

Exploring the Interplay of Beauty: Shelley's and Dickinson's Poems through Mead's Theoretical Framework

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Received:

September 22,
2024

Revised:

October 1, 2024

Accepted:

October 2, 2024

Published:

November 1,
2024

ABSTRACT

This study uses a symbolic interaction approach, specifically based on George Herbert Mead's ideas, to examine how Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and Emily Dickinson's poem, "I died for beauty—but was scarce," connect on certain themes. Using a qualitative approach that combines analysing the texts with considering the poets' social backgrounds, this research delves into how the poets express their views on beauty, truth, and mortality through symbolic interactions. This study shows that Shelley and Dickinson use beauty to explore deep questions about existence, reflecting their personal challenges and connections to society. The results of the study suggest that both poets go beyond just liking beauty; they use it as a platform for deep philosophical and emotional discussions that align with Mead's ideas about the self and society. This analysis helps the readers see how symbolic interactions in poetry influence our experiences and cultural interpretations, shedding light on why these works are still important in today's conversations about beauty and identity.

Keywords: *Beauty; Emotion; Semantics & Symbolism; Mortality; Truth*

INTRODUCTION

Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) emerged as a key figure in the Romantic movement, recognized for his groundbreaking contributions to both poetry and philosophy. Influenced by Enlightenment ideals, the evolving political climate of his era, and his personal experiences within a tumultuous society, Shelley crafted works that frequently engage with themes such as beauty, nature, love, and social justice. His poem "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," composed in 1816, epitomizes the Romantic era's fascination with the sublime and abstract concepts, examining the elusive quality of beauty and its profound effects on the human psyche.

Emily Dickinson: "I Died for Beauty"

Celebrated as one of America's most influential poets, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) is known for her distinctive style, innovative language, and contemplative insights on life, death, and immortality. Dickinson, who led a reclusive existence in Amherst, Massachusetts, authored nearly 1,800 poems, the majority of which saw posthumous publication. Dickinson wrote her poem "I Died for Beauty" in the late

19th century, addressing significant themes of art, beauty, and mortality, highlighting her conviction regarding the interconnectedness of life and death.

Both Shelley and Dickinson engage with the concept of beauty, contemplating its importance and transitory nature. In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," Shelley portrays beauty as an external, almost transcendent force that profoundly influences the human spirit, infusing the poem with a sense of wonder and yearning. Conversely, Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty" reflects on the deep bond between beauty and mortality, encapsulating the gravity of sacrifice and the enduring essence of beauty in death. Through their unique stylistic choices and narrative devices, both poets enrich the landscape of Romantic and American poetry, inviting readers to thoughtfully explore their interpretations of beauty.

The utilization of symbols to express deeper meanings serves as a compelling and effective rhetorical strategy. In literature, symbols represent the cognitive processes used by poets to create verbal and conceptual images within their works. They highlight the sensory and physical experiences we encounter daily, either through direct descriptions or via allusions, similes, and metaphors. Not only do visual elements convey symbols, but also sounds, touch sensations, thermal experiences (both hot and cold), smells, tastes, and movements. These symbolic representations capture the reader's interest by delivering striking and vivid depictions that authentically represent particular moments. Literary works that skillfully use symbols provide readers with insights into contemporary life and reinforce the messages that the authors or poets aim to convey.

The examination of Symbolic Interactionism in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and Emily Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty—but Was Scarce" highlights how human interactions and symbols shape themes of identity, beauty, and existence.

In Shelley's poem, "Intellectual Beauty" serves as a potent symbol of profound, abstract beauty that transcends mere physical appearances, reflecting a shared societal ideal that unites individuals in their quest for understanding. Engaging with this divine beauty, the speaker fosters deep reflections on existence and demonstrates the construction of identity through awareness of beauty. This aligns with George Herbert Mead's assertion that the self emerges through social experiences, emphasizing how external symbols influence personal meaning and purpose.

Conversely, Dickinson's poem uses death as a significant symbol, suggesting that the pursuit of beauty can lead to profound sacrifice. The speaker's interaction with a companion, who also embodies beauty, underscores the social aspect of identity formation. This interaction exemplifies Mead's concept of the "generalized other," demonstrating that individual identities are shaped by societal norms and relationships. The poignant moment of realization in the line "but was scarce" captures the struggle for meaning in a society that often overlooks the depth of personal experiences, echoing key tenets of symbolic interactionism.

Ultimately, both poems, when viewed through Mead's framework, reveal how individuals navigate their quests for meaning, shaped by social interactions and shared

human ideals surrounding beauty and mortality. These works illustrate the intricate connections between personal identity, societal expectations, and the myriad symbols that define human relationships.

