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Death in the Poetry of John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to investigate the concept of death in the poetry of John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi; the two romantic poets of English and Arabic poetry. Death remains a controversial fact for many poets of different cultures. Elizabethan poets challenged death with the immortality of their poetry. Metaphysical poets tried to capture the moment as a tool against death and time. Romantics viewed death as an easeful solace to escape life's sorrows.

Methods: This study used the descriptive, analytical and American comparative approaches, to compare the poetic styles of the two poets, and to compare the psychological state that each of them experienced.

Results: The study concludes that death appears to have significantly influenced the poets' perceptions of life as evidenced in Keats's odes, and Al-Shabbi's collection Aghani Al-Hayat 'Songs of Life'. Their poetry is replete with themes of grief, death, melancholy and mortality. This study also concludes that there is a great similarity between John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi in which it is found that Al-Shabbi is the Keats of Arabs. Keats experienced the premature deaths of his father, mother and brother, which exacerbated his health. Al-Shabbi suffered from the power of death, losing his sweetheart and father, leading to his tragic illness.

Conclusions: This study concludes that Keats and Al-Shabbi welcomed death as salvation from the misfortunes and sorrows of life showing it as a form of transcendence or liberationDeath has become another synonym of life according to Keats and Al-Shabbi

Keywords: John Keats, Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi, death, Romantic poetry.

الموت عند جون كيتس و أبي القاسم الشابي دراسة مقارنة

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ملخّص

الأهداف: يهدف البحث إلى دراسة مفهوم "فكرة الموت" عند الشاعرين الرومانسيين: الشاعر الإنجليزي جون كيتس، والشاعر العربي أبو القاسم الشابي دراسة تحليلية مقارنة؛ إذ لا تزال فكرة الموت قضية تثير وجهات نظر متعددة عند الشعراء من ثقافات مختلفة، ففي العصر الاليزابثي الإنجليزي تحدى الشعراء مفهوم الموت من خلال أشعارهم، حاول الشعراء الميتافيزيقون الاستمتاع باللحظة الآنية كتحدٍ للزمن والموت، بنما يرى شعراء الرومانسية أنّ الموت هو الطريق الوحيد للهروب إلى عالم الهناء والفناء.

المنهجية: استخدمت هذه الدراسة المنهج التحليلي والمقارن حسب المدرسة الأمريكية في دراسة الأدب المقارن و ذلك لإجراء مقارنة بين الشاعرين وفهم تصورات كل واحد منهما حول الموت.

النتائج: توصلت هذه الدراسة إلى أنّ الموت كان مسيطرًا على أفكار الشاعرين بشكل بارز في قصائد جون كيتس الغنائية وقصائد الحياة للشابي، إذ بدى واضحًا أنّ هذه القصائد تتشبع بأفكار الحزن والموت والكآبة والفناء، كما توصلت إلى وجود تشابه كبير بين الشاعرين، إذ عايش جون كيتس الموت مبكرًا بوفاة والده، وأمه، وإخوانه، وهذا أدى إلى تدهور حالته الصحية؛ بينما عانى الشابي من سطوة الموت بفقد محبوبته ووالده، مما أدى إلى مرضه المأساوي الذي فتك بقلبه.

الخلاصة: خلصت الدراسة إلى أنّ الشاعرين كيتس والشابي رحّبا بالموت كطريق للخلاص من آلام الحياة ومتاعبها. كما أنّ الموت صار مرادفا للحياة لدى الشابي و جون كيتس.

الكلمات الدالة: جون كيتس، أبو القاسم الشابي، الموت، الشعر الرومانسي

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Introduction

Death is the ultimate end of all creatures, among which, Man is the only creature who knows that he is going to die. Accordingly, this knowledge creates the worries in his life. Poetry reflects the inner conflict inside the soul of Man because of his prior knowledge of death and what is going on after death. Life, death, mortality and immortality are frequent themes in poetry in general and in romantic poetry in particular.

Death is a prominent theme in both English and Arabic Romantic poetry, holding a central position in the feelings and thoughts of Romantic poets. Romantic poets perceived death as a gateway to deeper existential questions, emphasizing profound meditation, emotional intensity and spiritual contemplation. Death plays a significant role in English Romanticism as it represents the transient nature of life and the inevitability of mortality. It is presented as a transformative force that potentially facilitates rebirth, self-discovery and spiritual awakening. Romanticism emphasized personal experiences and individualism, reflected in the characterization of the movement as a "revolt of the individual" (Idrees, 89). English Romantic poets viewed death as a natural component of life's cycle and employed it as a metaphor to illustrate the transitory nature of human existence. John Keats, known for his profound sensitivity and rich imagery, is confused between confronting and accepting death in his poetry. Throughout his poems, he confronts the inevitable reality of death while finding solace in imagination and art.

For Arab Romantic poets, death is perceived as a prerequisite of life, serving as an escape from the misery of existence to a more perfect and ideal world. It represents mystery and the unknown, and may serve as a gateway to spiritual freedom and self-realization. According to Abu al-Qasim Kerru, "Death in Shabbi's poetry seems to be the remedy which will save him from misery and open the doors of eternal beauty before him. In this regard Shabbi's pessimism of life apparently consists of an optimism of the afterlife" (cited. in Idrees, 108). Romantic poets embrace death with great enthusiasm because they regard it as a means of achieving spiritual freedom and complete fulfilment. Thus, romantic poets portray death as the beloved they eagerly await to meet.

Objectives of the Study:

This study aims at:

1. Investigating the concept of death in the poetry of John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi who belong to different cultures and historical periods.
2. Exploring the image of death and how it is perceived by Keats and Al-Shabbi.
3. Figuring out some similarities and differences between Keats and Al-Shabbi regarding the concept of death in their poetry.

