

## Navigating Eros and Thanatos: A Genre and Appraisal Analysis of Virginia Woolf's Suicide Note and John Keats' Last Letter

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze Freudian life and death drives, commonly referred to as Eros and Thanatos, through the lens of systemic functional linguistics, particularly focusing on the interpersonal meaning-making process. The texts selected for this analysis are Virginia Woolf's suicide note and John Keats's last letter to his friend Charles Brown. These letters are significant as they were composed shortly before the authors' deaths—Woolf by suicide and Keats due to tuberculosis—providing a poignant context for examining their expressions of life and death. The analysis is framed within the genre of letters, which allows for a nuanced understanding of the contextual factors influencing each writer's expression of Eros and Thanatos. By evaluating these texts, the study seeks to uncover shared values surrounding these drives (Freud, 1961) using appraisal theory, an extension of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) that focuses on interpersonal meaning (Martin & White, 2005). The research is specifically limited to the attitude system of appraisal, enabling an exploration of interpersonal attitudinal markers between the writers and their recipients. This text analysis employs descriptive and interpretive techniques, connecting interpretations with the three major systems of attitude: Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. This framework will facilitate a comparison of the emotional landscapes reflected in the letters, highlighting both similarities and differences in how Woolf and Keats confront their impending deaths. The study concludes that life and death drives are instinctual forces shaped by both physical and mental health contexts. By situating these texts within their letter genre, the analysis provides a richer understanding of how Eros and Thanatos manifest in personal correspondence at critical moments in life.

**Keywords:** Appraisal; Eros; Thanatos; Suicide; Woolf; Keats; Genre

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## INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to discover the concurrent and opposing acts of two fundamental impulses, Eros and Thanatos, to comprehend the phenomena of life in the final notes/letters of literary writers. Additionally, it looked for evidence of evaluative language in famous authors' (Woolf and Keats) suicide note and last letter in trying to pinpoint the psychological factors that contributed to their untimely deaths. The researchers approached this study with the assumption that the study of residuals- the last note or letter- that is left behind may provide an insight into an individual's Attitude to this strange phenomenon of life.

The research on thanatology suggests that the pendulum of life experiences swings between life and death instincts termed Thanatos and Eros (Anderson, 2016). According to Potamites and colleagues (2014), those writers who suffer from mental illnesses or any other melancholia often engage with this desire for death owing to their struggle with psychological issues. In their studies, Runco (1998) and Pająk and Trzebiński (2014) also attested that there is close proximity between literary writers and suicide attempts. It is also believed that these suicidal thoughts emerge from the clash between Eros and Thanatos, and these instincts are recorded in the works of writers who struggle with mental and physical illnesses (Kean, 2011). Examples are the writings of Virginia Woolf and John Keats, who are no exception to it, as both of them were drawn to this subject matter. Virginia Woolf is one of the chief begetters of modern authors who wrote a great deal of poetry and fiction about human emotions, life, death, and the different perspectives on it (Androustopoulos et al., 2020). In contrast, the romantic poet John Keats, known for his escapism and theory of beauty and truth, has also written abundant poetry about how he perceives life, its beauty, and its end (Bate, 2009).

Both writers had critical insight, and they used it to register these insights in their writings other than poetry and fiction. Woolf is a literary essayist, novelist, and poet who recorded her profound thoughts about the representation of the human psyche and stream of consciousness (Sang, 2010; Bell et al., 1974). Her critical essays focused on literary topics about style, genre, subject matter, and her personal life to record her intuitions regarding the creative process of art. In contrast, Keats belongs to the romantic age and is known as the poet of beauty. He frequently wrote letters to his friends, siblings, teachers, colleagues, publishers, and critics, which contained his poetic thoughts in a prosaic manner (Rollins, 2012). The common thing about both the writers and their prosaic writings is that they both frequently wrote non-literary writings and died after writing their last letter (in Virginia Woolf's case, it was a suicide note). Woolf committed suicide and left a suicide note for her husband expounding on her situation (Oyebode, 2010). Contrary to this, Keats succumbed to his illness and died of Tuberculosis. He wrote many letters, which were his last letters to the concerned recipients; however, the last letter written to his close friend Charles is considerably more important because he was comfortable with Charles and could express his feelings openly (Rollins, 2012; Colvin, 2018). Both of the texts, Keats' last letter and Woolf's suicide note, have something in common as they were written, or rather composed, in tranquility, knowing that they were likely to be their last words (Trilling, 1955; Lee, 2003). This study assumes that Woolf's letter might be projecting the influence of the death instinct on her thoughts, as she intended to end her life after writing it. In contrast, Keats' letter to Charles might reflect life instinct, as he wanted to live, but he knew he would die and wanted the physical pain, suffering, and embarrassment to end. Hence, both texts seem to carry a paradoxical sub-text to them, which may reflect a struggle between life and death instincts.

Critics have analyzed the suicide note of Virginia Woolf for its linguistically charged elements which demonstrate the essential motive behind her decision to commit suicide (see, e.g., Lee & Joh, 2019; Jasim & Jaafar, 2022). A study by Malini and Tan (2016) analyzed the suicide note for its Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), where the analysis of linguistic elements shows that bipolar disorder triggered suicidal impulses in her. This result closely aligns with the psychological perspective studied by Lee (2003), whose psychoanalysis highlighted issues similar to previous studies (e.g., Jasim & Jaafar, 2022; Malini & Tan, 2016). The study of Androutopoulou et al. (2020) also fortifies the stance about bipolar disorder as it looks at the letters of Woolf for the two highlighted premises of hope and despair, which remained recurrent throughout her letters. The suicide note of Virginia Woolf has also been analyzed by many researchers for its language in terms of forensic paralinguistic foundations (Lee & Joh, 2019), rhetorical features and harm concerning others and oneself (Egnoto & Griffin, 2016), and linguistically stylistic features foregrounding important information that help investigate the dynamics of death impulses in her suicide note (Koehler, 2007; Grosvenor, 2013; Jasim & Jaafar, 2022). However, the suicide letter has not yet been investigated regarding the struggle between Thanatos and Eros that the writer was going through. This marks a gap in the existing literature that this study intends to bridge.

