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The Motif of Death in Percy Bysshe Shelley's Short Poems*

Abstract

In the early 19th century poetic tradition, there was a great emphasis on the poet as the creative genius, and subjectivity was cherished more than ever. As a poet of the Romantic Era, Percy Bysshe Shelley conveyed his emotions, philosophical beliefs, and religious convictions, as well as his fears and motivations, through his literary works. Death was an omnipresent theme in Shelley's life, and he used poetry as a means to express his thoughts and feelings about it. The passing of those close to him, such as his wife Harriet and children Clara and William, confronted him with his own mortality. He responded to the death of his beloved ones by composing poems. In addition to expressing his grief over these losses, he also voiced the decrease of his life instincts and his death wish. This paper will examine Shelley's short poems ("Death", "On Death", "To William Shelley", "Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples" "Ode to the West Wind," "To Night," and "O world! O life! O time!") through the lens of Sigmund Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholy, as well as death wish. The chosen autobiographical poems reveal Shelley's mourning process and his journey towards accepting death, showcasing his death drive, and reflecting his genuine emotions as well as his Neoplatonic philosophy.

Keywords: Percy Bysshe Shelley, Death, Melancholy, Freud, Romantic poetry.

Percy Bysshe Shelley'in Kısa Şiirlerinde Ölüm Teması

Öz

Erken 19. yüzyıl şiir geleneğinde yaratıcı deha olarak şaire büyük bir önem verilirdi ve öznellik, her zamankinden daha fazla el üstünde tutulurdu. Romantik dönem şairlerinden biri olan Percy Bysshe Shelley, duygu ve düşüncelerini, felsefi inançlarını ve dinî kanaatlerinin yanı sıra korkularını ve onu harekete geçiren şeyleri edebî eserleri aracılığıyla okuyucuya aktardı. Ölüm, Shelley'in hayatında her zaman var olan bir temaydı ve o, şiiri bu konudaki duygu ve düşüncelerini ifade etmek için bir araç olarak kullandı. Eşi Harriet ve çocukları Clara ve William gibi yakınlarının ölümü onu kendi ölümlülüğüyle yüz yüze getirdi. Bu farkındalık ile birlikte sevdiklerinin ölümüne verdiği tepki çoğu zaman şiirler yazmak oldu. Bu kayıplardan duyduğu üzüntüyü ifade etmenin yanı sıra Shelley, şiirlerinde hayat arzusunun azalışını ve kendi ölüm arzusunu da dile getirmiştir. Bu çalışmada Shelley'in kısa şiirleri ("Ölüm", "Ölüm Üzerine", "William Shelley'e", "Napoli Yakınlarında Kederle Yazılmış Kıtalar", "Batı Rüzgârına Övgü", "Geceye" ve "Ey dünya! Ey hayat! Ey zaman!" başlıklı şiirleri), Sigmund Freud'a ait yas ve melankoli kavramlarının yanı sıra ölüm arzusu kavramı ile oluşturulacak kuramsal çerçeve ışığında incelenecektir. Seçilen şiirler, otobiyografik özellikler göstermekte olup Shelley'in sevdiklerinin ölümü ardından yaşadığı yas sürecini ve ölüm olgusunu kabullenme yolculuğunu ortaya koymakta, onun ölüm dürtüsünü sergileyerek gerçek duygularını ve yeni platoncu felsefesini yansıtmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Percy Bysshe Shelley, Ölüm, Melankoli, Freud, Romantik şiir.