Shamisa (2004) provides a foundational classification distinguishing between arbitrary and personal symbols. Arbitrary symbols are characterized by their transient nature, varying significantly from individual to individual, while personal symbols are defined as unique creations that reflect an individual's personality or experiences. Renowned poets Robert Frost and Dylan Thomas exemplify the adept use of both symbol types, displaying the depth and range of symbolic expression in their works.

Building on this classification, Perinne (1974) emphasizes the importance of recognizing phenomena within literary texts that are deliberately positioned to serve as symbols. This identification is critical, as any word or item can transcend its literal meaning to acquire symbolic significance, enriching the thematic layers of a story or poem.

Griffin (1997) notes that theorists like Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead are the originators of symbolic interactionism. Particularly, the establishment of the symbolic interactionism tradition acknowledges Mead as a pivotal figure. His contributions included training individuals to achieve nuanced mental interpretations, particularly within the realm of philosophy.

In recent years, the application of symbolic interactionism in literary analysis has gained prominence, providing new insights into the interactions between poets and their social environment. Among the scholars contributing to this discourse, Khalili, Mohabati, and Zirak's study (2021) stands out as a significant exploration of the intricacies of Khaqani's poetic interactions. Grounded in the foundational principles of symbolic interactionism, a theory prominently associated with George Herbert Mead, this research delves into the nuances of human interaction, emphasizing how language and symbols influence our understanding of relationships and social dynamics. This study confirms that the perceptions and meanings arising from individual and collective experiences intricately tie poetry, as a form of social communication.

In 2023, Umaima Khan and Nosheen Khaliq explore the use of symbolic perspectives in the poetry of renowned American poet Robert Frost and modern Welsh poet Thomas Dylan. The research employs Blumer's (1986) Theory of Symbolic Interactionism to analyze and compare the symbols employed by both poets. The authors contend that modern individuals grapple with overwhelming responsibilities and experience a sense of alienation within a sordid atmosphere, leading to a communication gap that nature can help bridge.

The study argues that through symbolic tools, Frost and Dylan present an optimistic view of life, advocating for a welcoming perspective on death as an eternal reality that connect humanity with existence. The poems feature a single narrator who oscillates between revealing in the beauty of nature and expressing rage against death, reflecting the social context and emotional states of the characters. Finally, they encourage readers to interpret universal and personal symbols based on their own symbolic approaches and societal positions in an increasingly mechanized world.

In 2024, Mawaidi, Suminto A., and Wiyatmi examined Instagram poetry through the lens of symbolic convergence theory. The study focused on the works of poet Alfin Rizal, utilizing qualitative analysis of data sourced from his Instagram account, as well as from his published poetry collections. To enhance the analysis, the researchers categorized each piece of poetry into specific taxonomies.

The findings revealed that Alfin Rizal uses message dramatization strategies, significantly influencing public engagement with his poetry. This dramatization manifests in various forms, including poetry videos, photo manipulation, tailored backgrounds, and illustrations that serve as secondary contexts. Additionally, the study highlighted the construction of a symbolic reality that shapes interactions among followers, who reinterpret and disseminate Rizal's dramatized messages across other social media platforms. This research underscores the dynamic interplay between Instagram poetry and public participation in the digital age.

RESEARCH GAP

While the studies mentioned above contribute valuable insights into the application of symbolic interactionism in literary analysis, there remains a notable gap concerning the focused exploration of how this theoretical framework specifically informs the analysis of beauty, truth, and mortality in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Emily Dickinson.

The existing literature predominantly emphasizes the connection between symbolic interactionism and broader social contexts, such as the interactions found in Khaqani's poetry or the contemporary themes present in the works of Robert Frost, Thomas Dylan, and Alfin Rizal. However, there is a lack of targeted research applying Mead's framework to the intimate and complex relationship between the self and society as expressed through the lens of beauty in Shelley and Dickinson's works.

Most importantly, while previous studies explore the functions of symbols in conveying emotional and philosophical ideas, they do not specifically delve into the unique ways in which Shelley and Dickinson utilize beauty as a means of confronting existential questions within the specific context of their social and historical backgrounds.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how the poets navigate concepts of beauty and mortality through their interaction with sociocultural norms, ultimately revealing deeper layers of meaning in their poetic expressions that may resonate with contemporary discussions on beauty and identity.