Significance of the Study:

This study is of paramount significance since it is unearthing one of puzzling issues in English and Arabic poetry, i.e. death. Death is a recurrent phenomenon in poetry which is a mirror of the life of all humans. John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi represent two different cultures with different perspectives on death. This is what makes the study unique. This study is significant since it presents death from a western and eastern viewpoint. Death is the barrier between this life and the lifeafter. Romantic poets have different viewpoints on death and this is what this study reveals. This study is essential for those specialized in literature in general and those specialized in comparative literature.

Method of the Study:

This study has followed the method of qualitative analysis. The researchers have applied the library, descriptive, analytical and the American school comparative method of this study. The researchers have used the method of content analysis to analyse the concept of death in some poems of John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi. The researchers survey the secondary literary sources including the papers, theses, and the books on both Keats and Al- Shabbi. Finally, a comparative analysis has been done on the concept of death in the selected poems leading to the findings. The comparative

methodology depends heavily on the American comparative school in which literature is studied to find its ties without finding whom affects whom. This school is suitable for this study because of the huge historical gap between John Keats who belongs to nineteenth century and Al-Shabbi who belongs to twentieth century Accordingly, this study is a parallel between the two literary figures Keats and Al-Shabbi. The selected poems have been selected carefully because of their relevance to the concept of death and to the similar views of death and life for Keats and Al-Shabbi. After a careful study, researchers found that the selected poems are apt to be the sample of this study.

Previous Studies:

Al-Abbood (2015) study entitled "Keats and Fear of Death" investigated the theme of death in Keats's poetry. The study presented how deaths of his relatives influenced his life. Keats's unique perspective on life and death sets him apart from his English Romantic peers. The study dealt with some of Keats's poems such as "When I Have Fears, Endymion and To Autumn". He noted that Keats here is not afraid of normal demise, but rather of unfulfilled potential and loss of love because of early death. Al-Abbood added, for Keats, early death would deprive him the opportunity to be a famous poet, as it was his only wish, as he stated in a letter to his brother in 1818 "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death," (199). The study concluded that Keats's brief life, marked by tragedy and illness, intensified his fear of not achieving maturity as a poet. Keats's acceptance of mortality without seeking consolation aligns with his concept of "Negative Capability." Al-Abbood found that Keats's premature death paradoxically preserved his legacy and fame.

Hussein (1989) examined the themes of nature and death in the poetry of prominent poets from Arabic literature like Al-Mala'ika, Al-Shabbi, and Shukri, compared with English Romantic poets like Keats and Shelley. The study drew parallels between Arabic and English Romantic poets concerning their preoccupation with these themes, exploring how these themes serve as a means for profound contemplation, emotional expression, and philosophical reflection. The study followed a descriptive and analytical approach. Despite the poets' different attitudes toward life and death, a common undercurrent of disillusionment, isolation, and vulnerability runs through their works, echoing the Romantic era's fascination with mortality and the human experience. In their poetry, these poets confronted the ephemeral nature of life, the allure of death as a potential respite, and the emotional complexities that shape their perspectives. According to the study, both English and Arabic romantic poets depicted death as a looming certainty, a fate that everyone must embrace. Death is presented as a refuge from life's challenges and miseries. Keats, as one of the main poets of the study, experienced feelings of death many times, as displayed in his poems and letters. The study concluded that in "When I Have Fears," Keats portrays the fear of death as a remarkable force that brings an end to his poetic career and ability to convey his message to others. Finally, in "Ode to a Nightingale", Keats welcomes death and refers to it as "easeful Death", and he is in half love with it.

Miller (1965) argued that Keats' concept of death is paradoxical since it encompasses a philosophy of life as well in which he intensely desired life and intensely desired death. She divided his attitude with death into things desirable and things undesirable. According to Miller, the four major concepts with which Keats associates death are rebirth and its related themes of sleep and dreams and hope of immortality, love, the transiency of ·joy and pleasure ,and finally, quietness and peace. The opposing attitude is Keats' association of death with things undesirable, or the treatment of death itself as undesirable. Miller noted that these two attitudes are significant to understand Keats' concept of death. She followed the survey, content and analytical approach to study Keats' concept of death. Miller concluded that the life and the thought of Keats is a bundle of contradictions. He possessed the Romantic "love of death and darkness". She found a strong bond between love and death in Keats' poetry. She found that his desire to death is similar to Apollo's desire to die into life.

Idrees (1987) examined the concept of death in modern Arabic poetry during the twentieth century ranging from neo-classical poetry to the romantic poetry in the 1930s and 1940s leading to the avant-garde poetry of the 1950s – 1970s ending with the concept of death in the Palestinian Resistance poetry. Idrees presented the concept of death in the movement of Arabic romantic poetry. She pointed that the romantics found life full of untruth, evil, ugliness, the imperfection of life and the evil forces. Accordingly, the Arab romantics found life barren and unworthy living. She analysed some examples from

the poetry of Al-Shabbi, Gubran and Naimy as models of romantic poetry dealing with the concept of death. More examples are analysed from different periods of the twentieth century. Idrees concluded that the concept of death underwent significant transformations from the turn of the twentieth century up to the seventies. She added that the neo-classicists exceeded in their treatment of death in the form of elegy. In Romantic poetry, she added, death was no longer treated within the mere exclusive framework of the elegy since they were influenced by the western romantics and the Arab Sufis. Arab poets found optimistic view in the myth of death and resurrection as a fruitful death.