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Introduction

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in 1792 into a conservative aristocratic family in Sussex, yet his aristocratic birth did not hinder his being labelled as a nonconformist due to his liberal idealism. Shelley broke ties with his family when he was 18 years of age. This was mainly caused by his opposition to his father who was a Member of the Parliament and what he stood for. His grandfather was a baronet, Shelley did not like to be in a position of privilege, and he was “increasingly unwilling to submit to the system which fostered that privilege” (Reiman, 1969, p. 16). Because of his pamphlet entitled “The Necessity of Atheism” (1810) written in collaboration with Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Shelley was expelled from Oxford and had to abandon his university career. Shelley was a prolific poet who is thought to occupy “a strangely unsettled position” (O’Neill, 2013, p. 1) in English poetry because he was not a controversial writer during his lifetime due to his nonconformist attitude toward power hierarchies. His literary works were severely criticized mainly because of his radical beliefs. Largely through the efforts of his second wife, Mary (Godwin) Shelley, he gained popularity in the decades following his death. In addition to questioning all types of authority in his literary works, some tragic events such as his first wife’s suicide and his children’s and beloved friends’ death together with his philosophical background based on William Godwin’s *Inquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) nourished his poetry. Shelley was influenced by Plato and Neoplatonists to a great extent which led to his conception of the world as two poles; one as the ordinary world of mortality and suffering, and the other as the reflective world of perfect and eternal forms. While there are glimpses of Neoplatonism, thereby his acknowledgement of the existence of an infinite unity and ultimate reality in his poetry, Shelley mostly wrote about this world, and he represented the objects of contemplation as belonging to the empirical world rather than to the transcendental realm. The external world is more than a trigger; it is the participant in the imaginative creation for him. That is why, he tells about his feelings through some specific objects and phenomenon in nature.

In the early 19th century poetic tradition, there was a great emphasis on the poet as the creative genius, and subjectivity was cherished more than ever. Poets of the Romantic era shared their imagination, experiences, memories, feelings, and thoughts in their poems. Although it is argued that Percy Bysshe Shelley is “unautobiographical in his poetry” (Reiman, 1969, p. 16) compared to the other Romantic poets, his poems also express his deep feelings, ideology, and tendencies as well as his fears and drives. Death has been around Shelley from his youth onwards. In 1811, Shelley married his sister’s friend, Harriet Westbrook who was then 16, against the wishes of their parents. Soon, Shelley was in love with William Godwin’s daughter Mary Godwin. In 1816, his first wife Harriet “pregnant by an unknown lover” (Abrams et. al., 1993, p. 645) drowned herself and Shelley was not given the custody of their two children because of his outspoken criticism of church and state. Later, he married Mary Godwin, and within 9 months in 1818 to 1819, they lost their beloved children Clara (born in 1817) and William (born in 1816). Devastated by the deaths around him, he composed poems such as “To William Shelley” and “Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples” both of which express his mourning for the lost ones and his melancholic mood.

The long poems of Shelley such as “Adonais” mourning the death of his friend John Keats (see Ulmer), “Alastor” in which the poet figure journeys to death aided by supernatural means (see Hewitt), and “Julian and Maddalo” which starts with a melancholic tone and the poetic persona’s mourning (see Hirsch), have been the subject of scholarly debate regarding the themes of grief, death, and mourning, while his short poems, which mention death, are sidestepped. Shelley’s approach to death in his short poems can be studied in three categories; his general ideas on death, his feelings about the loss of his beloved ones, and his death wish. Reading his poems through the lens of Sigmund Freud’s ideas on melancholy and death drive

and with reference to Neoplatonist philosophy, I will argue that some of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry is autobiographical, as they bear the marks of his genuine feelings on death, his melancholic mood, and his death drive, for death is a way of reaching the One.

Death, Melancholy, and Death Drive

Since the earliest times of human existence on earth, humans have tried to understand the world they inhabited and its ways. In their quest for the meaning of life, they have also endeavored to grasp the nature of death and how it relates to the human experience. In its most basic sense, death can be defined as "the nonreversible condition in which an organism is incapable of carrying out the vital functions of life" (Kastenbaum, 2003, p. 224). The condition of death is mostly about non-existing in the empirical world. Death has inspired many scholars: philosophers pondered about it and developed their conceptualizations, historians tried to grasp its meaning for the previous civilizations, while the poets mused on it with the help of the power of words. Like their predecessors, the poets of "the romantic revival had a great deal to say about death, and often they said it with a fervor and strangeness" (Kurtz, 1933, p. xi) and among other poets of Romantic era, Shelley can be labelled as "the young bachelor of death" (Kurtz, 1933, p. 77) for he is the one enveloped by death throughout his short life, and he expressed his feelings about death through his poetry.