Furthermore, by situating these analyses within Mead's theoretical framework, this research seeks to extend the understanding of symbolic interactions beyond mere textual analysis to include a dialogue on the enduring relevance of these themes in today's identity formation and cultural interpretation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research fills a gap in literature by applying symbolic interactionism, especially George Herbert Mead's ideas, to analyze beauty, truth, and mortality in

Shelley and Dickinson's poetry. It explores how these poets use the framework to delve into individual and societal expectations, connecting literary exploration to philosophical and sociocultural dialogues. This study enhances literary criticism around Shelley and Dickinson by shedding light on existential themes, offering a methodological lens for future analyses of poets addressing similar profound questions, thereby enriching our understanding of their enduring literary contributions.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A symbolic interactionism is a sociological framework that examines how individuals engage and construct meanings via symbols, language, and social interaction. It highlights the importance of comprehending how individuals perceive and assign meaning to social contexts, as well as the function of symbols in communication. Prominent contributors to the development of this theory are George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, who defined its foundational principles in 1937. This theory fundamentally highlights the importance of the "meanings" attributed by social actors within their respective contexts (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin & Demirbuken, 2009). This study examines the dynamics of human interactions, wherein individuals engage with each other by interpreting symbols and meanings (Reck, 1963; Blumer, 1986; Goffman, 1922). Thomas J. Scheff argued in 2011 that Charles Cooley's theories heavily influence Erving Goffman's work in symbolic interactionism.

This framework identifies human interaction as the primary data source, highlighting individual perspectives conveyed through non-verbal cues, including facial expressions, body language, gestures, and overall behavior (Marsh, 2002). The theory emphasizes the significance of personal values and their potential to eclipse recognized advantages (Siregar, 2016). It asserts that each individual represents cultural essence, engages in the social structure of their community, and collectively contributes to the formation of shared "ideas" (Siregar, 2016).

George Herbert Mead was an American philosopher, sociologist, and psychologist, and he is best known for his contributions to social psychology and his role in developing the theory of symbolic interactionism. He focused on how symbols and language are vital in human interaction, along with the social formation of the self.

This is an overview of Mead's symbolic interactionism framework.

1. The Self as a Social Product

Mead (1934) posits that social interactions and the internalization of societal norms and values form the self, rather than existing independently within individuals. This process entails individuals taking on others' perspectives and using symbols to interpret and respond to the world around them. This is not something you are born with, but rather something that develops through social interactions. He argued that individuals develop a sense of self through communication with others, which shapes their understanding of themselves and their place in society. This perspective emphasizes the importance of language, gestures, and symbols in shaping our identities and interactions with others. Individuals understand themselves through other people's

responses. The formation of the self occurs through a process of internalizing the perspectives of others, which he referred to as the "looking-glass self."

2. The Role of Symbols

Symbols, particularly language, play a crucial role in human interaction. Blumer (1969) stated that Mead believed humans communicate and create meaning through symbols. A symbol represents something else; in social settings, language and gestures are key symbols for expressing complex ideas and emotions.

3. The Generalized Other

Mead (1934) introduced the concept of the "generalized other," which refers to the common behavioral expectations of society. This idea shows how individuals understand the viewpoint of the broader community. The generalized other helps individuals navigate social situations by understanding societal norms and expectations.

4. The importance of social interaction

According to Goffman, E. (1959), the core of Mead's theory revolves around social interaction. He believed that social life stems from these interactions, where individuals negotiate and interpret meanings through conversation. This continuous interaction process facilitates the growth and change of both personal identities and societal frameworks.

5. The active process of meaning-making

Fine (1987) stated that Mead highlighted how individuals actively create meaning, not static, within social interactions. People are constantly interpreting and reinterpreting symbols and interactions, leading to the dynamic nature of social reality.

George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism offers a framework for comprehending the construction of social realities via communication, interaction, and the utilization of symbols. Self-development, the significance of language, and understanding societal expectations are central themes in this framework, demonstrating the dynamic interaction between individuals and their social surroundings.

According to Carter and Fuller (2015), symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that explains how individuals' ongoing behaviors and interactions shape and sustain societies.

George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism framework comprises several key components that are central to understanding how individuals create meaning through social interactions. These components include:

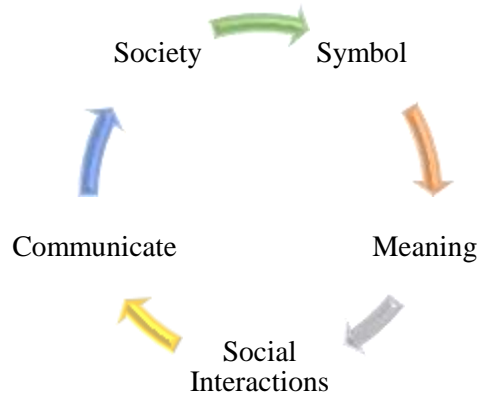


Figure 1: George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism framework Key components

Symbols: Symbols are the building blocks of communication and interaction. They can be words, gestures, objects, or anything that carries shared meanings within a particular social group.

Meaning: Meaning is derived from symbols. Social interactions construct meaning, not inherent in objects or actions. Individuals interpret and assign meaning to symbols based on shared understandings within their social context.

