable sadistic energy to provide self-denigration. As a result of the superego's Sadistic attacks, the ego will be driven to suicide.

The most famous four words of Smith *Not Waving but Drowning* are undoubtedly about Smith's desire to die and about miscommunication. Smith finds herself misunderstood by people, thus she illustrates her gloomy view of life which led her to think about death as a kind of rescue from this fatal misunderstanding as referred by Will May (2010) that some people misinterpret the signs conveyed by another person. Smith lost her hope in life; no more waving or struggling to find a solution for this misunderstanding exists. Rather she is drowning in her death wish, trying to find her peace in death and returning to her earlier state.

In a book entitled *Stevie: A Biography of Stevie Smith* Barbera, J. and McBrien, W. (1985) mentioned that Smith wrote this poem when she saw an article on a newspaper describing a drowning incident (186). She reveals that the poem describes a man whose friends misunderstand the signs that he is trying to send them and imagining that he is only larking. No one told the poor man who was drowning to 'pull himself together' (Spalding, 1988). On the contrary, the drowning man's signs are misread as waving or just happily larking. No one tries to help him or tell him to pull himself together as no one is aware of his situation.

In 1965, Smith read for the BBC while introducing her poem making an important change to her speech. Instead of calling or asking for help, she declares that the man was not asking for help; he was really drowning. This refers to Smith's idea about death; the change of wording reveals the real intention of her poem, and she indicates to death because she really desires to die. She may envy the drowning man who was waving for a short while. Smith reveals her serious suicidal thoughts which may be just larking for others. Despite being simple, her poem carries a kind of ambiguity as she hides her serious desire to die between the lines and presents it as a kind of accident, letting her readers to find out the morbid feelings behind the revealed words (Bennett, 2017).

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning (Smith, 1978: 167)

When someone is dead, people try to find a reason for the death, and they may provide a medical reason that the water could have been cold, or the man's heart was too weak. They think about the moment when the man died and not what led to that situation. Like people who commit suicide, they mention the method that the person killed himself or herself rather than engaging in the real reason behind that death. They miss the main point which is the dead man's attempt to deliver a message that he was isolated and alone. Accordingly, the reason behind the man's death as well as Smith's death wish is emotional more than being physical.

Although Smith usually advocated death in her poems as a personal relief from life's dilemma, in this poem, it appears as an act of communication, that is a path for the sufferer to show her or his unfortunate situation to the world. Critics interpret that Smith would be like the drowning man, or she would be the one who tries to communicate, and as she drowns, she waves in a sea of words without being understood or heard. Like the dead man who tries to say something, despite being dead, still he is misunderstood. Finally, the poem deals with the way in which human beings become unable to cope with others, expressing their sorrow for being alienated and instead of being understood by others, Smith tends to think, write, and talk in her poem declaring her death wish (Bennett, 2017).

Not Waving but Drowning is a suggestion that Smith is crying for help which presents a more socially approved view of the taboo. Consequently, this poem glorified the idea of the death wish. Smith's experimental utilizing of Freud's ideas are explicit everywhere in her poems. Death instinct is dominant, as Freud clarifies the death instinct is responsible for this kind of desire and it sometimes leads the person towards destruction which can result in suicide, self-harm, and death wish. Accordingly, people who experience depression and have a strong desire to die often reenact a traumatic event they faced in their life. This kind of unconscious desire to die reveals itself at any problematic or depressed situation that faces the individual. In Smith's case, it could be concluded that her life instincts could largely temper this death wish unlike Sexton who had intense desire to die and finally she committed suicide as a kind of rescue for her depressed life. The death instinct in this poem is a crying for help or attention rather than being a destructive force.

V. Conclusion

This study is designed to find the reasons for showing a profound sense of death wish, self-destruction, and isolation by the two poets. In Sexton's case, it begins when she gives birth to her second child who was suffering from severe bipolar disorder. Despite taking medications, no progress was achieved but the conditions became worse along with suffering from anger and anxiety. As part of the treatment, her therapist Dr. Martin Orene encouraged her to write poetry. Accordingly, Sexton shared her experiences and personal life in her poems and confessed her intense desire to leave the world. In Smith's case, it begins when at the age of four her father left home and at the age of 16 her mother died. The two poets

vary in the way they perceived death. They were desperate to put an end to their lives, but their motives were different to silence the ruin that surrounds life. Anne's destruction was an act of grace and sorrow. She saw that, considering her bright academic future, she was nothing but a burden on her beloved ones. Their death poetry must be read from the point of view of someone who has suicidal wishes to understand how those poets felt as if they were stuck in their lives.