While trying to understand what death is, people also came to realize their emotional responses to losing a loved person. Melancholy is one of the emotional responses to loss. Its etymology and description date back to ancient Greece: "Melancholy comes from two Greek words, *melas* (black) and *khole* (bile)" (Radden, 2000, p. ix). Hippocrates, the fifth century Greek physician asserted that the disorders of human body originated from the imbalance of four humors: blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and the black bile. He also put forth that melancholy was caused by the existence of excessive amount of black bile, and the outcome of it was depression and some form of a mental disease. Melancholy has taken a variety of forms and meanings throughout centuries. As succinctly summarized by Juliana Schiesari, the time period between the Renaissance and contemporary times represents the historical boundaries of a "great age of melancholia, . . . inaugurated by the Renaissance, refined by the Enlightenment, flaunted by Romanticism, fetishized by the Decadents and theorized by Freud" (1992, pp. 3-4).

Sigmund Freud relates death with melancholy in his seminal article "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). He discusses melancholia as a state related to narcissistic disorder of loss and proposes that melancholy may take diverse clinical forms. Comparing melancholia with mourning, Freud states that "mourning is the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on" whereas melancholia is "a state of grief [that] develops in some people, whom we consequently suspect of a morbid pathological disposition" (1917, p. 243). The prevalent symptoms of melancholia and mourning are enumerated as follows by Freud:

a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (1917, p. 244).

These symptoms could be considered as stages of melancholy, for there is a certain difference of the levels between "the painful dejection" and "delusional expectation of punishment"; in the latter, it seems that the severity of the melancholia has increased. Freud also underlines that the melancholic patients may experience a kind of loss of which they are unaware.

In addition to melancholy, which is directly related to a certain kind of loss or death, the loss of the will to live, or "death drive" is another term Freud suggested. According to Freud,

human actions are controlled by the pleasure principle, and whereas people tend to carry out actions that give pleasure, they shun those that give pain. At maturity, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle; the individual becomes aware of the fact that he needs to wait to fulfil his pleasures. In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922), Freud presents a dualistic view of instinctual life and expounds on “death drive” which he defines as “the tendency of the organism to return to a pre-organic, inanimate state” (p. 38). Drives are intrinsic and universal feelings, and “death drive” is, indeed, a part of a dualism developed late in Freud’s career consisting of two forces: the life-drive and the death-drive¹ which exist in a state of equilibrium. However, there appears to be a conflict between the pleasure principle and the death drive. The pleasure principle has to share the field with a powerful counter-predisposition of the individual’s organism—a predisposition to disrupt the balance. Freud states that “The goal of all life is death, and . . . The inanimate was there before the animate” (1922, p. 32). And he maintains that the first instinct of living beings is “the instinct to return to the inanimate state” (1922, p. 32), and comments “the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion” (1922, p. 33). Thus, according to Freud, the death drive seems to take precedence over the life-drive and the pleasure principle. Death and pleasure do finally come to be associated. In Freud’s conceptualization, “Death is the ultimate release of tension; it promises the ultimate experience of stasis and complete calm” (Thurschwell, 2000, p. 88); that is why, it is prioritized over life drive. Freud refers to sexual instincts as synonymous with life instincts and distinguishes between death instincts and sexual instincts as “those which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life” (1922, p. 40). Freud is heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, in whose philosophy death is the “true result and to that extent the purpose of life” (44), while the sexual instinct is considered the embodiment of the will to live. While sexual instincts are aligned with life drive, death instinct and life instinct are represented as opposite concepts.

Shelley’s Selected Short Poems Displaying His Melancholy and Death Drive

Shelley is considered subscribing to Neoplatonic philosophy, and his poetry is replete with signs of Neoplatonic influence. Hence, bearing in mind Neoplatonism and understanding of death in Neoplatonism may help us appreciate his poems better. Accepted as the founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus foregrounded “the principle of unity, of pure intellect, of moving and vitalizing power, and, at the same time the matter itself” (Pecino, 2014, p. 147) as the source of everything, also referred to as the One. At the top of the hierarchical transcendence is One, and the other essentials are “the body which may be said to be in soul, soul in mind, and mind in One. . . this permanent evolution may be generated ascending or descending” (Pecino, 2014, p. 148) because all these are connected to the infinite unity of One. In Neoplatonic understanding, through death the soul regains its purity and has the opportunity to reunite with the One. Human soul is believed to be immortal, and death gains a new meaning: it gives living beings the opportunity to regain their purity by returning to the One.