Self: The concept of the "self" as a dynamic process that emerges through social interactions. The self consists of two components: the "I" (the spontaneous, impulsive aspect) and the "Me" (the socially aware, reflective aspect).

Mind: Mind refers to the ability to think and reason. According to Mead, the mind arises through social interactions and involves the capacity to take others' perspectives, enabling individuals to anticipate and interpret the actions and intentions of those around them.

Communication: Communication plays a crucial role in symbolic interactionism. Individuals exchange symbols, facilitating the creation and maintenance of shared meanings within a social group.

Role taking: Role-taking is the ability to understand and adopt the perspectives of others. Through role taking, individuals can anticipate how others will respond to their actions, facilitating successful social interactions.

Significant symbols: These are those that evoke a shared response or meaning within a social group. These symbols are central to the formation of collective identities and the maintenance of social order.

Gesture and response: Mead emphasized the importance of gestures and responses in social interactions. Gestures are actions or expressions that convey meaning, while responses indicate how individuals interpret and react to these gestures.

Overall, these components of Mead's symbolic interactionism framework highlight the dynamic and socially constructed nature of human behavior and the ways in which individuals create and negotiate meaning through interactions with others.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives collectively aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between the poets' works, their sociocultural implications, and the application of symbolic interactionism, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding beauty, truth, and mortality in literature.

- Investigate the application of George Herbert Mead's theories, specifically symbolic interactionism, in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Emily Dickinson, focusing on beauty, truth, and mortality themes.
- Analyze Shelley and Dickinson's Engagement with Beauty and Mortality: Interpret how Shelley and Dickinson address concepts of beauty and mortality, exploring their poetic expressions within sociocultural norms and existential inquiries.
- Address the Gap in Existing Literature: Bridge the existing void in literary studies by scrutinizing the intricate connection between individual identity and societal expectations as portrayed in the works of Shelley and Dickinson.
- Enhance Understanding of Existential Themes: illuminate how the poets tackle existential themes concerning beauty and identity, contributing to a deeper understanding of the historical and social contexts shaping their works.
- Situate poetic analysis within sociocultural dialogue: Expand the analysis beyond textual examination to include a broader discussion on the significance of beauty, truth, and mortality in contemporary dialogues pertaining to identity formation and cultural interpretations

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to the study description, the major research questions are as follows:

1. How do the themes of beauty, truth, and mortality manifest in the poetry of Percy B. Shelley and Emily Dickinson through the lens of symbolic interactionism?
2. In what ways do the social backgrounds and personal experiences of Shelley and Dickinson influence their portrayals of beauty and existence, as understood through George Herbert Mead's framework of the self and society?
3. How do societal norms and historical contexts shape the representations of beauty, mortality, and identity in Shelley and Dickinson's works?
4. In Shelley and Dickinson's poetry, how do beauty and its representations function symbolically? How do these poets use beauty to engage in a broader philosophical discourse?
5. How can the principles of symbolic interactionism enrich the understanding of literary analysis, particularly when examining the relationships between the works of Shelley and Dickinson and contemporary conversations surrounding beauty and identity, and what relevance do the investigations into beauty and identity found in Shelley's and Dickinson's poetry hold in today's cultural and philosophical discourse?

6. In what ways can the poetry of Shelley and Dickinson prompt modern readers to critically examine and compare historical and contemporary perspectives on beauty and identity?

These research questions aim to facilitate a thorough exploration of the themes present in the poetry of Shelley and Dickinson, leveraging symbolic interactionism to provide deeper insights into their works and their enduring significance in contemporary discussions on beauty and identity.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in symbolic interactionism, specifically utilizing George Herbert Mead's theoretical framework to analyze the selected poems. The methodology delineates a structured approach to theory development, as outlined by Remenyi et al. (1998), providing a procedural framework for conducting the research.

This study focuses on various aspects of qualitative research within the social sciences, examining how interpersonal interactions and symbols shape meaning in the texts. This study focuses on data collection to inform the analysis and support the research objectives.

To enrich the discussion and findings, this study will primarily utilize secondary data sources. These sources will encompass both published literature and unpublished materials, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the contextual and symbolic elements present in Shelley's and Dickinson's works. By leveraging a wide array of secondary data, the study aims to provide a nuanced interpretation of the thematic and symbolic constructs within the poems through the lens of Mead's interactionist perspectives.

ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" intricately weaves the themes of beauty, truth, and mortality into the poem, reflecting Shelley's contemplation on the transcendent power of beauty and its influence on the human experience. An example that illustrates this is:

**"The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats though unseen among us; visiting
This various world with as inconstant wing
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower—"**

In these lines, Shelley personifies an unseen force that moves through the world, akin to the transient nature of beauty and truth, symbolizing the elusive and ever-changing essence of these concepts.