In contrast, Keats' letters have been analyzed less for the death instincts, as these letters have been perceived as a source of information providing insights into the young poet's life (see, e.g., Callaghan, 2020; Houghton, 2021). Keats' letters (1921) were collected and arranged chronologically by investigating the young poet's life events and establishing the poet's relationship with the people he knew. The biographical investigations of Rodriguez and Rodríguez (1993), Roe and Roe (1995), Bate (2009), and Houghton (2021) connected the life and works of Keats to the letters he wrote to authenticate the arguments about his life that were scientifically compiled. Furthermore, Keats' letters to Fanny Brawne were taken as a primary source by Altikriti (2016) to study the poetic elements injected into them and the exaggeration of human feelings to larger-than-life notions of Platonism. Similarly, Keats' letters have been considered a contributing factor to a biographical study by Bate (2009), who also incorporated these letters in his book while assembling the works and life events of the poet. In contrast to the mere autobiographical studies dealing with the poet's societal life, the study of Thorpe (1926) looked into the letters as a gateway to his artistic imagination, which rendered a significant understanding of his theory of poetry and how he approached it. At the same time, Rodriguez and Rodríguez (1993) connected the artistic and societal life of the writer by investigating these letters for the poet's poetic art and how that reflected his life. In addition, some researchers looked at these letters from a psychological perspective, trying to gain insights into Keats' mind (i.e., McGann, 1979; Callaghan, 2020; Baker, 2011). One of the earliest studies in this vein was conducted by McGann (1979), who investigated the evolution of the critical mind behind these letters by considering the life events of Keats. A recent study also tried to locate the limitations in private letter writing and compared Keats' letters to his contemporaries (Callaghan, 2020). However, as far as the life and death instinct is concerned, his letters to Charles stand out because they talk more about the pain, suffering, and embarrassment of Keats' days in quarantine (Baker, 2011), which shows the pendulum of his state of mind swinging between these two instincts. None of his last few letters has been analyzed to see the clash between Thanatos and Eros emerging through the linguistic features and how that reflects the writer's mental health. This highlights a void in the existing literature that this study attempts to fill by investigating the influence of Thanatos and Eros in the last letter to Charles. Moreover, the complex interplay between life and death instincts, as articulated through the letters of literary

figures, remains underexplored in existing research. While previous studies have examined the linguistic and rhetorical features of suicide notes and letters, they often overlook the contextual meanings and emotional nuances conveyed through genre-specific structures and appraisal systems. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing John Keats's last letter and Virginia Woolf's suicide note through the lenses of genre analysis and appraisal theory, aiming to uncover how these frameworks illuminate the psychological dynamics of Eros and Thanatos in their expressions of hope and despair.

### **BASIC CONCEPTS ADOPTED IN THIS STUDY EROS AND THANATOS: FREUD'S THEORY OF DRIVES**

Freud explored different layers of the human mind and mental ability in his research on human consciousness dealing with life and death instincts (Freud, 1961). He believed that life instincts could not account for all human behavior. In his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud concluded that all instincts belong to one of two major classes: life drives and death drives, later referred to as Eros and Thanatos by other psychoanalysts. According to Freud, the life urge concerns basic survival, enjoyment, and reproduction. Life instincts encompass urges like hunger, thirst, and the need to avoid pain. The ordered, logical portion of a person's psyche that regulates desires, the ego, according to Freud, opposes the life urge. Later, he said, a self-destructive death urge (Thanatos) opposed the life drive or Eros. He proposed that people are predisposed to dying and destroying themselves, notably asserting that "the objective of all life is death". According to Freud, this death urge is often channeled outward by humans and manifests itself as violence towards others. However, people can also focus this urge inward, which can lead to suicide or self-harm. He also believed that life and death instincts are the two conflicting forces that affect the development of one's life and impulses; Thanatos determines the mental condition that drags one towards suicide and violence, and Eros deals with life instincts (Lind, 1991). Mapping the feelings in the two texts helped to explore the understanding of Eros and Thanatos (Freud, 1961; Gray, 1996). This also marked differences between the two impulses juxtaposed with similar yet different contexts, contributing to the existing discourse on serious mental health issues.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study is situated in the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) interpretive paradigm providing tools for text analysis. The interpersonal metafunction in SFL provides a theoretical foundation for this study, and the researchers have analyzed the attitudinal evaluation markers (Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation) qualitatively. The current research primarily focuses on the interpersonal metafunction, as the selected texts exemplify interpersonal communication where the writer engages directly with the reader. This focus on interpersonal meaning is crucial, as it reveals how the authors navigate their relationships and convey their emotional states in the context of impending death. The qualitative analysis examines the intricate structures of language that facilitate this meaning-making process, emphasizing the stages of letter genres that provide essential context for understanding the interpersonal dynamics at play. By analyzing how each writer constructs their message, the study highlights the ways in which they articulate their feelings, intentions, and connections to their recipients. This approach not only enriches our

understanding of the texts but also illustrates how genre conventions shape interpersonal interactions and influence the overall impact of the communication.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### ATTITUDE: WAYS OF FEELING IN TEXTS

An explanation of how people assess and react to the experiences and events in their lives is provided by the appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005). According to the theory, people base their assessments of a situation or experience—influenced by various cognitive processes—on their perceptions of it. Appraisal theory examines the organization of language that employs meaning by appraising attitudes, judgment, and graduation, which emerge from the interpersonal social meta-function.