Shelley has two poems which allude to death in their titles; “On Death” and “Death;” studying these poems may give us an idea about his general approach to death. The former was published in the 1816 collection titled *Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude: and Other Poems*. The poetic persona starts the poem comparing the flickering “the meteor beam” with “the flame of life” (Shelley, 2012, p. 36) in terms of its fluidity and paleness, while a meteor beam dissipates in a short time, the human beings can stay alive longer than a beam. The readers are reminded of “destiny” in the next stanza probably to make them realize that death is inevitably a destiny and the ultimate end for all the living beings. The following stanza starts with two metaphors; the

¹ also known as Eros and Thanatos after the Greek Gods for love and death, respectively.

world is likened to a mother and a nurse, and in such a caring world, “the coming of death is a fearful blow” (Shelley, 2012, p. 37). Putting emphasis on the mysteries regarding death, the poet finishes the poem with a set of rhetorical questions, and lastly the hopes and fears are juxtaposed in the finishing lines of the poem: “the hopes of what shall be/ With the fears and the love for that which we see?” (Shelley, 2012, p. 37). He comes up with a solution to the problem of death; despite fears, we should continue loving what we can see while we can, and though mysterious, death may yield a light at the end.

The poem titled “Death” consists of four stanzas, and it was published by his wife Mary Shelley after the poet died, in 1824 *Posthumous Poems*. The ubiquity of death is underlined in this poem which begins as follows,

Death is here and death is there,
Death is busy everywhere,
All around, within, beneath,
Above is death—and we are death. (Shelley, 2020)

The omnipresence of death is clearly stated in the lines above, and in the final line human beings are considered one with it, for no one is immune to it. The statement “we are death” can also be interpreted as a Neoplatonic manifestation that the soul will reunite with the One after death. Subsequent to this emphasis on death's being everywhere, the poet moves on to the process leading up to death “First our pleasures die—and then /Our hopes, and then our fears—” (Shelley, 2020) finally death claims all. If considered in Freudian terms, a decrease in the pleasure, and by extension lessening of the life instinct results in death, which is beautifully expressed by the poet and in line with the conceptualization of death drive.

In “To William Shelley” the poetic persona, Shelley himself, could be argued to be in a state of mourning the death of his little boy, when the poem is read through the lens of Freud's concept of melancholy. “To William Shelley” is a poem of two stanzas, and it was published by Mary Shelley in *Posthumous Poems*, 1824. The poem begins with an apostrophe, “My lost William” and expresses his and his wife's sadness on the death of their beloved son, “if a thing divine/ Like thee can die, thy funeral shrine / Is thy mother's grief and mine” (Shelley, 2020). After stating his surprise in the death of the boy, he imagines his son as a deity residing in a shrine made up of his parents' grief. In the second stanza, he consoles himself thinking that the soul of his boy is felt in the nature, nourishing the elements of nature:

Where art thou, my gentle child?
Let me think thy spirit feeds,
With its life intense and mild,
The love of living leaves and weeds. (Shelley, 2020)

In this poem, the loss object after which the feelings of melancholy arise is William and it is for sure that the father is attached to the boy with the bond of love, and the grief felt after the loss is also clearly expressed. When this poem is interpreted from a Neoplatonic perspective, Shelley the father, seems to succumb to the idea that corporeal death of his boy let him to reach the everlasting realm of the One.

Written in the aftermath of his wife Harriet's suicide and his daughter Clara's death, “Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples” (1818) could be read as a poem expressing the melancholy of the poet. The poem also reflects Shelley's mind, which is plagued by his own ill health, too. A bright morning and a peaceful atmosphere are described with vivid visual imagery in the first stanza. Saying that “I sit upon the sands alone,” (Shelley, 1993, p. 673) he emphasizes the solitariness of his state, and seems to enjoy the view nonetheless. The peaceful atmosphere does not prevail in the third stanza, and the volta is marked by the word “alas”:

Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
Nor peace within nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth

...

Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure. (Shelley, 1993, p. 673)

His life is full of negation, and he seems to have lost his interest in the outside world. He summarizes his situation at the time of writing the poem; he does not have any hopes for the future, his health is in poor condition, he is in debt, and his poetry is not well-acclaimed, all of which contribute to his state of melancholia. The symptoms of melancholy such as painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, and loss of the capacity to love could be identified in the lines above. The fourth stanza starts with the voicing of “despair” which is so unbearable that he wants to die and continues with expressions about the lethargic and passive state of himself:

I could lie down like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear,
Till death like sleep might steal on me, (Shelley, 1993, p. 673)

Likening himself to an exhausted child who wants to cry so much so that he would not care for anything in life, he expresses his wish to die, which is the expression of his death wish and which could also be considered delusional expectation of punishment, one of the symptoms of melancholy as stated by Freud. Another symptom that could be identified based on the lines above is “inhibition of all activity” (Freud, 1917, p. 244) for the poet wants to lie down passively. It could even be argued that he prefigures his own death in this stanza, with an emphasis on the waves coming through his body. Shelley and his friend Edward Williams were drowned in 1822, in Lerici, Italy when the storm overturned their boat. The similarity in the way he imagines his death in poetry and the way he dies in reality is striking. In the concluding stanza of the poem, the poet compares himself with the sunny day and tells that people “might lament—for I am one / Whom men love not” (Shelley, 1993, p. 673) as opposed to the glorious day which will remain in memories. With these lines, he expresses his sadness that he is not a popular figure in England because of his uncompromising and liberal idealism. What is expressed here is a manifestation of melancholy; for the subject may feel a “a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings” (Freud, 1917, p. 244). Mary Shelley was witness to Shelley's melancholy, and writes about those times as “his thoughts, shadowed by illness, became gloomy, and then he escaped to solitude, and...poured forth morbid but too natural bursts of discontent and sadness” (qtd. in Worthen, 2019, p 226). Drawing on a close reading of the poem and the words of Mary, it could be put forth that this poem is an outburst of his genuine feelings. Through the deaths of the people he loves, he confronts the idea of his own death.

Shelley's poems “Ode to the West Wind,” “To Night,” and “O world! O life! O time!” display the triumph of the poet's death drive over his life-drive. The first one just mentions the decreasing pleasure, and depicts the poet as willing to return to the inanimate state. The second one shows the poet as waiting for the death to come, and the last one expresses the poet's conscious desire to embrace death. The dates of composition and publication of the poems are also suggestive in terms of the poet's sense of his approaching death in 1822: “Ode to the West Wind” was written in 1819; “No Night” was written in 1820, and “O world! O life! O time!” probably written shortly before his death and it was published posthumously in 1824.

In "Ode to the West Wind," the poet's reference point is the west wind which is unlocatable, and is described as "unseen presence" (Shelley, 1993, p. 676), which is similar to the One as the source of everything in Neoplatonic understanding. Its mysterious condition of being undetectable attracts the poet who probably has lost his inspiration and pleasure in the word, and who probably feels a decrease in life instincts. Among the binaries mentioned by the poet is life and death. These concepts along with other binaries such as Autumn and Spring are juxtaposed and represented as symbolizing the hectic life and its counterpart dull death. In the first canto of the five-canto poem, spring is cherished as a life-giving force to the "winged seeds" (Shelley, 1993, p. 676). After recounting the influence of the wind on the earth, the poetic persona mentions the influence of the wind on the sky. The wind directs the angels of rain and lightning, and sings a dirge for the dying year. The second canto of the poem ends with a pessimistic prophecy which reflects the interior world of the poet: "black rain, and fire, and hail will burst" (Shelley, 1993, p. 677). In the third part, the water is mentioned as being affected by the wind; it wakes the Mediterranean. Although the seas rule over their immediate surroundings, when they hear the wind, they "grow grey with fear/ And tremble and despoil themselves" (Shelley, 1993, p. 677). The west wind is depicted as the most powerful of all the mentioned natural phenomena and elements, very similar to the concept of the One as the highest divinity in Neoplatonist thought.