In Emily Dickinson's poem "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce," the themes of beauty, truth, and mortality are also explored, albeit in a more introspective and contemplative manner. An excerpt that exemplifies this is:

**"They then, as bees, rehearse by rote
That's the tune—"**

In this excerpt, Dickinson uses the metaphor of bees rehearsing by rote to symbolize the cyclical nature of life and death, reflecting on the transient nature of human existence and the quest for truth and beauty in the face of mortality.

Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, both Shelley and Dickinson use beauty, truth, and mortality as symbolic tools to engage with their readers on a deeper level, inviting them to reflect on the interplay between individual experiences and societal constructs. The poets employ symbols and metaphors to convey these themes, inviting readers to interpret and assign meaning to these abstract concepts based on shared understandings within their social contexts. In doing so, Shelley and Dickinson, bridge the personal and the universal, inviting readers to engage in profound reflections on the nature of beauty, truth, and mortality within the framework of their poetic expressions.

Analyzing Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and Emily Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce" line by line in the context of the poets' social backgrounds and personal experiences, through the lens of George Herbert Mead's framework of the self and society, can shed light on how these factors influence their portrayals of beauty and existence.

**Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":
"The awful shadow of some unseen Power"**

Shelley, a Romantic poet known for his rebellious spirit and radical ideas, often challenged societal norms and institutions. This line may reflect his skepticism towards established authorities and traditional beliefs, suggesting a personal quest for deeper truths beyond conventional boundaries.

"Floats though unseen among us; visiting"

Here, we might see Shelley's portrayal of an unseen power visiting humanity as a reflection of his own sense of alienation from the dominant social structures of his time. His personal experiences of feeling disconnected from mainstream society could influence his depiction of a mysterious force that interacts with humanity from a distance.

**Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty—but was scarce":
"They then, as bees, rehearse by rote"**

Emily Dickinson, known for her introspective and reclusive nature, often explored themes of mortality and the afterlife in her poetry. Her secluded lifestyle and existential inquiries could influence her personal contemplation on the cyclical nature of life and death, as reflected in this line.

"That's the tune—"

Dickinson's emphasis on the repetitive nature of life and death in this line may stem from her own experiences of introspection and solitude. Her personal background

of self-imposed seclusion and intense introspection likely influenced her portrayal of existence as a recurring and predetermined cycle.

According to George Herbert Mead's framework, people develop their sense of self through social interactions and by taking on the perspectives of others. The personal experiences and social backgrounds of Shelley and Dickinson would have informed their unique perspectives on beauty, truth, and existence, shaping their poetic expressions. Their interactions with society and personal experiences likely influenced Shelley's rebellious spirit and quest for deeper truths, and Dickinson's introspective nature and contemplation of mortality, as they navigated the complexities of self and society in their poetic explorations of beauty and existence.

Analyzing Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and Emily Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce" line by line in the context of societal norms and historical contexts can reveal how these factors shape the representations of beauty, mortality, and identity in their works.

Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power"

In Shelley's time, societal norms were deeply rooted in religious beliefs and traditional values. This line may reflect the influence of these norms, with the concept of an unseen power embodying the mysterious and divine aspects of beauty that were often associated with religious ideals prevalent in the historical context.

"Floats though unseen among us; visiting"

The historical context of Enlightenment thinking and the Romantic movement, which placed a growing emphasis on individual experience and the transcendental nature of beauty, could shape the idea of an unseen power visiting humanity. Shelley's representation of beauty as an ethereal force visiting humanity may challenge conventional societal notions of beauty as merely physical or material.

Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce":

"They then, as bees, rehearse by rote"

In Dickinson's era, societal norms often revolved around Victorian values and the prevailing attitudes towards death and morality. This line, comparing individuals to bees rehearsing by rote, may reflect the societal expectations for people to conform to predetermined roles and behaviors, even in the face of existential questions about mortality and identity.

"That's the tune—"

The historical context of Dickinson's time, where societal norms prescribed rigid roles and expectations for individuals, could influence her emphasis on a predetermined tune or pattern in life and death. The idea of individuals following a predetermined tune aligns with the societal constraints that shaped notions of beauty, mortality, and identity during that period.

In Shelley and Dickinson's works, societal norms and historical contexts play a significant role in shaping their representations of beauty, mortality, and identity. Shelley challenges traditional notions of beauty by portraying it as a powerful but unseen force, reflecting the changing attitudes towards aesthetics and spirituality in his

historical context. Dickinson, on the other hand, reflects societal expectations and attitudes towards mortality and identity through her introspective exploration of death and the predetermined nature of existence, influenced by her time's societal norms. The poems of both poets offer insights into how societal norms and historical contexts influence the portrayal of beauty, mortality, and identity in their respective works, illustrating the interplay between individual expression and the broader cultural milieu.