Martin and White (2005) suggest that attitudes are created through the process of appraisal, which entails assessing the circumstance or item from multiple angles. Martin and White (2005) define a framework for mapping attitudes as a system of meanings that refers to how attitudes are understood in English texts. Three semantic areas, generally referred to as emotion, ethics, and aesthetics, make up this system. These measurements consist of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. The exploration of emotional expression in literary correspondence, particularly through the lens of appraisal theory, has gained traction in recent years. Appraisal theory, developed by Martin and White (2005), provides a framework for understanding how language conveys attitudes and emotions through three primary categories: Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. This theoretical approach has been applied in various contexts to analyze the emotional dimensions of texts, including suicide notes and letters.

Previous research has focused on the linguistic and rhetorical features of suicide notes, often highlighting the stylistic elements without delving into the underlying emotional implications. For example, Jasim and Jaffar (2022) examined the linguistic characteristics of suicide notes, identifying patterns that reflect emotional distress but did not explore how these patterns relate to the authors' psychological states. Similarly, Lee and Joh (2019) analyzed forensic rhetorical features in letters but overlooked the contextual meanings that emerge from the use of appraisal markers. Egnoto and Griffin (2016) also contributed to this discourse by examining rhetorical features in literary letters, emphasizing elements of self-harm present in the language. There are studies on the use of appraisal framework for metaphor analysis (Luporini, 2021) or analyzing other genres for example speech (Shamir, et al., 2023). However, these studies often lack a comprehensive approach that considers how genre conventions influence emotional expression. The current study seeks to fill this gap by applying systemic functional linguistics as a conceptual framework to evaluate attitudinal markers in the texts of John Keats and Virginia Woolf. In addition to linguistic studies, psychological literature has explored the emotional dimensions of letters written by literary figures. Malini and Tan (2016) found that bipolar disorder can trigger suicidal impulses in writers, while Androutsopoulou et al. (2020) identified hope and despair as significant factors influencing mental health. Lee (2003) concluded that mental health issues often lead to a conflict between hope and despair. However, these studies frequently lack an inclusive approach that examines the core components establishing this conflict. The integration of Freud's concepts of Eros and Thanatos further enriches this discussion. Freud posited that human behavior is driven by a conflict between life instincts (Eros) and death instincts (Thanatos). This duality is particularly relevant when analyzing texts like Woolf's suicide note, where Thanatos

appears to dominate her emotional landscape despite her expressions of love for her husband. Conversely, Keats's letter reflects a struggle between these instincts, showcasing his desire for life even as he confronts mortality. The present study aims to build upon this existing literature by triangulating appraisal theory with Freudian drives to analyze how Keats's and Woolf's letters express the complex interplay between life and death instincts. By focusing on attitudinal markers within their correspondence, this research seeks to provide deeper insights into the psychological dimensions of their emotional states while addressing gaps in previous studies regarding contextual meaning in literary texts. Ultimately, this literature review sets the stage for understanding how genre conventions and appraisal systems can illuminate the nuanced expressions of hope and despair found in literary correspondence.

### AFFECT

A person's emotional reaction to a specific object or event is referred to as their "affect." The process through which a person evaluates the degree of pleasure or displeasure associated with that object or event is called affect assessment. This evaluation can be positive, negative, or neutral. According to Martin and White (2005, p. 42), "affect is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings: do we feel happy or sad, confident or anxious, interested or bored?" Affect can also be categorized into sub- and sub-sub classifications to provide a more nuanced understanding of the types of feelings involved. The sub-classifications of affect include happiness, security, and satisfaction for positive emotions, and unhappiness, insecurity, and dissatisfaction for negative emotions. For example, happiness can be further divided into feelings such as joy or affection, while unhappiness may include sadness or antipathy. Similarly, security encompasses feelings of confidence or trust, whereas insecurity involves anxiety or fear. These sub-sub classifications allow for a detailed analysis of how individuals express their emotions in specific contexts. For instance, a person might positively evaluate a stunning sunset because it elicits joy and satisfaction. In contrast, someone experiencing a distressing event might express sadness (unhappiness) or anxiety (insecurity). Thus, affect is not only positive or negative but also varies in intensity and type based on the sub- and sub-sub categories it engages. This layered approach provides deeper insight into the emotional dimensions of interpersonal meaning-making within systemic functional linguistics (SFL).

### JUDGEMENT

By applying their ideas, values, and expectations to an object or event, people evaluate it through the judgment appraisal process. This evaluation focuses on the level of goodness or badness that a person assigns to that object or event. According to Martin and White (2005, p. 42), "Judgment deals with attitudes towards behavior, which we admire or criticize, praise or condemn." To achieve a more nuanced understanding of these evaluations, it is essential to involve the sub- and sub-sub classifications of judgment. These classifications determine the positive and negative aspects of the judgments made and the specific types of characters being assessed. For instance, personal judgment (Social Esteem) allows individuals to evaluate someone's character through praise or criticism, while moral judgment (Social Sanction) assesses a person's character based on ethical standards, encompassing admiration or condemnation. Within these categories, personal judgment can be further divided into subcategories such as capacity, tenacity, and norm, which reflect different dimensions of character evaluation. For example, capacity refers to one's

abilities or skills, tenacity pertains to persistence and determination, and norm evaluates adherence to social expectations. Similarly, moral judgment can include evaluations based on ethical behavior, integrity, and social responsibility. This detailed classification enables a comprehensive analysis of how individuals express their attitudes toward others' behaviors and characteristics. For instance, a person's assessment of a political speech may hinge not only on their political beliefs but also on how they perceive the speaker's capacity and integrity. By incorporating these sub- and sub-sub classifications of judgment, we gain deeper insights into the complexities of interpersonal evaluations within systemic functional linguistics (SFL).