Usman and Apriliani (2020) in their study "Romantic Philosophy in the poem of "Hadith al-Maqbarah" by Abu al-Qasim Al-Shabbi" analysed the romantic philosophical thoughts of death in his philosophical poem "Conversation in the Graveyard". This study has used the descriptive method in defining the personality of Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi and his contribution to the field of literature. This analytical method is used to study and interpret the poem and its romantic philosophy. In this study, Usman and Apriliani concluded that this poem indicated that Al-Shabbi is the poet of death but in the poem (Conversation in the Graveyard) there is a philosophical strain in which he raised his questions about death, life, mortality, and immortality and philosophically he answered them. This study finally concluded that Al-Shabbi succumbed to death to get rid of the monotonous and meaningless existence.

John Keats vs Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi :

John Keats (1795-1821) was one of the prominent English poets of the Romantic period. At school, he was a very argumentative and temperamental student. Keats's childhood friend, Holmes, describes him thus; "Keats was in childhood not attached to books. He was a boy whom any one, from his extraordinary vivacity and personal beauty, might easily have fancied would become great-but rather in some military capacity than in literature" (cited in Smith 392). The death of his father and the illness of his mother with tuberculosis prompted him to study medicine and "although he obtained a license in an apothecary, he left his job as a surgeon and preferred to be a poet. He dedicated himself to poetry" (Wahas, 130). A few years later, he lost his mother, grandmother and brother and started to suffer from tuberculosis. Thus, the death of his relatives, his illness and love for Fanny Brawne formed his personality and perception of death and life.

Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi (1909-1934) was one of the key figures of Arab Romantic poets. He was born in Al-Shabbiya village, Tauzer, Tunisia. He started his early education in traditional Quranic schools, where he demonstrated his high aptitude for learning. When he was 12, "he was sent to the famous school of Al-Zaituna Mosque, where he was taught the traditional Islamic sciences, Arabic language and literature" (Badawi, 157). In Al-Zaituna, he received the freedom and literary creativity he desired. He then joined the Tunisian Law School "he became a lawyer, but he never practiced" (Wahas, 185). He devoted his attention to poetry and preferred to become a poet. Like Keats, he did not follow the profession he had practiced, but pursued his literary inclination. Thus, the educational environment he lived in and his locomotion from one state to another in Tunisia with his father, who worked as a judge, greatly impacted Al- Shabbi's perception. He lost his sweetheart and father in addition to his heart illness. Kerru (1952) mentioned that the death of Al-Shabbi's father was one of the catastrophes that changed Al-Shabbi's life topsy-turvy.

Keats's poetry embodies all elements of Romanticism such as love of nature and beauty, imagination and melancholy. His odes are considered to be the most valuable literary achievement. They have been appreciated by many poets, writers and critics, for example, Stopford Augustus Brooke, who considers them as "above criticism, pure gold of poetry, and virgin gold" (Nagar and Prasad, 48). Moreover, Robert Bridges remarks, "Had Keats left us only his odes, his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is" (cited in Nagar and Prasad, 150). Regarded as a precious treasure for their literary and artistic value, his letters provide essential explanations of his philosophy of life and theory of poetry. By the twentieth century, Keats's letters became more appreciated as Eliot describes them, "the most notable and the most important ever written by any English poet" (92). Moreover, Bush states, "Keats's letters have become more and more testament of critical and human wisdom, and dozens of ideas and phrases are current coin in our critical language" (12).

Similarly, Al-Shabbi is one of the most intelligent poetic figures of modern Arabic literature as Salma Jayyusi describes him "He is the only modern North African poet prior to the sixties to play a part in the development of Arabic poetry"

(367). His poetry is characterized by the grandeur of representation, richness of imagination, and sincerity of expression, qualities exemplified in his collection, Aghani Al-Hayat (Songs of Life). Muhammed Mustafa Badawi says "There is nothing in the least theatrical about the poetry of the Tunisian Al-Shabbi who is one of the most appealing modern Arab poets" (157). He worked hard to create a new literature that would meet the nation's aspirations and be different in style and content. Speight, in the same context, adds, "Al-Shabbi was an innovator in that he worked for new content for Arabic literature, a fresh message to give to his people" (186). Al-Shabbi believes that poetry has a noble message and the poet can play the same role of leader and politician. Al-Sanusi states that "The greatness of Al-Shabbi 's poetry is that he believes that the poet has a message towards people not less than the message of a politician, leader and judge" (49).

Death can be defined as the inevitable end of human life and a means of escape from the tragedies and hardships of life. Romantic poets acknowledged that life is full of miseries and difficulties, and death is their only salvation. In other words, it is a kind of rest for them. It is the last chapter in a person's life as Hussein cited Al-Mala'ika's "Death seemed to be life's ultimate tragedy" (165).

Keats' concept of death is paradoxical in that it must necessarily encompass a philosophy of life as well, Miller (1965). John Keats has a strong desire for death as well as a strong desire for life. She added that Keats' concept of death is related to things desirable like love, joy, rebirth, and peace and related to undesirable like pain, darkness, separation and destruction. The link between death and love is a unique Keatsean notion. This is because love is the prime fact of life and Keats finds death as the other fact of life. This is the bond, according to Keats, between love and death. Describing Keats saying "Keats and death, death and Keats: the two cannot be separated… both as man and as a poet" (McFarland, 62). This duality of life and death reveals the oneness of living and dying in John Keats' poetry. Keats's complex attitude toward death is evident in his poems and letters, where he expresses both a yearning for escape and a deep appreciation for life's beauty. Joan Wright Miller (1965) explains, "His thoughts on death were both complex and contradictory, caused naturally by his intense desire for life and his equally intense desire for the peace which would accompany death" (4). According to Kumar and Singh, (2012), he was so aggressive because he was not afraid of death, and he would welcome it if it came. For Al-Shabbi, death is a terrifying nightmare, signifying the obliteration and inevitable conclusion that transforms beautiful dreams into illusions. Therefore, Al-Shabbi's exploration of death in his poetry surpasses the mere discussion of life. "And this inevitability makes Al-Shabbi feel the spiritual alienation (Quraish, 196). Death and all synonyms of death like sleep, dream, grave, and graveyard are present in most of the poems of his 'The Songs of Life'. This is because he was still so young that he wants to enjoy life and the songs of life not like the other elder poets do in the modern Arabic poetry. Moreover, he is afraid of death since he feels that as a poet, he has a mission to be fulfilled to his people. He wrote to his friend Mohammed Al Hiliwi: "Nothing makes me sadder than the thought that I am going to die before fulfilling the mission for which I feel I was born" (Omri, 297). Al-Shabbi differentiated between several kinds of death; the living death that was living, the destroying death that snatched his sweetheart and his father, and the ultimate death of all creatures in which he enjoys immortality far away from the mortality of his life. In some moments, Al- Shabbi enjoys the contradicting types of death. That is why he is sometimes afraid of death and sometimes he is eager to enjoy death as a remedy for the sense of his alienation and nothingness.

