

Death in Daliyyat Abi Alalá Al-Maarry and Milton's "Lycidas" (A Comparative Study)

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المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في طبيعة الموت والقلق منه وصوره في مرثيتين: دالية أبي العلاء المعري وقصيدة جون ملتن ليسيداس. يكرس المبحث الأول للنظر في طبيعة الموت وشموليته ويركز على طبيعية ولا طبيعية الموت من وجهة نظر بعض الفلاسفة من خلال رؤية الشعاعين، ثم يتعرض لشمولية الموت التي تمر بكل شيء في هذا العالم. ويعالج المبحث الثاني قلق الموت وكيف أن هذه الظاهرة تصاحب الموت وتنتج عن وقائعه. وتعرض صور الموت المختلفة وصور هشاشة الحياة والتي تختلف أحيانا وتتوافق أحيانا أخرى معتمدة على البيئة والزمن والثقافة التي ينتمي إليها كل من الشعاعين فضلا عن دراسة العزاء من خلال الخلود في القصيدتين.

Abstract

This study sheds light on the nature of death, the anxiety and images associated with it in two elegies; "Daliat Abi Alalá El-Maárry" and Milton's "Lycidas". The first section deals with the nature of death and its comprehensiveness. It concentrates on the naturalness and unnaturalness of death as it is studied by some philosophers and then by the two poets. Then it tackles the poets' views concerning the comprehensiveness of death which passes over everything in the universe. The second section is devoted to the anxiety of death and how this phenomenon is accompanied by death and is resulting from its facticity. In the last section different images of death and the fragility of the existence in the two elegies are studied; sometimes they come to be similar, other times they differ according to the environment, time and culture to which each poet belongs. The solace through immortality in both poems is also studied.

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1- Introduction: The Nature of Death

In all cultures death is looked at as a destructive power that ends life. But two different views concerning its nature are continuously clashing: the naturalness and the unnaturalness of death. The first view seems more agreeable by most philosophers and theorists who deal with such a subject. An unknown poet Kalidasa raised a question concerning the naturalness of death with the help of analogy. He asks:

Why do we feel that death is unnatural and life is natural when life is like a few drops of water in a pot? There ought to be something unnatural about this. It is this which needs explaining. And if the water is thrown back into the ocean, there is nothing unnatural about that¹.

He goes on in his discussion to conclude that death does not require explanation but life requires. Hence, it is unnatural to ask why do we die; it is better to ask "why we were born"².

In addition to this, some philosophers concentrate on the immanence of death and life. The image of death, therefore, does not appear at the last moment; it can be found in every moment of life. Abdurahman Badawi in his book "AlMout Walabqaria" (Death and Genius) argues:

وما الموت إلا حد للحياة، هو الصورة التي تلبسها الحياة وتحطمها من بعد، وهذه الصورة لا توجد في اللحظة الأخيرة فحسب، بل توجد في كل لحظة من لحظات الحياة، وتعين مضمون هذه اللحظات، هو صورة باطنة إذ توجد منذ بدء الحياة. وبدونها ستكون الحياة منذ البدء شيئاً آخر. الموت باطن في الحياة ومحايث لها وليس متعالياً عليها³.

The existentialists also agree to the previous idea. They see that death is not simply an end of life; it isn't an accident which happens in the end of the story; it is rather penetrating in the story⁴.

Whatever the nature of death is, no one seriously believes that death can be escaped. People usually have a desire to delay it but it remains a part of man's life⁵.

With regard to the second view which believes that death is unnatural – the thirst for life and the fear of the unknown play a vital role in shaping it. "The more we have a thirst for life, the more we are assured that life is natural and death unnatural, the more we are terrified by the great world of the unknown"⁶. Moreover, one cannot assign a specific date for his own death a matter which raises doubts of the naturality of death.