### APPRECIATION

The process of appreciation assessment involves evaluating an object or event based on its inherent qualities or features. This evaluation centers on the value or significance that a person assigns to that object or event. Martin and White (2005, p. 43) explain that “appreciation involves evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena, according to the ways in which they are valued or not in a given field.” To enhance this understanding, it is essential to incorporate the sub- and sub-sub classifications of appreciation, as these classifications determine the positive and negative aspects of the evaluations made and the specific types of appreciation being expressed. The main categories of appreciation include reaction, composition, and valuation. Each of these can be further divided into subcategories that provide a more detailed framework for analysis. For instance, within reaction, we can identify subcategories such as aesthetic appeal (how pleasing something is), emotional impact (the feelings it evokes), and interest (how engaging it is). In the composition category, subcategories might include complexity (the intricacy of the object), balance (how well elements are proportioned), and harmony (the overall coherence). Lastly, the valuation category can be subdivided into cultural significance (the importance within a cultural context) and economic value (monetary worth). For example, when assessing a work of art, a person may appreciate its aesthetic appeal due to its beauty (positive reaction) while also considering its complexity and cultural significance. Such nuanced evaluations reflect not only personal taste but also broader societal values. By involving these sub- and sub-sub classifications of appreciation, we gain deeper insights into how individuals articulate their evaluations and how these evaluations contribute to interpersonal meaning-making within systemic functional linguistics (SFL).

### ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The analysis of Keats's last letter to Charles Brown and Woolf's suicide note was grounded in the stages of genre analysis to provide a structured understanding of how interpersonal meanings are constructed within the letter genre. Each text was examined through the distinct stages of letter writing, including salutation, orientation, body, and closure, to contextualize the emotional and attitudinal markers within their respective structural frameworks. This genre-based approach allowed the researchers to explore how the writers navigated interpersonal meaning-making at each stage of their letters, shedding light on the progression of their feelings and intentions. Following this genre analysis, the texts were individually analyzed using team-based research principles for case studies, as outlined by McLeod (2010). The researchers then convened as a team to discuss their findings and reach a consensus, repeating this process four times to ensure rigor and depth. Feedback from colleagues was sought throughout the process to refine and

validate the conclusions. The analytical framework of Appraisal Attitudinal markers was employed to investigate the emotional expressions of the two writers, particularly their feelings related to life and death instincts. By integrating genre analysis with appraisal theory, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of how Keats and Woolf articulated their emotions and interpersonal relationships within the structural stages of their respective letters, offering deeper insights into their engagement with Eros and Thanatos.

### SELECTED SAMPLE

The letter by Virginia Woolf, dated March 28, 1941, is a suicide note addressed to her husband, Leonard Woolf. This letter adheres to the stages of the letter-writing genre, beginning with a salutation ("Dearest"), followed by an orientation where she sets the emotional tone and context of her decision. Woolf's letter is widely available; however, this study selects Oyeboade (2010, p. 280), who has transcribed some of the letters and published the journal *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* (1994-2014). The body of the letter elaborates on her feelings of mental anguish, her gratitude for Leonard's support, and her belief that her continued existence would burden him. Finally, the letter concludes with a closure that expresses her love and appreciation for their life together. This structure provides a framework for understanding how Woolf conveys interpersonal meaning and emotional depth within the genre of a personal farewell letter.

Keats's letter to Charles Brown, dated November 30, 1820 (quoted in the compiled book by *Keats & Scudde*, 1899, p. 376) similarly follows the stages of the letter-writing genre. It begins with a salutation, followed by an orientation that situates the reader in Keats's declining health and his awareness of impending death. The body of the letter reflects on his experiences, his friendship with Brown, and his acceptance of mortality. The closure offers a poignant farewell that underscores the emotional weight of their relationship. What makes these two letters relatively similar in context is their shared engagement with the knowledge of impending death. Both writers use the conventions of the letter genre to articulate their feelings about life and death while addressing their closest confidants. By analyzing these texts through their genre stages, we gain a deeper understanding of how interpersonal meaning is constructed in moments of profound emotional significance.

### ANALYSIS OF KEATS'S LETTER TO CHARLES BROWN

In this section, we will conduct a comprehensive analysis of John Keats's letter to Charles Brown, dated November 30, 1820, through the lenses of genre based appraisal analysis foregrounding Freudian concepts of Eros and Thanatos. This multifaceted approach will illuminate how Keats navigates his emotional landscape while grappling with themes of life and death.

### GENRE ANALYSIS

Keats's letter follows the typical stages of personal correspondence: salutation, orientation, body, and closure. Each stage contributes to the construction of interpersonal meaning:

**Salutation:** The letter begins with "My dear Brown," where Keats uses "dear" to express his affection for his friend. This reflects positive Affect (love) and sets a warm, intimate tone that



underscores his strong bond with Brown. This opening aligns with Freud's concept of Eros, as it highlights Keats's desire for connection despite his physical suffering.

**Orientation:** Keats immediately introduces his physical and emotional struggles: "Tis the most difficult thing in the world to me to write a letter." This statement conveys negative Appreciation (reaction: quality) about writing, showing how his illness has made even simple tasks arduous. He continues with "My stomach continues so bad" and "I feel it worse," which reflect negative Affect (reaction: impact) as he describes his misery. However, when he states "yet I am much better than I was in quarantine," he expresses a more optimistic view of his health, indicating a momentary triumph of Eros over Thanatos. The phrase "afraid to encounter the pro-ing and con-ing of anything interesting" reflects Affect (insecurity), as Keats avoids engaging with emotionally taxing matters, further illustrating his vulnerability.

