

The Concept of Eternity in a Variety of Three Different Poems

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مفهوم الخلود في ثلاث قصائد مختلفة

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المستخلص

يركز البحث على عنصر الخلود الذي هو قبلة غالبية بني البشر. يتطرق البحث إلى ثلاث شعراء مختلفين و هم يعبرون عن فكرة الخلود في ثلاث قصائد مختارة: ملحمة "كلكاش" و "ليسديس" لملتون و "في ذكره" لتينسن، نتيجة لهذا المصاب يستكشف هؤلاء الشعراء معنى الحياة و يحاولون إيجاد ملاذ لهم ولأصدقائهم. يعبر الشعراء عن خوفهم من الموت و الذي من خلاله يصنعون عالمهم الخاص وذلك عن طريق انجازهم شواهد متنوعة من أجل تخليد انفسهم واصدقائهم على حد سواء. كلمات مفتاحية: الادب الانكليزي، الشعر، كلكاش، الخلود.

Abstract

The ultimate goal of most people is immortality, which is the subject of the current paper. The three authors who celebrate immortality in three separate poems—"The Epic of Gligamesh," "Lycidas" by Milton, and "In Memoriam" by Tennyson—are the subjects of this dissertation. The poets, who have lost three close friends—Enkidu, Edward King, and Henry Hallam—try to achieve immortality in these poems. They look into the meaning of life and try to find a resort for their friends and themselves as a result of this tragedy. The fear of death that drives the three poets to construct their own world in which they accomplish numerous good actions to ensure their own and their companions' immortality is expressed. **Keywords:** English literature, Poetry, Gligamesh, EternityII

This paper is an attempt to present a comparative study of three different poems: The Iraqi Epic "Gilgamesh" (400 B.C), John Milton's "Lycidas" (1634) and Tennyson's "In Memoriam" (1850). The main reasons behind choosing these works are the following: first, the three works belong to different nationalities and cultures. The author of "Gilgamesh" is Iraqi in origin, whereas Milton and Tennyson are English who lived in the seventeenth century and the Victorian period respectively: second, despite the difference in time and place, the three authors reveal certain similar thematic approaches and man's preoccupation by the dilemma of death and immortality. To begin with, "Gilgamesh" is a long poem. It belongs to the early beginning of civilization in the southern Mesopotamia, some four thousand years B. C. It deals with the inevitability of man's: death. The events move round the death of a strong man, Enkidu the sorrow and bewilderment of his friend, Gilgamesh and finally the attempts to find reasonable answers to his dilemma that results from his friend's early death. ⁽¹⁾Milton's "Lycidas" is a pastoral elegy written in the first half century of seventeenth England. The nominal theme is a lamentation of the poet on the early death of his young friend, Edward King, who died when his ship foundered. Its real theme is the fears and horror that obsessed Milton, the anger and resignation, the rebelliousness and faith of John Milton himself. ⁽²⁾The third poem, "In Memoriam" is a collection of short elegies written in the Victorian period. These "fragments" of elegies were occasioned by the early death of Tennyson's close friend, Arthur Henry Hallam. In this poem, Tennyson encompasses the idea of the concept of death which he is going to accept as something inevitable. The three poets express and reveal the fear of death which they create their own world in terms of achieving certain deeds. The shock and grief at his sudden death causes Tennyson to explore the meaning of life