Keats lived short and tragic life. Walsh writes "Keats's life was harsh and sad" (7). He experienced grief at an early age. In 1804, his father died when he was nine and six years later his mother died because of tuberculosis in 1810. "Keats looked after her, carrying out all the duties of the sick room, administering the medicine and feeding the patient" (Hussein, 127). He also looked after his brother Tom during his illness who eventually died of tuberculosis in 1818. Walsh says "the grimness of life, experienced from the first in the tragic deaths of his father and mother, and the shattering of the family, was brought home to him again by the state of Tom's health" (7). At the same time, his second brother George decided to immigrate to America for fortune and Keats himself began to suffer from tuberculosis. In turn, these tragic effects greatly influenced his attitude when he complained to Fanny Brawne in July 1819 "The death or sickness of someone has always spoilt my hours" (2005, p. 309). Therefore, he felt that he would die young, and died at the age of 25. Thus, "The environment he lived in influenced his perception of life" (Wahas and Nagi, 6). In this respect, his experiences are similar

to Al-Shabbi's who looked after his father and suffered from financial conditions and died young with heart disease. Both poets experienced love, Keats loved Fanny but this love failed with the death of Keats, while Al-Shabbi 's sweetheart died before their marriage.

The death of Al-Shabbi's father, the most tragic event in his life, had a profound effect on his attitude and placed a lot of responsibilities on him, "and, as the eldest son, he had to manage the financial affairs of his family and take on the role of moral guide to his brothers and sisters" (Hussein124). His father died when he was in his twenties, but he was defeated in the first experience which made him more poignant as he was strongly attached to his father. Badawi writes "His father's death in 1929, which meant that he had to assume responsibility for the family, cast a shadow over his life which was darkened by an unhappy marriage" (175). His famous poem "Ya Mawt" (O Death) describes Al-Shabbi's feelings and attitudes toward death, depicting death's cruelty. The poem can be described as one scream of his broken heart. He writes:

O death, you ripped my chest apart
You smashed my back
O death! What you want from me
And you tore my chest
Take me to you
As my age is vibrated in the world of worry
(Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 83-86)

Another tragic event in Al-Shabbi's life was the death of his beloved at a very early age. Al-Shabbi was unlucky to marry the one he loved. She was struck by a sudden illness while he was studying law at al-Zaituna College in the capital. "Her death was a traumatic experience for the poet who continued to remember her long after his marriage to his cousin Shahla" (Hussein124). Al-Shabbi 's perception of women was different and his love was unique and original, "Because the woman he loved was ideal made of his elevated imagination. She was not body but a transparent spirit and her love was a spiritual beyond instinct" (Farrukh, 36). According to Al-Shabbi, love is a synonym for life, and death is not death until love is executed. Her death broke his heart, and to end this grief, his family hastened his marriage to his cousin, Shahla. However, this marriage was disappointing as he did not find in his wife the wonderful poetic image of women he drew in his poetry: "he seemed to have been disappointed in an early love which ended in the death of the young woman he loved" (Badawi, 175). Heart problems plagued him from a young age, ultimately leading to his premature death at the age of 25. A letter to his friend Al-Helewi reveals his struggles with this condition:

My heart condition has deteriorated significantly in recent times, necessitating a doctor-imposed restriction on all intellectual activities. Friend, my heart is the wellspring of pain that courses through this tormented body. And as long as I carry this big heart between my sides and life weakens it without mercy, thus, I am the most miserable of its sons. (cited in Fakhry Tomailah, 138).

Life and Death

The theme of death and life has bewildered romantic poets who tried to unravel the mystery of death, but they never arrived at a definite answer. For them, death is nothing but a return to a more perfect life, while this life is unworthy living. "Death promises what life cannot give, a submerging into nature, complete disintegration with it, and thus a return to the true sources of life" (Mahajna, 45). The disillusionment felt by these romantic poets was found in their attitudes toward life and death. "Some Romantic poets came to see death as the only solution to this irreconcilable conflict; yet others sought to achieve a balance between their views of death, on the one hand, and life, on the other" (Hussein, 129). Consequently, not all romantic poets regarded death as the antithesis of life, nor did they view the afterlife as a solution to all their unfulfilled dreams and aspirations in this present life.

The philosophy of death is a main concern in Keats's poetry as he experienced the feelings of death many times. According to Brendan Corcoran (2009), in order to comprehend Keats's "idea of death," one must also consider "the actual

presence of death in Keats's life and his study of death through and in the poetry" (324). Keats's fear of death and negative attitude toward it, are clearly shown in his sonnet "When I Have Fears". This sonnet distinguishes itself from Keats' other works by presenting a more nuanced view of death. It is a more relatable and poem about death and life. He expresses his fear of dying before achieving all his great dreams and desires. This fear acts as a force that ends the poet's poetic career and his ability to convey his message to others.