**Body:** The body of the letter contains rich emotional content, where Keats evaluates his condition, relationships, and circumstances: He describes his life as a "posthumous existence," which reflects negative Appreciation (valuation) of his current state. This phrase vividly captures Thanatos, as Keats feels disconnected from life and anticipates death. When lamenting missed opportunities to meet Brown ("How unfortunate"), Keats expresses negative Appreciation (reaction: impact) about their inability to connect. This regret highlights Eros through his longing for friendship. The phrase "my star predominant" reflects an ambiguous Appreciation (reaction) of fate/destiny. While it acknowledges misfortune, it also suggests resignation to the inevitability of death (Thanatos). Keats's gratitude toward Dr. Clarke ("very attentive to me") reflects both positive Judgment (social esteem: capacity) for Dr. Clarke's care and positive Appreciation for the support he receives during his illness.

**Closure:** In closing, Keats struggles to say goodbye: "I can scarcely bid you good bye even in a letter." This reflects deep positive Affect (love) for Brown, reinforcing Eros through his reluctance to part emotionally. His final blessing—"God bless you!"—underscores his enduring affection and hope for Brown's well-being, despite his own despair.

#### APPRAISAL ANALYSIS

Table 1 (Appendix A) provides a detailed breakdown of attitudinal markers used by Keats:

**Affect:** Keats frequently expresses emotional reactions tied to his health and relationships: Phrases like "afraid to encounter" and "so weak" reflect insecurity and despair (negative Affect), tied to Thanatos. Conversely, "much better than I was in quarantine" conveys optimism (positive Affect) as he briefly acknowledges improvement in his condition, reflecting Eros. His affection for Brown is evident in "love so much," which registers as positive Affect (realis), emphasizing their close bond.

**Judgment:** Judgment is less frequent but still present in key moments: "Cannot answer" reflects a self-assessment of incapacity (Judgment: capacity) as Keats acknowledges his limitations due to illness. His statement about Dr. Clarke ("very attentive to me") reflects positive Judgment (capacity) for Dr. Clarke's care. The phrase "all in my power" conveys obligation (Judgment: capacity) as Keats expresses a commitment to correcting past mistakes if he recovers.

**Appreciation:** Appreciation dominates the letter as Keats evaluates entities around him: His description of writing as “the most difficult thing” captures his frustration (negative Appreciation: reaction: quality) with tasks that were once manageable. The phrase “posthumous existence” reflects a bleak self-evaluation (negative Appreciation: valuation) tied to Thanatos. His acknowledgment of Dr. Clarke’s attentiveness shows positive Appreciation, highlighting moments where Eros emerges through gratitude. The interplay among these markers reveals how Keats balances despair with moments of hope and appreciation for life.

#### FREUDIAN CONCEPTS: EROS AND THANATOS

Freud’s dual instincts—Eros (life instinct) and Thanatos (death instinct)—are central to understanding Keats's emotional state in this letter: Thanatos dominates much of the text as Keats grapples with mortality. His description of life as a "posthumous existence" reflects an acceptance of death. Phrases like “feel it worse” and “so weak” highlight physical decline, reinforcing Thanatos through expressions of helplessness. The acknowledgment of fate ("my star predominant") suggests resignation to death rather than resistance. Despite this, instances of Eros emerge throughout the letter: His affection for Brown (“love so much,” “God bless you!”) underscores a desire for connection even in despair. His optimism about being “better than in quarantine” reflects a flicker of hope tied to life instincts. Gratitude toward Dr. Clarke ("very attentive") demonstrates appreciation for care that sustains him physically and emotionally. The tension between these opposing forces—Eros driving him toward life and connection, while Thanatos pulls him toward resignation—creates a poignant emotional conflict that permeates the letter.

Through genre analysis, appraisal theory, and Freudian concepts, we gain a comprehensive understanding of John Keats's letter to Charles Brown. The structural elements of the letter facilitate interpersonal meaning-making, while attitudinal markers reveal the complexities of his emotional state amid suffering. By examining these facets together, we see how Keats navigates the profound conflict between Eros and Thanatos, ultimately illustrating the richness of human experience in the face of mortality. This analysis not only sheds light on Keats's reflections but also invites further exploration into how such themes resonate across literary contexts.

#### ANALYSIS OF WOOLF'S LETTER TO HER HUSBAND

This analysis examines Virginia Woolf’s suicide note to her husband, Leonard Woolf, through genre analysis, appraisal theory, and Freud’s concepts of Eros and Thanatos. By exploring the structural stages of the letter, attitudinal markers, and the psychological dynamics of life and death instincts, we gain a deeper understanding of Woolf’s emotional state and intentions.

#### GENRE ANALYSIS

Virginia Woolf’s suicide note adheres to the structural conventions of a personal letter, with distinct stages that contribute to its interpersonal meaning:

**Salutation:** Woolf begins with "Dearest," addressing her husband in an intimate and affectionate tone. This salutation reflects positive Affect (love) and establishes the emotional depth of their

relationship. It aligns with Freud's concept of Eros, as it underscores her enduring bond with Leonard despite her despair.

**Orientation:** Woolf sets the context for her decision by stating: "I feel certain I am going mad again." This declaration introduces her mental state, reflecting negative Affect (insecurity) as she acknowledges her deteriorating condition. She further elaborates on her inability to endure another episode of mental illness: "I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times." Here, Woolf expresses negative Appreciation (reaction: impact) about her past struggles, highlighting her fear of reliving them.

**Body:** The body of the letter is rich with emotional reflections and evaluations. Woolf expresses deep gratitude for Leonard: "You have given me the greatest possible happiness." This reflects positive Affect (affection) and positive Judgment (normality), appraising Leonard's role in her life. She acknowledges her guilt: "I cannot go on spoiling your life," which conveys negative Judgment (capacity) as she evaluates herself as a burden. This guilt aligns with Freud's concept of Thanatos, as it reflects self-destructive thoughts rooted in her perception of being a hindrance. The phrase "owe all the happiness of my life to you" highlights her appreciation for Leonard, reflecting both positive Affect (affection) and positive Appreciation (valuation).