Having explained the features of the wind, the poet goes on directly with his own desires and expectations in the fourth canto. He opts for being a dead leaf, a swift cloud, or a wave to share the strength of the uncontrollable wind which is the determining force in their directions or actions. Shelley makes use of sensuous identification; he identifies himself with the dead leaves, clouds, and waves which are depicted originally as passive and inanimate but activated and turned into animate beings by the wind. He seems to have an instinctive understanding of the wind and the other natural elements. He pleads the wind: "make me thy lyre" (Shelley, 1993, p. 678), which alludes to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Eolian Harp" and connotes the Eolian lyre, a significant symbol of poetic inspiration for the Romantic poets. The poet faces the problem of finding inspiration, as well as trying to find a way to maintain or retain his fading powers. In the following lines, he clearly expresses his dissatisfaction with his life, which could be considered in parallel with the symptom of melancholy "a lowering of the self-regarding feelings" (Freud, 1917, p. 244) and his wish for returning to the inanimate state, since he craves for being led by the wind like the other passive things he names:

Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud. (Shelley, 1993, p. 678)

The hardships in his life seem to have strengthened his sense of melancholy. In the last lines, he refers to "a heavy weight of" time, experience, and mortality that claim him; in other words, he comes to realize the fact that death is approaching. In his youth, he was also tameless, swift, and proud just like the west wind. Thus, in the last part of the poem, he likens himself to a tree whose leaves are falling, which is an indication of his readiness to be passive like a tree and to return to the inanimate state. He wants to be one with the wind: "Be thou, Spirit fierce,/ My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!" (Shelley, 1993, p. 678). Being aware of his diminishing pleasure in this mundane world, he yearns for uniting with the west wind, which could be taken as the symbol of the One. Yet, the wind's cooperation is required; therefore, he addresses to the wind: "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe" (Shelley, 1993, p. 678). He desires to get rid of the dead thoughts so that he could better reach to the inanimate state. He also wishes "the incantation of this verse" to be spread over the universe, he wants to leave a legacy behind. The

poem finishes with a question addressed to the wind: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" (Shelley, 1993, p. 678). After the season of the winds in Autumn, Winter comes, which is harbinger of Spring when Autumn winds would cease, which gives hope to the poet, who identifies himself with the wind, about his returning to the inanimate state.

The state of displeasure and dissatisfaction with the life goes a step further in "To Night" in which the poet voices his readiness to return to the inanimate state. The poetic persona is represented as waiting for the death to come in this poem. The persona calls for the Night and wants it to come swiftly. Like "Ode to the West Wind," this poem also explains a preference of the poet by referring to the binary oppositions such as western and eastern, joy and fear, terrible and dear, Night and Day, and death and life. Unlike "Ode to the West Wind," the poet favours one leg of the binary over the other in this poem, "Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear/ Which make thee terrible and dear" (Shelley, 1993, p. 713). The spirit of the night consists of binaries, and according to the poet, contains dreams of both joy and fear which makes the night both terrible and dear. Paradoxical words are used to define night, which shows the poet's uncertainty about it. The second stanza is indeed parallel with "Ode to the West Wind," for it wants the night to "wander o'er city, and sea, and land" (Shelley, 1993, p. 713). Shelley depicted the effects of the west wind on the earth, sky, and sea in the previous poem, and again the spirit of the night is required to wander in a similar manner. Actually, the poet's preference of the Night over the Day is made clear in the second stanza by ordering the Night "Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day" and "Come, long-sought!" (Shelley, 1993, p. 714). As he does in "Ode to the West Wind," the poet proceeds with his own experience and feelings regarding the subject of the poem: "When I arose and saw the dawn,/ I sighed for thee" (Shelley, 1993, p. 714). Day is an unwanted and "unloved guest" for the poet, as he waits for the Night to come and unite with him. While he waits for the Night, its "brother Death came, and cried,/ Wouldst thou me?" (Shelley, 1993, p. 714). There is no answer provided to the question of death, but when the sweet child of the Night, sleep repeats the same question the answer is granted: "No, not thee!" (Shelley, 1993, p. 714). In the last stanza comes the core of the poem: the poet expounds on the idea of death which will come "Soon, too soon" (Shelley, 1993, p. 714). His feeling of enthusiasm about the coming of the night is indicated by the frequent usage of the exclamation mark throughout the poem. Although he says that he will not want the blessing of sleep, he summons the night which is referred as death's closest kin: his brother: "Swift be thine approaching flight,/ Come soon, soon!" (Shelley, 1993, p. 714). Bored with the day and having consumed the joys of life, and thereby the pleasures of life, the poetic persona wishes the death to come and take him, making his death drive manifest and discreetly voicing his desire to reunite with the One.