If one believes in the first view he has nothing to do with deep sadness or sometimes outcry against death whatever its cause and time may be. Al Maárry” is aware of the fact that everything will sooner or later face its end:

كل بيت للهدم ما تبتني الور قاء والسيد الرفيع العماد

Hence, his outcry against death comes to be a mere kind of regret which is useless:

أسف غير نافع واجتهاد لا يؤدي إلى غناء اجتهد

While Milton openly rebels against death from the very beginning of his poem where he acts to "laurels" and myrtles harshly; this can be an objective correlative to the act of death:

*Yet once more, O ye laurels and once more
ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forced fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.*

.....

.....

for Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,

(LL. 1 – 8)*

Since death smashes everything haphazardly, Milton tries to do a parallel act to that of death. By his act, he wants to express his outcry against the unnaturalness of death. This is all what a man can do in the course of his useless cry against the injustice of death as Milton sees it.

Moreover, Al Maárry” describes death not only as eminent to life but as a friend to every man from his birth; it is "assahib alawwal" in Al Maárry” 's words:

ورأيت الوفاء للصاحب الأو
ل من شيمة الكريم الجواد

This unusual intimacy can rarely be found even in Arabic culture, yet the merit of loyalty in general, is highly valued in this culture and the will of the elegized is not completely deprived. While in Milton's "Lycidas" the elegized has been completely controlled by a destructive power named death:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,

Now thou art gone, and never must return

(LL. 37 – 38)

He is completely passive in this equation; his will is completely absent and he is fully subdued to death. He is not a participant in the action; instead he is merely a receiver.

Comprehensivity of death is alluded to widely in the two elegies. Al- Maárry” sees that everything whatever steadfast seems to be, will face death sooner or later:

زحل أشرف الكواكب دارا من لقاء الردى على ميعاد،
ولنار المريخ من حدثان الدهر مطف وإن علت في أتقاد،
والثريا رهينة بافتراق الشمل حتى تعد في الأفراد

Milton also refers to the fact of the unavoidability of death and its democratic policy with all. Orpheus, for instance, died and his mother "the Muse" could do nothing:

*What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son
whom universal nature did lament (LL. 58 – 60)*

Undoubtedly, man's recognition of the linear movement of time, contributes to the discovery of the comprehensivity and inevitability of death. When he fully recognizes this fact, man is dismayed by a strong feeling of the absurdity of life:

فإذا كان الإنسان سيفنى عبر الأبد كله فأى منفعة لمن يتعب مما يتعب به⁷

Both Al-Maárry” and Milton meditate this issue. The former starts his poem with a nihilistic view where sadness and happiness are the same since nothing lasts forever:

غير مجد في ملتي واعتقادي نوح بأك ولا ترنم شادي
وشبيه صوت النعي إذا قيس بصوت البشير في كل ناد
أبكت تلكم الحمامة أم غنت على فرع غصنها المياد

Milton also, as a reaction of his friend's death, regrets the nights they spent in labour when death cuts everything unexpectedly:

*Comes the blind fury with th' ahhorre'd shears,
And slits the thin spun life.* (LL. 75 – 76)

1-1 The Anxiety of Death

The anxiety of death occupies several directions in the two elegies; it is first anxiety which is concerned with freedom where man does not know a precise date for his death. Thus he is deprived of the most important choice in his life. He feels that he is followed by the scourge of death which may cut the continuity of his life unexpectedly. As for Alálá, the death of his friend is not sudden for his friend seemed to have suffered from a lingering illness which made his physician helpless in front of its deadly nature:

قد أقر الطيب عنك بعجز وتقضى تردد العواد
وانتهى اليأس منك واستشعر الوجد بأن لا ما معاد حتى المعاد

In Milton's "Lycidas", the death is unexpected and sudden. He drowned in the Irish sea⁸ and the poet inquires all what has been near the scene about the reason behind their hesitation to save Lycidas:

*Where were ye, nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of you loved Lycidas?* (LL. 50–51)