**Closure:** The letter concludes with a poignant farewell: "I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been." This final statement encapsulates both gratitude and despair, illustrating the tension between Eros (love for Leonard) and Thanatos (her decision to end her life).

#### APPRAISAL ANALYSIS

Table 2 (Appendix B) provided identifies key attitudinal markers in Woolf's note:

**Affect:** Woolf frequently expresses strong emotions tied to love, guilt, and despair: "Feel certain" and "mad" reflect negative Affect (insecurity), highlighting her fear and mental instability. "Greatest possible happiness" conveys positive Affect (affection) for Leonard, emphasizing his importance in her life. "Can't fight" expresses negative Affect (dissatisfaction) as she acknowledges her inability to overcome her illness.

**Judgment:** Woolf evaluates both herself and Leonard through moral and social lenses: She describes Leonard as "entirely patient with me and incredibly good," reflecting positive Judgment (propriety) in recognizing his kindness. Conversely, she judges herself negatively: "I cannot go on spoiling your life," which conveys negative Judgment (capacity) as she views herself as a burden.

**Appreciation:** Woolf uses Appreciation to evaluate entities in her life: She describes Leonard as having given her "the greatest possible happiness," reflecting positive Appreciation (valuation). Her acknowledgment that "two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came" conveys a mix of regret (negative Appreciation) and gratitude (positive Appreciation) for their shared experiences. The interplay among these markers reveals Woolf's internal conflict: her love for Leonard clashes with feelings of guilt and hopelessness about her illness.

## FREUDIAN CONCEPTS: EROS AND THANATOS

Freud's dual instincts, Eros (life instinct) and Thanatos (death instinct), are central to understanding Woolf's emotional state in this letter: Woolf's expressions of love and gratitude toward Leonard reflect Eros. Her phrases like "You have given me the greatest possible happiness" demonstrate a deep appreciation for their relationship, underscoring her desire to preserve his well-being even as she contemplates ending her own life. Her concern for Leonard's future happiness ("I owe all the happiness of my life to you") further illustrates Eros by highlighting her enduring emotional connection to him. On the other hand, the pervasive sense of guilt ("I cannot go on spoiling your life") reflects Thanatos, as it drives Woolf toward self-destruction out of a belief that she is a burden. Her acknowledgment that she cannot endure another episode ("I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times") illustrates resignation to death as an escape from suffering. The tension between these opposing forces—her love for Leonard versus her despair over her illness—creates the emotional complexity that defines the letter.

Through genre analysis, appraisal theory, and Freud's concepts of Eros and Thanatos, we gain a nuanced understanding of Virginia Woolf's suicide note. The structural stages of the letter facilitate interpersonal meaning-making by expressing love, gratitude, guilt, and despair. Attitudinal markers reveal how Woolf evaluates herself, Leonard, and their shared experiences while grappling with mental illness. Finally, the interplay between Eros and Thanatos underscores the profound conflict between Woolf's desire for connection and her resignation to death. Ultimately, this analysis sheds light on how language serves as both an expression of emotion and a reflection of existential struggle during moments of crisis.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the interplay between human emotions, particularly the conflicting instincts of life (Eros) and death (Thanatos), as expressed in the letters and suicide notes of literary figures. Drawing on SFL based genre analysis focusing appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), and Freud's theory of drives, we analyzed John Keats's letter to Charles Brown and Virginia Woolf's suicide note to uncover the thought processes behind their words and trace the manifestations of life and death drives within these texts.

The genre analysis of both texts revealed how their structural stages: salutation, orientation, body, and closure, contributed to their interpersonal meaning. In Keats's letter, the salutation ("My dear Brown") sets an affectionate tone, reflecting his desire for connection despite his suffering. The orientation introduces his declining health, while the body elaborates on his reflections about life, relationships, and mortality. The closure expresses difficulty in saying goodbye, underscoring his emotional attachment to Brown. In contrast, Woolf's suicide note begins with a salutation ("Dearest"), establishing intimacy with her husband. The orientation introduces her mental anguish and inability to endure another episode of her illness. The body reflects her gratitude toward Leonard while expressing guilt over being a burden. The closure conveys her final farewell, where she resigns herself to death as a means of ending her suffering. The structural differences between the two texts highlight their contrasting emotional landscapes: Keats's letter reflects a struggle between hope and despair, while Woolf's note reveals resignation to death.

The appraisal analysis identified key attitudinal markers: *Affect*, *Judgment*, and *Appreciation* (Martin & White, 2005), that illuminated the emotional states of both writers. Appreciation dominated Keats's letter as he evaluated his health, relationships, and circumstances.

For example, phrases like “feel it worse”\* reflect negative Appreciation, while “much better than I was in quarantine” conveys positive Appreciation, indicating moments of hope amidst despair. Keats also expressed Affect through statements like “I cannot bear the sight of any handwriting of a friend I love so much as I do you,” which reflects deep affection for Brown. Instances of Judgment were less frequent but significant. For example, Keats judged himself as incapable (“cannot answer”) due to his illness but also expressed resilience through imperatives like “you must bring your philosophy to bear.”

Woolf’s note is dominated by Affect and Judgment, that reflect her mental anguish and self-perception. Phrases like “I feel certain I am going mad again” reveal negative Affect (insecurity) as she acknowledges her deteriorating mental health. She expresses guilt through negative Judgment, such as “I cannot go on spoiling your life,” evaluating herself as a burden. Woolf also uses Appreciation to evaluate Leonard positively: “You have given me the greatest possible happiness.” However, her appreciation is overshadowed by Thanatos as she resigns herself to ending her life. The varying frequencies of attitudinal markers in both texts reflect their differing emotional trajectories: Keats oscillates between hope (Eros) and despair (Thanatos), while Woolf succumbs entirely to Thanatos.