To explore how beauty and its representations function symbolically in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and Emily Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce," we can analyze each poem line by line and delve into their philosophical implications.

Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"

1. Introduction to Intellectual Beauty:

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power Floats though unseen among us; visiting This various world with as inconstant wing As summer winds that creep from flower to flower—"

- In this hymn, Shelley addresses the idea of "Intellectual Beauty," portraying it as a divine and transformative force.
- The invocation of beauty suggests its essential role in human experience; it transcends the physical and delves into the mental and spiritual realms.

2. "O, what a divine surprise": "O, what a divine surprise, When things that are not are felt, and all things that perish With less surprise than your lightning eyes"

- The poet expresses wonder at beauty's sudden appearance. This surprise shows that beauty is an unpredictable, transcendent experience.
- It suggests beauty's role as a catalyst for philosophical contemplation, urging introspection and deeper understanding.

3. Symbolism of Nature: "The very winds forget their melody, And pause within the shadow of the earth; And the cloud perish in the atmosphere,"

- Through natural imagery, Shelley connects beauty with the sublime elements of the universe. The beauty he describes isn't just aesthetic; it's metaphysical, encouraging readers to think about existence and truth.

4. Contrasting Mortality and Eternity: "And mortal things feel the heavy weight of sleep, While with such fervor as all souls may feel, Thou dost rekindle them; and after years, Seeing the old world, and youth and manhood and age, With their past joys and Sorrows, thou dost talk,"

- Shelley juxtaposes the fleeting nature of human life with the everlasting quality of beauty. This highlights the tension between

physical impermanence and spiritual permanence, inviting a reflection on the nature of existence and our desire for permanence.

5. Beauty's Impact on the Human Soul: "Thou canst, even as a wind upon a bough, Soothe all things till they wake and die in sleep: And, as on the shores of Paphos, there is heard A sound of music, such as is delight To the dark spirit of the viewless air,"

- Shelley portrays beauty as a vital force that inspires the soul, indicating its role in motivating thought, creativity, and even rebellion against life's inherent struggles.
- This illustrates a broader philosophical discourse regarding beauty as both an inspiration for art and a transformative force capable of elevating human consciousness.

Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce"

1. Opening Statement of Sacrifice: "I died for Beauty—but was scarce Adjusted in the Tomb,"

- Dickinson begins with the powerful claim of dying "for Beauty," depicting it as something worthy of ultimate sacrifice. This brings beauty to a level of significance that integrates the personal and the universal.
- It encourages readers to contemplate the meaning of beauty within the framework of life and death, implying a fundamental connection between beauty and identity and existential purpose.

2. The Inevitability of Death: "I died for Truth—but was scarce Laid in my sepulcher,"

- The phrase "but was scarce" suggests the fragile nature of beauty and its potential lack of recognition in society. This creates a sense of irony, as the speaker's sacrifice led to their lack of acknowledgment.
- Dickinson portrays the harsh realities of beauty's elusiveness and the human condition, in contrast to Shelley, who celebrates beauty.

3. Dialogue with the Ideal: Two of us by dying grew Like Gentlemen—"

- The narrator encounters another character who "died for truth," further elevating the discourse around beauty and truth. This suggests a broader philosophical discussion about different ideologies, elevating beauty and truth to ideals that individuals might dedicate their lives to achieving or experiencing.

4. The Temporal and the Eternal: And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night,— We talked between the Rooms,"

- The setting in a tomb indicates the interplay between beauty, truth, and death, reinforcing the idea that the pursuit of beauty may lead to existential queries about what remains after life.

- This motif illustrates the conflict between fleeting beauty and eternal truths, inviting readers to question whether beauty is worth dying for or if it is a construct that fades in the face of mortality.

5. Reflection on Legacy: **Till the Moss had reached our lips, And covered up—**"

- The poem concludes with the quiet acceptance of the intertwined destinies of beauty and death, highlighting that both are inherent parts of the human experience. Here, Dickinson engages in a contemplative meditation on how beauty persists in memory and legacy beyond physical existence.

Broader Philosophical Discourse

In both poems, beauty transcends mere aesthetic appreciation; it serves as a bridge to explore profound philosophical themes.

- **Existential Questions:** Shelley and Dickinson both confront questions surrounding existence, mortality, and identity, suggesting that beauty is essential for understanding these human experiences.

Shelley: "And every thought of gentle power, A sweet emotion, a most gentle thought, A soothing sense of happiness; and love, And beauty and delight, and tenderness, That ever was in heaven, shall live and move."