He writes:

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;

The opening lines represent a specific fear for the reader. The death is not what worries the poet, but the fear of accomplishing his full creative potential during his life "full ripened grain" before he imagines his demise in the form of "high-piled books". This fear represents the poet's dissatisfied situations imposed by life despite his unlimited ideas "teeming brain". Walsh (1981) makes a similar argument, connecting the anxieties and fear caused by illness of Tom to Keats's depiction the conflict between death and life as in Hyperion:

Tom was sinking, and Keats was composing Hyperion. The pull of death against the attraction of life was a deep, constitutive tension in Keats's experience and his art. Hyperion, while it did not itself contain it, except perhaps in patches, helped toward the living equilibrium of the two he achieved finally in the great Odes. He did not succeed in arriving at anything as satisfying in his personal life (55).

Al-Shabbi was among the first Arab romantic poets trying to overcome the dilemma of the dualism of life and death. To Al-Shabbi, death is his first enemy as it took his father and sweetheart. Al-Shabbi lived when Tunisia was suffering from the oppression of French colonization. The humiliation and disdain imposed by French colonial rule relegated the Tunisians to slaves. He rejected the resignation and submission of Tunisian people toward the French occupation. "He at the same time was wondering how they abandoned and lost their dreams and revolutionary will" (Wahas, 214). In his famous poem "Ila Alsha'ab" (To the People), he rebukes and describes his people's status in front of French colonization as:

O, (my) People! Where is your sensitive beating heart?
Where are the ambitions and Dreams?
Where is the resolve to live? There is nothing now but
Death silence, distress and darkness
What sort of life is this?
(A life may be less bearable than death)
You are nothing in life, so leave it
And head towards death which does not need you.
(Tomailah 155, 156)

In the above lines, the poet addresses his people, trying to urge them to fight for freedom and independence. To Al-Shabbi, people represent creation and creativity, and if their life lacks struggle and work, their life and death are alike. Death here is abstract, but it is stronger than real death in which the will of life is inactive.

The conflict between Keats's intense desire for death and life is present in many of his poems such as the sonnet, "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again." This conflict is specifically shown in the following lines: "once again, the fierce dispute/ Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay/ Must I burn through." (Danson, 119). The phrase "impassion'd clay" means life and "damnation" implies a type of death- "death of the creative fire of poetry or simply, the end of life" (Miller, 63). Keats believes that person's love for life surpasses his longing to die. "Man's desire to live is according to Keats, connected to his instinct for survival" (Hussein, 141).

He writes:

The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
And yet we think the greatest pain's to die
How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
And lead a life of woe, But not forsake
His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
His future doom which is but to awake.

"To Autumn" highlights that death is a key part of life. "The first signifier of death is "Autumn," which functions in our common symbolic code as both a metaphor and a metonym of death and dying specifically, and loss and non-being more generally" (Bracher n.p). Autumn's ripeness represents the richness of life and its inevitable end. For Keats, life is lovely as it is in contrast to death. He emphasizes life's beauty and richness while also admitting its inevitable demise and decay. He moves on to explain the reality of death and life in the second stanza where autumn is portrayed, and the woman is shown finishing her responsibilities. The woman is harvesting and the wind is lifting her hair. She is not portrayed as an annoyed reaper, but as an affectionate woman napping in a poppy field, taking a break for some time. This stanza represents the end of the day in addition to the end of life.

Death, in fact, means the restoration of life. In this ode, he simply calls everyone to accept what life has to provide and this acceptance will make life more enjoyable. He portrays the real essence of both life and death in order to reveal the simplicity that lies inside them. Thus, "To Autumn" is not explicitly about death, it subtly hints at the cycle of life and death through its depiction of the changing seasons. It portrays the beauty of autumn, celebrating the ripening and eventual harvest of fruits as a natural process.

He writes:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

However, in his celebrated poem "Iradat Al-Hayat" (The Will of Life), Al-Shabbi calls on people to love life and work hard for it as life loves active people who love it. On the other hand, "he tries to call people to fight for freedom" (Wahas, 71). Life is for those who struggle to live a decent life, not for lazy ones. It is for ambitious people who do not fear life's risks. Furthermore, he believes in life's laws, the strongest will remain and life is going and does not wait for tardy and inactive people.

He writes:

He who is not embraced by the longing for life
Will evaporate in vacancy and be forgotten
Grief to anyone not aroused by the breathing desire of life!
Let him beware the slap of oblivion.
This is what life said to me,
This is how its spirit spoke.
I bless those with ambition,

Those who brave dangers
I curse the ones not keeping
Step with time,
Who are content to live a fossil life.
The vibrating universe loves what moves
And despises the dead
Forgetting their greatness.
Across the universe it was proclaimed:
Endeavour is the flame of life,
The heart of victory.
If the spirit chooses life,
Fate is certain to respond!
(Trans by Jayyusi and Nye131-136)

Al-Shabbi loved life when he himself declared that he is a life's honest slave and pessimism in life is a form of slander and folly. He could defeat life's tragic events and continue his desire for happiness, love and joy, as in his poem "Al-Itiraf" (The Confession). This poem expresses Al-Shabbi 's honest and frank feelings. Badawi comments on this poem: "However, Shabbi's mood in these years alternates between despair and a sense of the futility of existence on the one hand, and on the other, a passionate love for life as we find in "Confession" (167). The poet addresses his dead father as:

I didn't reckon that after your death, O father,
While my feelings blinded with sadness,
That I would be thirsty for lite, from whose
Glowing and intoxicating river I could drink,
And that I would return to life with a heart beating
For love, happiness and music,
For all the visions of hope,
For our strange inclinations and misfortunes in this world.
Pessimism in life and its rejection is
A kind of slander and folly
Man, in the depth of his heart, is
Life's faithful slave.
(Hussein 149)

Immortality:

Immortality is a major theme in English and Arabic Romantic poetry. Immortality, for Romantic poet, is the immortality of one's poetry and spirituality after his death. The corporal death of a human being does not signify the obliteration of one's traces or activities. People live long after their demise because of their good reputation. People can also achieve their immortality through their heroic actions and great works. Immortality is also achieved by martyrs who give up their lives in defending their countries against their enemies. "The immortality of man is not a physical one, a flesh and blood immortality, but a spiritual one. Human beings survive long after their death through their actions and reputation. Their names outlive them and their enduring reputations become a testimony to their achievements" (Hussein, 201). Thus, poets can transcend death and achieve immortality through their high-quality poetry.