Freud’s dual instincts: Eros (the life instinct) and Thanatos (the death instinct) provide a psychological framework for understanding the emotional conflicts in these texts. Eros dominates Keats’s letter as he expresses a desire for connection and vitality despite his suffering from tuberculosis. His affection for Brown (“love so much”) and optimism about improving health (“much better than I was in quarantine”) illustrate his longing for life. However, Thanatos is also present in his reflections on mortality (“posthumous existence”) and acknowledgment of physical decline (“feel it worse”). The tension between these drives creates a poignant emotional conflict that defines his letter. Thanatos dominates Woolf’s note from the outset: she acknowledges her mental illness (“I feel certain I am going mad again”) and expresses hopelessness about recovery (“I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times”). While Eros briefly emerges in her appreciation for Leonard (“You have given me the greatest possible happiness”), it is ultimately overpowered by Thanatos as she concludes that death is preferable to enduring further suffering. The clash between Eros and Thanatos is more balanced in Keats’s letter but reaches its resolution in Woolf’s note, where death instinct prevails.

This study extends existing research by integrating genre analysis, appraisal theory, and Freudian drives to examine the contextual meaning behind language in suicide notes and letters: Previous studies (e.g., Jasim & Jaffar, 2022; Lee & Joh, 2019) focused on linguistic features or rhetorical elements in suicide notes but often overlooked contextual meaning. For example, the study by Lee and Joh (2019) worked on the language of the letters from the perspective of forensic rhetorical features. Similarly, Egnoto and Griffin (2016) also examined the rhetorical feature of these letters and concluded by highlighting the elements of self-harm present in the language. The studies by Koehler (2007) and Grosvenor (2013) extended the debate surrounding suicide letters by analyzing their linguistic and stylistic features. By employing appraisal analysis framework of Martin and White (2005), this study highlights how attitudinal markers construct interpersonal meaning at both word and clausal levels. Psychological studies (e.g., Malini & Tan, 2016; Androutsopoulou et al., 2020) explored hope and despair in writers’ letters but lacked an inclusive approach to examining the core conflict between life and death instincts. This study addresses that gap by triangulating appraisal theory with Freud’s drives.

In Keats’s letter Eros dominates over Thanatos as he expresses a desire for life despite acknowledging mortality. Imperative clauses reflect his determination to overcome difficulties,

aligning with his life instinct. On the other hand, in Woolf's suicide note Thanatos prevails as she resigns herself to ending her life due to overwhelming despair. Her language lacks imperatives or expressions of agency, reflecting her loss of hope. The appraised items identified in both texts blend concrete linguistic elements with abstract psychological concepts related to Eros and Thanatos. This interdisciplinary approach provides a richer understanding of how language reflects emotional conflict.

Incorporating insights from modern psychology can address some limitations of Freudian theory, particularly regarding its deterministic view of human behavior. While Freud posited that individuals are driven by unconscious conflicts between Eros and Thanatos, contemporary psychological research emphasizes the role of cognitive processes and social contexts in shaping emotional responses (Cikara et al., 2022). For example, Malini and Tan (2016) found that bipolar disorder could trigger suicidal impulses in writers, highlighting the complex interplay between mental health conditions and emotional expression. Furthermore, Androutsopoulou et al. (2020) identified hope and despair as significant factors influencing mental health, suggesting that emotional states are not solely determined by instinctual drives but are also shaped by individual experiences and relationships.

By integrating appraisal theory with modern psychological insights, this study aims to provide a more holistic analysis of the emotional landscapes in John Keats's last letter and Virginia Woolf's suicide note. This approach recognizes the significance of attitudinal markers while also considering the broader psychological context in which these expressions occur. Such a synthesis allows for a deeper understanding of how life (Eros) and death (Thanatos) instincts manifest in literary correspondence, ultimately enriching the discourse surrounding mental health and emotional expression in both historical and contemporary contexts.

This study offers valuable insights into how literary figures express complex emotions through personal correspondence. By combining genre analysis with appraisal theory and Freud's drives, it reveals how attitudinal markers reflect the interplay between life and death instincts in Keats's letter and Woolf's suicide note. Ultimately, this research contributes an interdisciplinary perspective that bridges linguistic analysis with psychological theory, shedding light on the human experience of hope, despair, and mortality.

## CONCLUSION

The genre analysis revealed how the structural elements of each letter contribute to understanding the authors' emotional states. Keats's letter is characterized by a recurring theme of Appreciation, where he expresses concern for his health and relationships. His reflections on regret for not being able to meet loved ones indicate that Eros, the life instinct, dominates his correspondence. The use of imperative clauses at the end of Keats's letter demonstrates his desire to engage with life, emphasizing his wish to enjoy time with family and friends despite his impending mortality. In contrast, Woolf's suicide note predominantly employs Judgment and Affect, reflecting her mental anguish and resignation. The declarative clauses throughout her note convey a sense of hopelessness, suggesting that Thanatos is the prevailing force in her thoughts. Woolf articulates feelings of despair and perceives life as increasingly hollow, leading her to conclude that death is preferable to enduring further suffering. The study looked into the evaluative use of language through the attitudinal level of appraisal theory in the two selected texts dealing with elements of life and

death instincts. The letters were analyzed in terms of their use of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, and the results varied in both texts.