Dickinson: "They laughed and talked of me, But why did I die, And why did they live—"

Both Shelley and Dickinson delve into existential questions surrounding existence, mortality, and identity, using beauty as a lens to contemplate these profound human experiences. Shelley's exploration emphasizes the enduring nature of beauty in heavenly realms, while Dickinson's inquiry reflects on the disparity between the speaker's death for beauty and the indifference of those who continue living.

- **Transcendence vs. Reality:** Shelley offers a view of beauty as a spiritual force that lifts the human spirit, idealizing beauty's transformative qualities, while Dickinson presents a more complex, ironic view of beauty as transient and often unrecognized amid life's harsh realities.
- **Shelley: "Till the calm rivers, lakes, and seas, And the ocean, and the eternal heavens, And the universe, and the sun, the stars, And the bright earth, and the air, and the swift winds, And the blue sky, and the mind of man,"**
Dickinson: "And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night,— We talked between the Rooms,"
- **Beauty and Truth:** Both poets position beauty alongside truth, prompting readers to explore the nature of both concepts. For Dickinson, beauty seems intertwined with sacrifice, while for Shelley, it's about inspiration and the quest for understanding.

Shelley: "And, as on the shores of Paphos, there is heard A sound of music, such as is delight To the dark spirit of the viewless air,"

Dickinson: "Two of us by dying grew Like Gentlemen—"

Through their unique approaches to the theme of beauty, Shelley and Dickinson engage in a rich philosophical discourse that examines the essence of beauty, its significance in human life, and its complex relationship with truth and mortality.

Analyzing "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" by Shelley and "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce" by Dickinson through the lens of symbolic interactionism:

Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power Floats though unseen among us; visiting This various world with as inconstant wing As summer winds that creep from flower to flower—"

Symbolic Interactionism Analysis: The "unseen Power" symbolizes an abstract force that interacts with individuals, influencing perceptions and behaviors. This interaction between the unseen Power and humanity mirrors the symbolic interactions shaping individuals' understanding of beauty and identity.

"Thou dost rekindle them; and after years, Seeing the old world, and youth and manhood and age, With their past joys and Sorrows, thou dost talk,"

Symbolic Interactionism Analysis: Shelley portrays beauty as a dynamic force that influences individuals across different stages of life. The interactions with beauty shape experiences and memories, illustrating how symbolic interactions with beauty contribute to the construction of personal and cultural identities.

Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce":

"I died for Beauty—but was scarce Adjusted in the Tomb,"

Symbolic Interactionism Analysis: The speaker's sacrifice for Beauty highlights the symbolic value attributed to beauty and identity. The lack of acknowledgment in death reflects how societal interactions and perceptions influence the recognition and significance of beauty in shaping individual identities.

"Two of us by dying grew Like Gentlemen—"

Symbolic Interactionism Analysis: The parallel between the speaker's sacrifice for Beauty and the other character's sacrifice for Truth underscores the symbolic interactions between different ideals and values. This interaction reflects the complex interplay between beauty, truth, and identity in shaping individuals' beliefs and actions.

Relevance to Contemporary Cultural and Philosophical Discourse

Symbolic Interactionism Perspective: The principles of symbolic interactionism provide a framework for understanding how individuals construct meanings and identities through social interactions and symbolic representations.

Cultural and Philosophical Relevance: The investigations into beauty and identity in Shelley's and Dickinson's poetry remain pertinent in contemporary discourse. These explorations prompt reflections on how beauty influences personal and collective identities, shedding light on the enduring relevance of beauty as a concept that shapes cultural norms, values, and self-perceptions. The symbolic

interactions depicted in their works offer insights into the complexities of beauty and identity, resonating with ongoing discussions in today's cultural and philosophical dialogues.

Analyzing Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce" for prompting modern readers to critically examine historical and contemporary perspectives on beauty and identity:

Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty": "The awful shadow of some unseen Power Floats though unseen among us; visiting This various world with as inconstant wing As summer winds that creep from flower to flower—"

Analysis: Shelley introduces an unseen Power that interacts with humanity, symbolizing an abstract force influencing perceptions. Modern readers can compare this concept to contemporary notions of societal influences on beauty and identity, prompting critical examination of how external forces shape individual understandings.

"A sweet emotion, a most gentle thought, A soothing sense of happiness; and love, And beauty and delight, and tenderness, That ever was in heaven, shall live and move."

Analysis: Shelley links intellectual beauty to positive emotions and virtues. Modern readers can analyze how historical ideals of beauty align with or contrast contemporary perspectives, encouraging critical reflection on the evolution of societal values related to beauty and identity.

Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty – but was scarce": "I died for Beauty—but was scarce Adjusted in the Tomb,"

Analysis: Dickinson's speaker sacrifices for Beauty but receives little recognition. This line prompts modern readers to consider historical attitudes towards beauty and identity, highlighting how societal perceptions may undervalue certain aspects of beauty, prompting critical comparisons with contemporary standards.