"Ode to a Nightingale" is also ripe with the theme of the mortality of human beings and the immortality of nature. To depict his views on immortality, he used several images. In this ode, the poet enjoyed the nightingale's sweet voice to escape life's hardships. He wondered why human life is short and filled with problems and difficulties. "Ode to a Nightingale" is

a depiction of death because Keats wrote it when he was struggling with an overwhelming feeling of life's tragedy. In “Ode to a Nightingale” Keats selects the Nightingale as a symbol of immortality and freedom. He compares human life and features of nature, concluding that the bird is immortal. Thus, Keats through the bird imagery depicts the immortality of poetry through nature.

He writes:

“Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!” (61)

Moreover, in "Ode to Melancholy," Keats is aware of the fleeting nature of joy and the impermanence of beauty.

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.
(all, 21-24)

Immortality can be attained through poetic achievement as found in Keats’s poetry. In “Adonais”, Shelley mourns the death of his friend Keats. However, he refuses to accept that death is final. Keats’s material demise does not imply his spiritual nothingness. Shelley declares that Keats is alive. His poetry assures him of immortality. Shelley calls on nature to celebrate Keats’s spiritual immortality and defiantly declares that death, not Keats, is dead:

He lives, he "walks-tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonais -Thou young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;

Shelley goes even further and declares that Keats achieved immortality by becoming one with nature in all its forms and moods:

The splendours of the firmament of time
May be eclipsd, but are extinguished not;
Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
And death is a low mist which cannot blot
The brightness it may veil. When lofty thought.
Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,
And love and life contend in it, for what
Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there
And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.
(Adonais; 1974: 388-395)

Al-Shabbi also argues that if humans were bestowed with the gift of physical immortality, they would grow weary of life due to its monotonous and tedious nature. He recognizes that immortality adds a certain charm to life. He also realizes that death is unavoidable, therefore, he sees no benefits in thinking of immortality. He writes in "Hadith Al-Maqbara" (Conversation in the Graveyard):

You are discontented while living
For fear of extinction!
Were you to stay eternally alive?
You would weary of immortality.
Only death endears life.
Only the fear of the grave embellishes it.
Without life’s misery
People would never know

The meaning of happiness.
If there is no escape from death
For anyone in this world
Then what good is life and its conflicts.
(Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 70-72)

Al-Shabbi's renowned poem "Hadith Al-Maqbara" (Conversation in the Graveyard) is the sole composition in which he articulates his philosophy regarding life and death. This philosophical discourse delves into topics such as death, life, immortality, and perfection, with the poet personifying death as a human being. Assisted by imagination, the poet found himself in a cemetery; his heart was sorrowful, and his soul was defiant. His contemplation extended to pondering the destiny of the entire universe, encompassing the fate of humanity. "Al-Shabbi expresses the view that man's attachment to the idea of immortality springs from his fear of death which puts an end to man's physical existence" (Hussein, 210).

Will the smiles of these eyes perish?
And the glow of all cheeks fade?
Will the petals of lips wither
And these lovely breasts sink
Down into the earth?
How can such grace collapse,
Such an exquisite bosom disintegrate?
(Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 67)

Thus, the philosopher's spirit tried to convince the poet that immortality means weariness and immobility, and the immortality of the spirit kills its ambitions and life enjoyment. The fear of death makes people love life, and they will not know the meaning of happiness unless they suffer death's fear and misery. The philosopher's spirit is more positive, as it told him that we were born to attain perfection and immortality- the immortality of actions, not bodies. Al-Shabbi describes life's difficulties as simple obstacles that provide strength toward immortality.

He writes:
We were born to reach
The summit of perfection,
To become worthy of immortality's glory
But if we were to assume
And attain that distant perfection
Of spirit,
Would we not tire from
Eternal life,
Would we not wish for
Newer perfection?
Won't our souls aspire beyond
Perfection and immortality?
If the soul's yearning for immortality
Does not diminish,
Therein-I swear- lies
The wretchedness of fortune.
(Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 74-75)

Finally, in "Ila Almaut" (To Death) the poet looks at death as a 'shadow' of immortality. To him, death is what leads to immortality.

Death is the shadow of beautiful eternity
And the other half of life which doesn't mourn.
(Hussein, 213)

Easeful death:

Al-Shabbi was one of the Arab Romantic poets who welcomed death passionately and peacefully, just Keats welcomed death in the same way. This feature is noticeable in the poetry of Al-Shabbi and Keats. In this respect, they shared the same perspectives. Anyone who studies Al-Shabbi's poetry finds that there are many poems, such as "Fi Dhil Wadi Almaut" (In the Shadow of the Valley of Death), "Ya Mawt" (O Death), and "Ila Almaut" (To Death) in which the poet welcomes death as a close friend. Critics and writers who studied and analysed Al-Shabbi's poetry argued about his death and life philosophy, and some of them saw Al-Shabbi welcomed death as reflected in his poems. Meanwhile, others found that Al-Shabbi was positively looking for death in order to avoid the calamities of life. But the fact is that when he was affected by heart disease, he realized that death was waiting for him, especially when the medication could not help him. His heart disease, coupled with the death of his loved ones, convinced him to think about death instead of a worthless life. Thus, the poet convincingly welcomes death and announces his desire to undergo it. In his poem "Fi Dhil Wadi Almaut" (In the Shadow of the Valley of Death), he states that his life came to an end and shows his readiness to try death:

O, my weeping heart, the magic of life has dried up
So, let us try death! let us .. !"