Previous studies have focused on various linguistic and rhetorical features in suicide notes but often lack a contextual understanding of how these features relate to emotional states. For example, Jasim and Jaffar (2022) examined linguistic characteristics without delving into their emotional implications, while Lee and Joh (2019) explored forensic rhetorical features without addressing interpersonal meaning. By utilizing systemic functional linguistics as a conceptual framework, this study highlights how attitudinal markers contribute to a deeper understanding of interpersonal meaning at both word and clausal levels. Additionally, existing literature has explored psychological dimensions in literary letters. Studies by Malini and Tan (2016) found links between bipolar disorder and suicidal impulses, while Androutsopoulou et al. (2020) identified hope and despair as significant factors influencing mental health. However, these studies often overlook the nuanced conflict between hope and despair that emerges in individual texts. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing Keats's and Woolf's letters through Freudian drives. The findings suggest that Eros dominates in Keats's letter, where he expresses a desire for life despite acknowledging mortality. Conversely, Woolf's note reveals that Thanatos prevails as she resigns herself to ending her life due to overwhelming despair. A notable distinction between the two texts is their use of imperative clauses. Keats employs imperatives to convey his determination to live healthily and overcome difficulties, reflecting his life instinct and desire for agency. In contrast, Woolf's text lacks such imperatives; she resigns herself to death as a means to escape her suffering. The analysis shows that while Keats expresses hope through his language, Woolf's expressions reveal an acceptance of despair. This contrast underscores the different ways each writer navigates their emotional landscapes: Keats clings to life despite suffering, while Woolf succumbs to her mental anguish.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

This study contributes significantly to existing knowledge through its unique methodology and findings:

1. It applies appraisal theory to contextualize language while evaluating its linguistic elements, providing insights into how attitudinal markers shape interpersonal meaning.
2. It integrates Freudian drives into the analysis, highlighting the conflict between life and death impulses; a perspective not previously explored in depth within this context.
3. The selected texts offer distinct contexts; one is a suicide note from Woolf who feels compelled to end her life, while the other is one of Keats's last letters expressing a desire for connection despite impending death.
4. Finally, this research combines concrete appraised items with abstract concepts related to Eros and Thanatos, illustrating how these impulses manifest within each writer's emotional landscape.

Overall, this study enhances our understanding of how literary figures express complex emotions through personal correspondence while contributing an interdisciplinary approach that bridges linguistic analysis with psychological theory. Future research could expand on these findings by incorporating larger sample sizes or fieldwork involving clinical psychologists who analyze patient communications for insights into mental health issues related to Freudian drives.

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APPENDIX A

ATTITUDINAL MARKERS IN KEATS' LAST LETTER TO CHARLES

TABLE 1. Analysis of Attitude: Keats' Letter

Appraising Items	Appraiser	Affect	Judgment	Appreciation	Appraised
Most difficult thing	Keats			-ve Reaction: quality	Writing a Letter
So bad	Keats			-ve Reaction: impact	My stomach
Feel it worse	Keats			-ve Reaction: impact	Keats
Much better	Keats	Emotion			Keats
Afraid to encounter	Keats	Insecurity			The pro-ing and con-ing of anything
Posthumous existence	Keats			-ve valuation	his existence
How Unfortunate	Keats			-ve reaction: impact	missing each other
my star predominant	Keats		Capacity	-ve Reaction	Keats' fate/destiny
cannot answer	Keats				To Brown's letter
afraid to look	Keats	Affect			Brown's Letter
so weak	Keats			-ve Reaction	In mind
Bear the sight	Keats	Insecurity (affect)			The handwriting of a friend
Love so much	Keats	+ve affect Realis			Brown
Yet I ride the little horse.	Keats			-ve Reaction	At Keats' worst in quarantine (self)
To kill me	Keats	Affect			one thought enough
well, healthy, alert,	Keats			Valuation	The health of the writer
					the knowledge of
					contrast, feeling for light
great enemies	Keats			+ve Reaction	and shade, all that information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem
The torture must bring	Keats			Reaction	You
Very attentive to me	Keats	Interest +ve		Valuation	Your philosophy
very little the matter	Keats	Affection			Dr. Clark
very bad	Keats			Reaction +ve	With Keats' lungs
well disappointed	Keats	Dissatisfaction		Reaction -ve	My stomach
die young	Keats		Veracity		In hearing good news
very neglectful	Keats		Veracity		All young
good account	Keats			Reaction	Reply to his friend
Being anxious	Keats	Security			My health
					Delayed reply to the letter of Dr. Clark
all in my power	Keats		Capacity		to correct the mistakes made during sickness
If I should not	Keats		Obligation	Reaction	All my faults will be forgiven
Very well	Keats			Reaction	Severn
A dull life	Keats	Unhappiness			Severn
so low	Keats			Reaction	In mind
an awkward bow	Keats		Veracity	reaction	Bow

## APPENDIX B

### WOOLF'S SUICIDE NOTE

TABLE 2. Analysis of Attitude: Woolf's Letter

Appraising Items	Appraiser	Affect	Judgment	Appreciation	Appraised
Feel certain mad	Woolf Woolf	Inclination-ve Insecure			Woolf Woolf
I feel we can't shan't recover greatest possible happiness	Woolf Woolf		Normality	-ve Reaction Reaction	go through another of those terrible times Woolf's health
have been in every way Two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came	Woolf Woolf	Affection	Capacity		Woolf's husband Woolf's husband
can't fight	Woolf	Dissatisfaction		Reaction	Woolf and her husband
Spoiling	Woolf	Dissatisfaction			Woolf, with her disease Husband's life
owe all the happiness	Woolf	Affection		Valuation	You (Woolf's husband) my all happiness of life
entirely patient with me and incredibly good	Woolf		Propriety		Woolf's husband
could have saved	Woolf		Capacity	Reaction	It would have been her husband
certainty of your goodness	Woolf		Tenacity		Her husband's behavior
I cannot Go on spoiling	Woolf		Capacity	Reaction	Your life

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