"They laughed and talked of me, But why did I die, And why did they live—"

Analysis: The speaker questions the purpose of their sacrifice for Beauty. Modern readers can critically examine historical contexts where beauty and identity were intertwined, comparing them to present-day conversations on beauty's significance and the impact of societal norms on individual identities.

Prompting Critical Examination:

Shelley and Dickinson's poetry challenges modern readers to critically evaluate historical and contemporary perspectives on beauty and identity. By exploring the symbolic representations of beauty and the sacrifices made for it in their works, readers are prompted to compare how these themes have been perceived and valued over time.

The contrasting views of beauty as an unseen, powerful force in Shelley's work and as a somewhat elusive concept in Dickinson's poem encourage readers to question how beauty and identity have been conceptualized throughout history and in present-day society.

These comparisons prompt critical reflection on the evolution of ideals surrounding beauty and the complexities of identity construction.

Implications

1. **Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" explores the themes of beauty, truth, and mortality through symbolic interactionism, portraying beauty as a fleeting yet essential force that inspires truth and intellectual pursuit.** It signifies an interplay between the seen and the unseen, suggesting beauty's role as a bridge to deeper truths. Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty" juxtaposes mortality with beauty's quest. This underscores the societal and personal validation of beauty, indicating that both poets engage in a dialogue about how beauty shapes our understanding of existence and mortality.
2. **Influence of Social Backgrounds and Experiences:** Shelley's tumultuous political context and idealistic visions of beauty reflect his radical aspirations for societal change, while Dickinson's secluded life and introspective themes underscore her personal struggles with identity and death. Through George Herbert Mead's framework, one can discern how Shelley's broader societal interactions shape his self-concept, while Dickinson's internal dialogues foster a subjective understanding of beauty, emphasizing their contrasting engagements with the world.
3. **Societal Norms and Historical Contexts:** The Romantic period, which celebrated individual experience and nature, heavily influences Shelley's idealistic portrayal of beauty. Conversely, Dickinson's work often reflects the constraints of 19th-century societal expectations of women, particularly regarding beauty and mortality. These influences highlight how societal norms and historical contexts shape their respective portrayals of beauty and identity.
4. **Beauty's Symbolic Function: For Shelley, beauty serves as a symbol of divine aspiration and an intellect that transcends earthly connections.** Dickinson employs beauty as a catalyst for exploring existential questions, connecting mortality and personal experience. Both poets frame beauty not merely as aesthetic but as an essential vessel for deeper philosophical inquiry, creating a nexus between beauty and the greater truths of human existence.
5. **Understanding Literary Analysis through Symbolic Interactionism:** Applying symbolic interactionism enriches the literary analysis of their works by revealing how beauty and identity serve as constructs shaped through social interactions. The dialogue surrounding beauty remains relevant today, as contemporary discussions on identity, particularly in the realms of gender and race, echo the themes articulated in both poets' works. This continuity reinforces the importance of historical literature in understanding modern conceptions of self and societal interaction.
6. **Critical Examination of Beauty and Identity:** Both poets compel modern readers to reflect on the evolution of beauty and identity perceptions. Their works highlight the enduring impact of historical constructs of beauty on current understanding, inviting readers to interrogate society's ideals against

their own lived experiences. This critical engagement fosters a reevaluation of beauty's implications in one's personal and social identity, bridging the gap between historical and contemporary viewpoints.

On the whole Shelley's and Dickinson's poetry underscores the intricate connections between beauty, truth, and mortality, reflecting the significant interplay between personal experience and societal expectations, which continues to resonate in ongoing cultural and philosophical dialogues. Their investigations prompt modern contemplation about the evolving concepts of beauty and identity, encouraging a deeper understanding of these universal themes.

CONCLUSION

The works of Shelley and Dickinson reveal the profound interplay between beauty, truth, and mortality, shaped by their distinct social backgrounds and historical contexts. Through symbolic interactionism, this study elucidates how their portrayals of beauty transcend mere aesthetics, serving as vital conduits for deeper philosophical exploration and personal identity. Their poetry invites contemporary readers to critically engage with the evolving perceptions of beauty and identity, highlighting the enduring relevance of these themes in today's societal discourse. Ultimately, both poets encourage a nuanced understanding of how beauty influences our existence, fostering an ongoing dialogue that bridges the past and the present.

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Corpus Source

1. <https://allpoetry.com/I-died-for-Beauty--but-was-scarce> (*I died for Beauty - but was scarce* by Emily Dickinson
2. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45123/hymn-to-intellectual-beauty> (*Jymn to Interillectual BEauty* by Percy Bysshe Shelly