in terms of various problems.⁽³⁾ One of these problems is the great loss of Hallam. The summaries given above show that the three poems are essentially concerned with death and human mortality; the fear of death and man's seek for eternity. The concerns about fear of death are instinctive features of human beings. They are universal and timeless and emerge in time of crisis.⁽⁴⁾ The problem of the purpose of life, of life after death and immortality is cultural perpetual dilemmas that have preoccupied man since his creation. Gilgamesh, Milton and Tennyson undergo similar experiences that result from the death of their dear friends and the attempts to find an outlet to the crises that were prompted by the plight they faced. The *Gilgamesh Epic* reveals man's fear and anxiety about man's problem of eternity. Gilgamesh expresses this in the following three lines: "He has gone to the (common) lot of man. Day and night I have wept over him. For burial I did not want to give him up..."⁽⁵⁾ (G.E., pp.5-13) Death, the common end of mankind, has taken Enkidu from Gilgamesh with whom he has shared similar desires and achieved great deeds: "He who went with me through all hard (ships), Enkidu, whom I loved (so) dearly, He went with me through all hardship. (G.E., pp.5-13) Now Gilgamesh faces a problem which makes him sad. It causes him to think of death because they are close friends. This thinking leads him to wonder about the possibility of his own death as well: "Gilgamesh for Enkidu, his friend, Weeps bitterly and roams over the desert. When I die, shall I not be like unto Enkidu? Sorrow has entered his heart-I am afraid of death and roams over the desert. (G.E., p.64) Gilgamesh starts thinking of the possibility of his own death brought about by the death of his own friend Enkidu. This fear leads Gilgamesh to the desert and then causes him to look for a solution for his problem.⁽⁶⁾ This situation also leads to raise a question concerning the purpose of human life. Two different aims are offered. The author of the epic gives the first aim. "They embraced and kissed another, They took counsel together, as they conversed together. "Tell me, my friend; tell me my friend, Tell me the way(s) of the underworld, which thou has seen. (G.E., p.99) Then follows a long and fearful description of the underworld, of life after death. From this description we infer that life is closely related to the way people behave in the world, the number of their children and the way they have died. ⁽⁸⁾ Like the author of the ancient Iraqi Epic, Milton in "Lycidas" expresses his fear and anxiety about human mortality: "Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear, Compels me to disturb your season due: For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime, Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer: ("Lycidas", lines 6-9)⁽⁹⁾ Lycidas is the pastoral name of Edward King. His unexpected early death is a matter that touched Milton 'since they were close friends at the same college, shared similar qualities and travelled together: "Together both, ere the high lawns, appear'd Under the opening eyelids of the morn, We drove a field, and both together heard What time the Gray-Fly winds her sultry horn, Batt'ning our flock with the fresh dew of night. Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning bright Toward Heav'n, 's descent had slop'd his westering wheel. ("Lycidas", lines, 25-31) In addition, both Milton and Edward King were great young poets. At the time of King's death, Milton was leading the life of a scholar of his time, working hard to be a great poet and famous. These similarities between their lives make Milton, like Gilgamesh, think of the possibility of his own death before he can achieve his goal. Hence his fear of early death: "Alas! What boots it with uncessant care? To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade, And strictly meditate the thankless Muse? Were it not better done, as others use, To sport with Amaryllis in the shade, Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair? Fame is the spur that the clear spirit does raise (That last infirmity of noble mind) To scorn delights, and live laborious days; But the fair guerdon when we hope to find And think to burst out into sudden blaze, Comes the blind Fury with abhorred shears, And slits the thin-spun life. ("Lycidas", lines, 64-76) The poet wonders about the use of hard labour involved in the profession of a poet, of the glory that may be won, if there is the risk that accompanies it, that is the early death. Like Gilgamesh, this situation leads Milton to think that what happened to his friend, Edward King, may happen to him. Therefore he is filled with fear, sadness and sorrow like Gilgamesh, he lost a dear friend with whom he has shared many lovely memories. Furthermore he speculates about the use of hard work and glory that may be won if death is the lot of man. But he is told by Phoebus that the reward of achievement is Heaven: "Phoebus replied, and touch'd my trembling ears; Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil, Nor in the glistening foil Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumor lies. But lives and spreads a loft by those pure eyes And perfect witness of all-judging Jove. As he pronounces lastly on each deed, Of so much fame in heav'n expect thy meed" (Lycidas, lines, 77-84) It is clear that the hard work for fame is not wasted since one will be rewarded if not in this world then in the world hereafter. In other words, there is life after death, and immortality is reached through the achievement of great deeds. It is God's will to reward immortality to those who lead laborious life. It is worth mentioning that the Iraqi Epic excels in its detailed description of world of life after death.⁽¹⁰⁾ But, in *Lycidas* there are only brief allusions. However, like Gilgamesh, *Lycidas* has achieved fame "mounted high," and immortality, through "the dear might of Him." So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high, Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves. (Lycidas, lines, 172-73) Like both

Gilgamesh and Milton, Tennyson in his masterpiece "In Memoriam" reveals similar types of men, situations and preoccupations of those of Gilgamesh and Milton. The problem of man's death and his mortality and the poet's anxiety and fear are expressed in "In Memoriam" ⁽¹¹⁾"Behold the man that loved and lost, But all he was is overworn."⁽¹²⁾(*In Memory*, 15-16) Although the poet here does not mention the name or the nickname of the dead man as in Lycidas and Gilgamesh, yet he declares his death "Lost," "overworn." These are indications to Hallam. ⁽¹³⁾It is clear that, like Gilgamesh and Milton, death has taken Tennyson's dear friend, Hallam with whom he celebrates exchanged experiences and great deeds. They were together for four years and they went cheerfully from season to season in the annual cycle: "The path by which we twain did go, Which led by tracts that pleased us well, Thro' four sweet years arose and fell, From flower to flower, from snow to snow And we with singing cheer'd the way, And, crown'd with all season lent, From April on to April went, And glad at heart from May to May. But when the path we walked began To slant the fifth autumnal slope As, we descended following Hope, Three sat the Shaow (death) fear'd of man; Who broke fair companionship, And spread his mantle dark cold, And wrapt thee formless in the fold, And dull'd the murmur on thy lip, And bore thee where I could not see Nor follow, tho' I walk in haste The Shadow sits and waits forme". (In Memoriam, XXII, 1-18) In the lines mentioned above, Tennyson has a sense of horror that what has happened to his dear friend Hallam may happen to him as well. Tennyson has this the feeling of panic which can't be avoided in his fancy all the way through. Hence he has to overcome this feeling as much as possible. For Tennyson death would lurk around him all the time through. The last line of the stanza above approves this humiliating feeling: "The shadow of death sits and waits forme." Death, the inevitable end of mankind, has taken Hallam away where Tennyson cannot go and follow him. Now the poet encounters a problem that makes him sad. It causes him, like Gilgamesh and Milton, to think of the benefit of glory, fame, good qualities and wisdom if death is the ultimate lot of man. Hence, like Gilgamesh and Milton, Tennyson is obsessed by the idea that what happened to Hallam may happen to him too: "And bore thee where I could not see Nor follow, tho' I walk in haste, And think that somewhere in the waste" III To conclude, it has become clear that the three poems reveal this devastating matter of death by all means. The first poem tries some alternatives to treat and avoid the idea of this scaring death, but it is in vain. In Milton's "Lycidas", the same feeling has come to the poet himself. The poet tries by all means to shun death by creating and thinking of the possibility of his own death before he can achieve his goal. Hence, his fear of early death cannot be accessed. So that he has to submit to this element of this great fear of death. As for Tennyson, the crisis of life and death is clearly expressed and revealed in most of the lines of the great elegy about the reverend Hallam. As a result of this great loss Tennyson starts thinking of his own lot which he never thinks before. His philosophy centers on the way how to create a world just to avoid the term Death as much as he stays alive as he imagines, no matter how much he fears the Idea of death. In brief, life in the three poems is a glorious axis for all human beings, but death will completely spoil the beautiful dream of being alive forever.

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