Anxiety of death is also represented by the horror of nihilism. Man is not fully sure about the promising world for the good which religions have presented as a solace for the dead. Though both poets have not announced this openly, yet the images of death and the dead which will be alluded to in the next pages – clarify the destructive power of death and the unknown future of the dead. The brutal image of death which is portrayed by Al-Maárry” suggests that resurrection is somehow illusive for everything is depicted as a sign of eternal destruction:

فَعَزِيزٌ عَلَيَّ خُلُوطُ اللَّيَالِي رَمَّ أَقْدَامَكُمْ بِرَمِّ الْهُوَادِي

Milton in one of the moments of meditating reality where the illusive world of remembrances is dismissed – sees that Lycidas now had been swallowed by the monsters of the sea. Hence the chance of resurrection seems to be a far fetched one:

*Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;* (LL. 153–54)

Separation and abandonment enrich the feeling of anxiety of death. It makes man afraid of being alone in this experience. Tyson argues that "Our early abandonment created our fear of death" ⁹. Al-Maárry” portrays his dead friend as a traveller who will never return:

ودعا أيها الحفيان ذاك الشخص أن الوداع أيسر زاد

And then when he imagines the loneliness of his friend in the world of the dead he asks desperately:

كيف أصبحت في محلك بعدي يا جديرا مني بحسن اقتقاد

Milton also sees the same thing concerning the eternal trip of death and the loneliness of the dead:

----- Now thou art gone,
now thou art gone, and never must return! (LL. 37–38)

And then Lycidas becomes alone:

*Ay me! Whilest thee the shores and sounding seas
Wash far away, wher'er thy bones are hurled, (LL. 154–55)*

On this anxiety of abandonment Tyson sees that:

*First and foremost, for many of us, that thought
of our own death keys into our fear of abandonment,
our fear of being alone. Death is the ultimate abandonment:
no matter how close we are to our loved ones, no matter how
important we are in our communities, when
we die we die alone⁽¹⁰⁾*

We do not have to look at death that it is away to nothingness but it is merely a change in communication between two persons, originally it is a separation like a disease but if disease is a temporal separation, death will be an eternal one ¹¹. Hence "the more intense our awareness of ourselves as separate from others, the greater is the impulse to survive" ¹².

What deepens the anxiety of death further is the early death. The two poems show that the elegized are young; there are so many possibilities which have not been achieved yet. Al-Maárry” expresses this rather indirectly. He shows some of his dead friend's educational merits which herald more important other ones:

وفقيها أفكاره شذن للنعمان ما لم يشده زياد،
فالعراقي بعده للحجازي قليل الخلاف سهل القياد،
وخطيبا لوقام بين وحوش علم الضاريات بر النقاد

Hence the elegized was at his full potentialities and scientific production when death cut his life. There is an embodied outcry against the untimely death. The same thing concerning the unachieved possibilities are shown here and there in Milton's Lycidas; sometimes embodiedly, othertimes openly. The poet "examines the tragedy associated with early death in three parallel movements balanced between the introduction and conclusion" ¹³. The first introductory lines show that Milton's attempt concerning shattering the leaves of "laurels" and "myrtles" "before the mellowing year" is but an

objective correlative to the act of death which took Lycidas while still young to die:

*Yet once more, Oye laurels and once more
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your burries harsh and crude,*

Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.

*For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Yong Lycidas, and hath not left his peer. (LL. 1–10)*

Thus, death is connected with both facticity and possibility where the first concerns what is existed while the second concerns what will be existed ¹⁴ which definitely results from the facts of the present. Hence, both of the elegized are prevented from practising so many possibilities in the future.

Anxiety also appears on the death frightening on oneself. The poets elegize themselves as well as the fate of mankind in general. The opening lines of Al-Maárry's elegy show life as meaningless since death stops it unexpectedly:

غير مجد في ملتي واعتقادي	نوح باك ولا ترنم شادي
-----	-----
-----	-----
صاح، هذي قبورنا تملأ الرحب	فأين القبور من عهد عاد؟

He also blesses the period of youth and glorifies it; loosing it the worst loss for man:

وخلعت الشباب غضا فياليتك أبليتـه مع الأنداد.
فأذهبـا خير ذاهبين حقيقيين بقيا روائح وغوادي

The poet mourns his youth where the death of his friend gives him a chance to express himself.