In the last poem to be discussed, namely in "O world! O life! O time!" the death drive of the poet becomes more apparent, since direct address to the ending life span and approaching death is given: "O world! O life! O time!/ On whose last steps I climb" (Shelley, 1993, p. 715), life is likened to a set of stairs and the poet envisages himself being on the last steps of it. He seems to be aware that there is not much time left for him to exist in the world, hence he replies his question of "When will return the glory of your prime?" as "No more -- Oh, never more!" (Shelley, 1993, p. 715). Now that he acknowledges the fact that he will never return to the days he has had pleasure in living, he both laments for the forlorn days, and embraces the death:

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight;
Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar,
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
No more -- Oh, never more! (Shelley, 1993, p. 715)

He could find the Joy neither in Day nor at Night, the seasons are depicted as having turned into grey with old age. Grief and pain fill his weak heart rather than the delight and pleasure of life, and the poet knows that he will be unable to experience them again in the same manner. He welcomes death, for he is aware of the fact that all animate beings must die one day, for death is a part of being human. As Liran Razinsky maintains,

The death drive . . . is a drive inside that has death as its goal. In "The Theme of the Three Caskets," Freud (1913b) states this directly: Pretending to choose death is a defense against it, a reversal of the bitter truth that we have no control over it and no choice but to meet it. (2013, p. 141)

The poet seems to accept death in a solemn manner in "To Night" and "O world! O life! O time!". This favorable reception of death could be interpreted as his realization that he has no choice but to embrace it, or as his willingness to return to the One.

Conclusion

Like the other Romantic poets, Shelley also expresses his deep emotions in his poems, and a careful close reading of his poems reveals that he is eager to die, which could be because of his death drive, this melancholic mood, or his willingness to reunite with the One. In the selected poems of Shelley, analyzed in this paper, Shelley's approach to death and his tendency to choose death over life could be observed. While his poems "Death" and "On Death" display his acceptance of death and even his willingness to embrace it, they also exhibit his Neoplatonic understanding of death. He is surrounded by death and grief for his beloved ones, and the pain remains long after the dead ones leave the world. The poems "To William Shelley" and "Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples" abound with his emotional response to the loss of his loved ones. The symptoms of melancholy as enumerated by Freud could be identified in between the lines of these poems. As a result of losing the beloved ones in his life, he is mourning their loss and because of losing his life instinct, joy, and pleasure, he sometimes identifies himself with passive objects such as the wind, leaves, clouds, seas, and the night by way of sensuous identification in "Ode to the West Wind". Since he is aware of his diminishing life instincts, he consciously calls the night in "To Night". His preference of the night over the day, and refusal of sleep instead of embracing the night, the symbol of death, are the clues of his wish to return to inanimate state. In "O world! O life! O time!" he laments for his passing years, and seems to be aware of the approaching death and chooses to welcome it as a human being with the ultimate goal of dying. In other words, these poems of Shelley illustrate the process of his mourning and melancholy, and then his coming to terms with the idea of death, and manifest his death drive.

Briefly, the selected autobiographical poems by Shelley reveal his Neoplatonic understanding, his experience with the loss of his loved ones and gradual acceptance of death, ultimately demonstrating his death drive, while also showcasing his genuine emotions. Shelley's early experiences with death inspired much of his literary work, as he sought to explore and make sense of the complex emotions and contemplations that it elicited. Within the frame of Neoplatonism, his poetry illustrates that he embraced death eagerly because of his wish to reunite with the One. It could also be argued that Shelley's exploration of death in his autobiographical poems reveals a deeper understanding of the human condition and the inevitability of mortality.

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