The application of Freud's psychoanalysis theory helped to analyze the issue of death wish and unleash the psyche of the poets. Those writers seek death for the sake of peace because Eros or life instinct is the disturber of that peace, while death instinct is the disintegration of the person's conflict in life. According to Freud, death wish happens in conditions when the demands of the ego become unfulfilled and unbearable, thereby leading to a kind of wish to return to a life without experience to avoid the pressures of the society. Hence, death is a recommendable prospect for both Sexton and Smith. Sexton presents death as a way of production rather than destruction by comparing suicide with carpenters in *Wanting to Die*. Death is not only the endpoint of their lives but a liberation from troubles.

Based on Freud's Theory, the psychological problems that Sexton suffered from led to a desire to escape and end her own life. In the last 15 years of her life, she had problems with what she had been trying to do. Her mother, who died of a breast cancer, wanted her to be responsible for her death and not to allow her to be marginally killed by illness or age. Sexton was motivated by the death of her mother, which made her avoid this kind of death, and she became frightened, hideous, and weak, with a great fear of being old and sick. In this sense, the confessional poems of Sexton reflect her death wish and suicidal inclination, thereby making her poetry at the same time autobiographical and psychological. The fascination by the death wish and suicide in the poetry of Sexton reflect the universal desire for death as done in Freudian Thanatos, that is the destructive death instinct.

As for Smith's poetry, her literary work reveals the key death representations, the personification of death, depicted as a hero, a knight, a lover, a friend, and a masculine constructing linked to God. Then there are portraits of female characters seduced by the passion for death, incarnated even by the male incarnation of death. The poet and the narrator in Smith's poems are aware of the pain and reveal it by leaving the modern lover. Heroines of Smith are torn between men and evil, and she reinforces the whimsical thinking of women, which quickly seduces and lessens the involvement of male into women's affair

Both Sexton and Smith could not fulfill their wish, but they tried to visualize it by writing about their death wish in the form of poems to relax and satisfy their urge without satisfying it. According to the psychoanalysis, this kind of imagination is to avoid the hidden sad experiences buried in the unconscious mind. Those poets tried to alienate themselves from the society because they could not cope with it, and they could not deal with the social constraints imposed by the family, the friends, and the society upon them. This is exactly the

role of superego; their vision of themselves cannot adapt to their consciousness; therefore, they are struggled within the society, preferring to write down their death wish in the hope that one day they can achieve it. Although Sexton eventually tried to control her id which represents her unconscious desires, this primitive part of personality remained infantile throughout her life. The dark side of her life pressured her to the point that she could not develop the ego and the superego to control her id's basic instincts which, thus resulting in an unrealistic act of committing suicide. Smith's case is like the following example, if a person is hungry, instead of stealing a piece of cake, the ego can regulate the overwhelming desire to steal the cake and force the one to wait for a piece to buy. Based on this example, the ego does not suppress the urge, rather it only tames and slows down the impulse to an acceptable time and place. Similarly, Smith did not suppress her desire, but she tames and slows down her impulse.

Freud assumed that Eros and Thanatos should be harmonious; they coexist together so that the person's mind can work properly. However, the lack of harmony is obvious in both writers' cases, and they have an instinctive desire to die or "pull to death" which is in a direct opposition to their instinct for survival. They are tired of living because they cannot fulfill their desire in life which increases their pain. In Sexton's case, life instincts or Eros could not overwhelm and control Thanatos to provide a mentally stable mind so that she can live a normal and happy life. Accordingly, she ends up with committing suicide, as she experiences a mental pain. Both Sexton and Smith were mentally disturbed and could not control their desire to die, thus they tried to write down their wish on papers to relieve their tired souls.

To sum up, both Sexton and Smith reveal their desire to die and escape from the real world. The main reason for their death wish is their psychological disorder, which results from their depressive life. Both writers share the same desire to die, and Sexton fulfilled her desire by committing suicide because of her unbalanced personality while Smith could somehow control her id, although she had one failed suicide attempt, she waited desperately until she died of a brain tumor.

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