Milton openly expresses the anxiety concerning his own death beside the death of mankind. He confesses that his elegy is a beneficial one. He hopes that as he mourns Lycidas another unknown poet may do the same:

So may some gentle Muse

With lucky words favor my destined urn, (LL. 19–20)

In addition to that, the elegized may be Milton himself in some parts of the poem. The "reverened Camus" who laments his "dearest pledge" without naming him or ascribing any identifiable feature to him "might as easily be Milton as king as the reference is obscure as the "figures dim" on his apparel" ¹⁵:

Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,

*"Ah! Who hath reft", qouth he, "my dearest
pledge"?*

(LL. 103 – 107)

However, the feeling through which one recognizes the essence of death is dual; it is, sometimes looked upon as evil; other times. it is looked upon as something good in so far as it puts an end to "the fever called living"¹⁶ as Edgar Allan Peos terms life. Consequently no result can be concluded unless anxiety of death is taken into account¹⁷. Death is described as something evil and horrible through the images in both poems and it is looked at as good when the argument is directed to immortality and this can be found in Milton's poem in more than one occasion. This may have been due to the fact that the Christian dogma concerning the promising next world where Christianity grants immortality for those who simply believe in the divinity of Christ:

He who believes in me will alive, even

*though he dies.*¹⁸ (John. 11 – 25)

1-2 Solace in the Two Elegies

Since that what death takes can never be regained, the two poets allude to the other world where death finds no path to it. The views of the two poets differ sharply concerning the world to come. As a Muslem Abu Al-alá doesn't guarantee paradise for his friend.

This is something related to man's deeds in this life and to his intention. So, no one – but God – Judges these deeds. However Al-Maárry doesn't doubt immortality at all:

خلق الناس للبقاء فضلات أمة يحسبونهم للنفساد
أنما ينقلون من دار أعمأ ل إلی دار شقوة أو رشاد

(أو) (or) makes things clear for people , including the poet's friend who may be moved to hell or to paradise. Thus, the poet does not celebrate the solace of immortality since man's fate and future are unknown.

There is a slight solace which is not related to religion; it is the comparison between death and sleep, a theme which is highly expressed in all literatures of all nations:

ضجعة الموت رقدة يستريح الجسم فيها، والعيش مثل السهاد

As a result, the only solace the poet expresses is rest and that man gets rid of the commitments and burdens of life.

As a Christian, Milton is sure of his friend's immortality because of the simplicity of the meaning of faith in this religion. One can easily enter the kingdom of God if he simply believes in the divinity of the Christ. As a result, Milton imagines his friend as being received a Christian burial:

*For so to interpose a little ease
let our frail thought dally with false surmise*

(LL. 152 – 53)

This "false surmise", according to Abrams refers to the fact "that the body of Lycidas has been recovered and can receive a Christian burial" ¹⁹. Christianity gives Milton a wider space to console his friend and himself for Lycidas now is with the saints who entertain him and sweep the effect of death. In short, Lycidas will be in the presence of God. On this, Tyson argues that:

One of the greatest comforts religious belief can offer is to assure us that we will not die alone and that after we die we will not be alone: God the father will be there for us and with us. Our heavenly father will not abandon his children even when every one else we know has done so ²⁰.

In this respect, death becomes just a bridge to reunite man with God. It is just a lost relationship to be acquired between man and God. Concentrating on the life after death, Milton ends his poem using "the image of the rising sun and the sacrifice of Jesus... he concludes confidently" ²¹

Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

(L. 193)

The poet now looks towards a golden future and leaves the sad present. Hence, solace is represented by immortality.