According to Al-Shabbi , life is full of deprivation, sorrows, pain, and suffering, and death is the morning that dispels life's darkness and rids it of its sorrows and calamities. His poem "Al-Sabah Al-Jadid" (The New Morning), implies that the demise of a human being signifies an end. Death is just a transit toward another stage of life that is more perfect and pleasant. "While welcoming his awaited death, Shabbi seems to have praised the "charm of life", despite its sorrows, and expressed longings at the same time for the "dawn of death" (Idrees, 163-64). According to Hussein, Al-Hamshari associated happiness with death; this feature of his poetry has been recognised by Nazik al-Mala'ika who goes so far as to say that his poetry comes closer to that of Keats in this respect than Al-Shabbi's poetry does (46). This is not a trivial assessment considering the fact that Al-Shabbi's poetry is imbued with the strong aroma of death. He says:

Life's magic doesn't die
Why complain of passing darkness
When a new morning is on its way?
The seasons are shifting,
Spring to spring.
Be tranquil, wounds
Be silent, sorrow
The age of weeping is done,
The time of madness too
Morning approaches
From beyond the centuries.
(Trans by Jayyusi and Nye,138-139)

Badawi comments on poem "Al-Sabah al-Jadid" (The New Morning) that: Of course, Shabbi finally welcomed death as the only means to end his suffering. But what is interesting is that his address to death is by no means an expression of total defeat. .... Paradoxically enough, and as is abundantly clear from a study of his imagery, Shabbi now regards death as a means of attaining a fuller and more significant life (13)

Similarly, Keats uses words 'soft names' which express passion and love to address death and welcome it. His longing for death is obvious enough in "Ode to a Nightingale". He describes death as easeful and he is in half love with it, in which

it is the most hated by all creatures and the source of sadness, suffering and pain. By capitalizing death, he personifies it and turns it into someone to fall in love (Sağlam, 2). John Keats finds an easeful death as he escapes from his own world to the world of the nightingale as he is listening to her song. This easeful and joyful death is because of the depression haunting the life of the poet (A. T. Nagi, 12). Thus, death should not be fearful because it can put an end to people's suffering. Keats was charmed by the song of the Nightingale, expressing his desire to die as death will end his pain. Keats says:

I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die
To cease upon the midnight with no pain
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy.
(Ode to a Nightingale)

For Al-Shabbi, death is against the delights of life as it is full of sadness, miseries, pain, deprivation and suffering. In contrast, "death provides man with comfort and treats him kindly. It is compassionate and merciful; it is eternal, powerful and smiling; it grants eternal 'life' by replacing man's existence in this world with a more pleasant and joyful one in another more 'real' world" (Hussein, 232). Thus, the poet shows his desire in death as in his poem "Ila Almaut" (To Death):

Turn to death! If you wish for life's leisure,
What you seek lies beyond the door of the grave.
To death! wretched child of vitality,
In death lies the harmonious voice.
To death! Should your days torment you,
Remember: death holds time's compassionate heart.
On, to death! Whose soft cradle
Will rock us in its embrace.
Death is the ongoing spirit,
Life's other half which does not weep.
There beyond space,
Death lives on strong and beautiful,
Pulling us to its bosom,
Healing our ancient wounds,
Spreading the radiance
Of a different kind of morning
(Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 83-86)

His strong desire for death as a positive phenomenon of this existence, means that it is a gateway towards another phase of this life, i. e. immortality. He wants to get rid of all the factors of decay by welcoming his death. Idrees commented: "While welcoming his awaited death, Shabbi seems to have praised the "charm of life", despite its sorrows, and expressed longings at the same time for the "dawn of death" (171). In his poem (The New Morning) he welcomes death as an end for his suffering. Not only that but to enjoy the eternal charming of life that never vanishes. Al-Shabbi , welcoming death, finds that the era of mourning is about to end since a new good morning is about to shine from 'behind the centuries. He says:

Morning approaches
from beyond the centuries.
(Trans. by Jayyusi and Nye, 1987, p.139)

Finally, Al-Shabbi recognizes that death is inevitable and everyone will experience it. In "Al-Nabi Al-Majhul" (The Unknown Prophet), he "imagines the location of his future grave under the pine trees. He describes how the birds will flutter over his grave, singing their songs, and how the cyclic movement of the seasons will continue as it had done in the past" (Hussein, 234). He also announces that he will be near nature after his death as nature will not modify its course:

Under elegant pines the torrents will carve
A hollow for my grave
Forever the birds will chirp over it,
The breeze softly sings above me
And the seasons continue
To whirl about me
As they did in my youth.
(The Unknown Prophet)

Similarly, for Keats, the most enjoyable and comfortable moments in his life is when he remembers his death as he states in one of his letters to Fanny on July 25th, 1819: "I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death (1958:133)" Keats compares death to poetry, fame and beauty and declares that it is more intense than any of its partners, (1908: 348):

Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser---Death is Life's high meed.