1-3 Images of Death

The two poets portray death in different images, sometimes they meet, other times they differ. This is owing to the different reasons behind the death of the elegized, their different environment, period and the culture to each relates.

The reason behind Al-Maárry's use of the image of grave is a result of the natural death of his friend:

رب لحد قد صار لحداً مراراً، ضاحك من تزامم الأضداد

This image – indirectly – expresses the comprehensiveness of death in addition to its continuity which will and will never cease. In addition, he names gives death five different names; that express destruction, sadness and end of things with the exception of one image where death is depicted as a station for sleep and rest:

ضجعة الموت، رقدة يستريح الجسم فيها، والعيش مثل السهاد

The first reference to the sad occasion of death and the futility of life is expressed through using (الموت) death:

إن حزناً في ساعة الموت أضعا ف سرور في ساعة الميلاد

Then he uses (الدهر) which means time which also is depicted as an enemy who definitely will win over the intended person:

قصد الدهر من أبي حمزة الأو اب موالى حبى، وخدن اقتصاد

The verb (قصد) expresses intentionality. Hence the subject (الدهر) is personified.

In another image – when the poet talks about King Solomon who mastered people, demons and everything – death is called as (أخت النّاد) and (أمّ اللّهم) which both express destruction and deprivation:

فرمته به على جانب الكر سي أم اللّهم أخت النّاد

Then he terms death by using (الليالي) which again means time. Hence the poet is fully aware of the destructive power of the machine of time:

فعزیز على خط الليالي رم أقدامكم بـرم الهـوادي

The bones of neck and feet are both mixed together; the high with the low; the pride with the humility. However, this mixture is not so close; it needs time. As a result, the poet repeats initiative / r / which "is able to project us into the future, or even into eternity"²². Then he uses (الردى) which simply means death. It is depicted as a power which sooner or later, not only man but everything will meet it:

زحل أشرف الكواكب دارا من لقاء الردى على ميعاد

While Milton concentrates on the "dead" rather than "death". He alludes to the reasons of death and not its names. Sometimes he mentions the sea where his friend was drawn; other times he offers fabulous reasons like the ship which was "built in th'eclipse":

*It was that fatal and perfidious bark
built in th'eclipse and rigged with curses dark*

(LL. 100 – 101)

Under the effect of his tradition Al-Maárry turns to pigeons and blames them for not mourning over his friend. He alludes to the pigeon which lost its chick in Noah's flood²³ :

أبنات الهديل أسعدن أو عد	ن قليـل العـزاء بالأسـعاد
أيـهـه الله دركن، فـأنـتن	اللواتي تحسن حفظ الوداد

Then, he turns to a very famous image of clothing in which he asks pigeons to snap their necklaces and to continue mourning:

بيد أني لا أرتضي ما	فعلتن وأطواقكن في الأجياد
فتسلبن واستعرن جميعا	من قميص الدجى ثياب حداد

He wants them to tear away their clothes and to borrow shirts from dark night so this would suit the sad occasion about which he talks. Again the sibilant sound / s / is in harmony with death and sadness²⁴.

Clothing images are functional in Milton's elegy "beginning with the speaker's sable shroud which like the "thin spun life" combines death with cloth"²⁵:

*Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
And slits the thin spun of life* (LL. 75 – 76)

Again the clothing importance meets the reader towards the end of the poem:

*And every flower that sad embroidery wears
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffodil lies fill their cups with tears,
to strew the laureate hearse where Lycidas lies.*

(LL. 148 – 51)

Milton concentrates on flowers because his poem is a pastoral one from one hand and the importance of flowers in Christian rites of burial on the other hand. He also "uses flower imagery as divergent structure between melancholy scenes of gory death condemnation"²⁶.

Finally, the images of the fragility of life and the inevitability of death are expressed widely in the two poems and they participate in expressing different moods and points of view a matter which shows them in different occasions where some of them are repeated.

The best among them is that which expresses the coming destruction of whatever is built and the short living of man in Al-Maárry's poem:

كل بيت للهدم ما تبتني الور	قواء والسيد الرفيع العماد،
والفتى ظاعن وكيفيه ظل	ج السدر ضرب الأطناب والأوتاد

And Milton's "the abhorred shears" which "slit the thin spun of life". He combines the fearful image of death and the fragile image of life in two successive lines. (LL. 75 – 76) thus the image of death is expressed in contrast with the image of life.

Conclusion

Human activities differ from a nation to a nation and from time to time. Various factors participate in consolidating this difference; among them is the environment and culture which come to be the first. However, some activities such as which deals with some subject tackle man's existence and death. It seems to transcend the borders of environments and cultures. Hence, poets from different cultures meet in looking at such a subject. Both the two poems which have been considered deal with the nature of death as something inevitable and comprehensive because it is a universal everlasting phenomenon which accompanied existence from its early days and will continue forever. Religions and environments play a very secondary role in this matter which appear in the poets' reaction to death and some images of death specially those formed by the environment. Hence, man's view to death is the same; it is destructive, unavoidable and sometimes untimely. The untimely death had stimulated both Al- Maárry” and Milton to mourn over their intimate friends.

Notes

- 1- _ _ _ _ _ "Death and Immortality", <http://www.Milton>. P. 7.
- 2- _ _ _ _ _ "Death and Immortality", P. 7.
- 3- Abdul Rahman Badawi, Al-Maut wal Abqaria, (Cairo, 1976), P. 18.
- 4- Jacques Choronn "Death in Western Thought", Trans. by Kamil Yousif (Al-Maut fil Fikr Al-Gharbi), (Al-Kwait, Al-Majlis Al-Watani lil Thakafa wal Funoon, 1984), P. 81.
- 5- John Macquarrie, Existentialism, Trans. by Imam Abdul Fattah, Al-Wujoodia, Al-Majlis Al-Watani lil Thakafa wal Funoon, 1982), P. 86.
- 6- Death and Immortality, P. 9.
*All the lines of verse are taken from Hughes' John Milton: Complete Poems and Prose,
- 7- Jacques Choronn, P. 29.
- 8- Clay Hunt, Lycidas and the Italian Critics, (London Yale University Press, 1979), P. 148.
- 9- Lios Tyson, Critical Theory Today, (Routledge, New York, 2006), P. 23.
- 10- Lios Tyson, P. 22.
- 11- Jacques Choronn, P. 24.
- 12- Death and Immortality, P. 8.
- 13- Arthur Barker, "The Pattern of Milton's Nativity Ode": (UTQ, 1941), P. 71 – 72.
- 14- John Macquarrie, P. 286.

- 15- J. V. Ward, "Contrast and Unity in Lycidas". (<http://www.Lycidas>), P. 3.
- 16- Edgar Allan Poe: Poems, Tales, Essays, ed: David Gallway (Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1976), P. 337.
- 17- Abdul Rahman Badawi, P. 17.
- 18- English Text of the new Testament, John: 11 – 25 (International Bible Society, Isbn, 1992).
- 19- Lios Tyson, P. 23.
- 20- Justin Scott Van Kleek, "Christening the Pagan and Death in Lycidas", <http://www.Lycidas>, 2006, P. 5.
- 21- Justin Scott Van Kleek, P. 6.
- 22- Roman Jakobson; Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning, (The Harvest Press, Great Britain, 1978), P. 1.
- 23- Abu Saeed Abdulmalik Bin Kareeb Al-Asmai': Al-Asmaiat Tahkik Ahmed Shakir and Abdulssalam Mohammed Haroon, (Diwan Al-Arab2, Dar Al-Al Maárry” f, Massr, 1976), P. 80.
- 24- _ _ _ _ _ , "On Lycidas", <http://www.Lycidas>, 2006, P. 4.
- 25- J. V. Ward, P. 3.
- 26- Miranda Wileox, "Images of Growth in Milton's Lycidas", <http://www.Lycidas>, 2006, P. 7.

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