The great similarities between Al-Shabbi and Keats are their longing for death and their great passion for melancholy and grief. Their fear of death is one of the driving forces behind their fast maturity and their achievement. In the case of Al-Shabbi, depression is the prevailing concept in his poetry. This is because of the loss of his beloved, the death of his father, the sense of alienation that he suffered among the literati in Tunisia and the romantic spirit that he had been haunted in and his heart disease especially in the late years of his life, A. T. Nagi (2023:16). Death is seen as an identified platonic love for both of them. John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi appeal to death in order to capture the moment of beauty and spiritual love which can be seen in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and Al-Shabbi 's "Ila Almout" (To Death). Many critics also find typical similarity between John Keats and Al-Shabbi, though both of them belong to different literary historical periods. Idrees argued that "Shabbi, as is well known, died young at the age of twenty-five, and his life has in many ways been compared to the life of the English poet, John Keats. Like Keats, he had premonitions of his death, which can be traced in some of his poems" as can be traced in Keats' poems. Death for both of is the gate for immortality and blissful afterlife. So, death and life have become synonymous in their poetry. So, for both Keats and Al-Shabbi, death is a paradoxical concept since it encompasses the other side of the coin that is life. Such concept can be traced in many of their aforementioned poems. Another similarity is the use of apostrophe while dealing with the concept of death. Both of Keats and Al-Shabbi are addressing death as love one as in the case (O Death) and (To Death) by Al-Shabbi and in "Ode to the Nightingale" and other poems by Keats.

In spite of the great similarity between John Keats and Al-Shabbi, there are some differences between the two prominent literary figures. Keats's treatment of death as something desirable and undesirable can be found at the same moment in one poem as in "Endymion" whereas Al-Shabbi can be seen separately in two poems as in, (O Death) and (To Death). This indicates that Keats lives the moment of the duality of life and death. However, Al-Shabbi was not experiencing the same moment of the duality of life and death. Such experience indicates that the suffering of the loss of so many relatives was more painful than in the case of Al-Shabbi. Another difference between Keats and Al-Shabbi is the philosophical slant in the poetry of Al-Shabbi regarding death especially in his poem " Conversation in the Graveyard" in which he has philosophical enquiries about existence after death. He has so many enquiries such as:

Will the skies of this universe be annihilated?
Will this so huge space go far away? (Stanza 2)

Al-Shabbi has many philosophical questions about the existence of this universe. The death of Al-Shabbi is similar to

the annihilation of the universe which is similar to the metaphysical philosophy of macrocosm and microcosm of John Donne in his poem "The Sun Rising". This philosophical slant cannot be found in the poetry of John Keats. This is due to the different cultural perspective between the two poets. However, John Keats finds that his universe can be mingled in the universe of the nightingale in his "Ode to the Nightingale". In spite of the fact that both of Keats and Al-Shabbi were preoccupied with the concept of death, Al-Shabbi has the feeling of strong will and superiority over others. Al-Shabbi's poem "Iradat Al-hayat" (The Will of Life) is a good example for this point. Keats was so weak because of the death so many relatives and the weak relation among his family members as in the case of his brother George who left to America though Keats was too ill. Death haunted Keats more it did with Al-Shabbi. Accordingly, Keats anticipated his death early after being seriously ill in his late years. This is also due to the medical knowledge of John Keats that made him sensitive to his physical illness. Generally speaking, the similarities between John Keats and Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi regarding the concept of death are more than the differences between them. This leads us to conclude that Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi is the Keats of Arabs. This is due to all the similarities mentioned above. Moreover, John Keats is a precursor of Al-Shabbi. However, Al-Shabbi did not know and speak any foreign language. This means that Al-Shabbi did not copy John Keats. He has his own romantic slant due to the influence of the Arab Romantic School. Accordingly, he is the Keats of Arab for the same effect, status and ideas and other similarities mentioned in this study.

Conclusion

Death was a prominent and prevailing theme in the poetry of John Keats and Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi who lived tragic lives. They lost their relatives and suffered from fatal diseases which were the main cause of their premature demise at the age of 25. Although they lived shortly, they wrote the best poetry that was enough to rank them among the greatest poets. Both poets demonstrated an intense commitment to their surroundings, employing poetry to evoke emotions and encourage thought in their readers. Both poets shared themes of grief, melancholy and mortality and immortality. Keats's emphasis on the transient nature of life and beauty resonates with Al-Shabbi's passion for freedom and the struggle against oppression. Death haunted Keats more it did with Al-Shabbi. Despite their different cultures and periods, both poets were deeply committed to utilizing their art to encourage change and reflect the intricacies of the human condition. Both Keats and al-Shabbi portrayed death as a peaceful and restful state and an escape from the difficulties and tragedies of life. Their portrayal of death as a gentle and comforting force served as a means to reconcile their own mortality and find solace in the face of its inevitability. Therefore, Keats and Al-Shabbi depicted death as a welcome release from the world of suffering, tragedies and pains of the world, showing it as a form of transcendence or liberation. Regarding the concept of death, Keats and Al Shabbi have similar views if not identical views. The similarities are more than the differences between the two poets. Since John Keats is the precursor of Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabbi and due to the huge similarity between them, this study concludes that Al-Shabbi is the Keats of Arabs in spite of the fact that he did not speak English to be considered as a kind of immitation. Each poet is a unique literati and distinguished poet. The only joining tie between them is death. Death is a haunting concept in their poetry which has become an easeful solace to escape the sorrows of life. Keats and Al-Shabbi welcomed death as salvation from the misfortunes and sorrows of life. Furthermore, death has become another synonym of life according to Keats and Al-Shabbi.

This study will open new horizons in the field of comparative studies particularly between Arabic poetry and English poetry. Many phases of the life of Keats and Al-Shabbi will be the source of the future scholar based on the findings of this studyFuture scholars may further explore the intersections of English Romanticism and Arab Romanticism, particularly through the lens of shared human experiences such as illness, loss, and mortality. This cross-cultural exploration not only enriches our understanding of Keats and Al-Shabbi but also deepens the global appreciation of how poetry can serve as a medium for healing, resistance, and transcendence in a world of huge turmoil

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