

Rebellion Against Death in the Poetry of Riyadh Al-Saleh Al-Hussein as a Model

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Preface

The issue of rebellion against death - however large it may be - remains in the realm of the word only. Because death is not a system to rebel against and to drop, or a restriction imposed on us to break, it is rather that existential destiny that collects all the foundations, so it is neither inevitable nor defeated, and from this, the issue of rebellion has become a complex philosophical idea based on a personal philosophy of the creator, as he adopts and transmits it for the image of the total annihilation.

We can define the term (rebellion against death) as: the problem of reconciling with the idea of death and accepting it, so the poet tries to triumph over his end by producing endless ideas.

On the other hand, it must be pointed out that rebellion is not only a philosophy, but a position that rejects one of the rules of the universe, and that (rebellion is fundamentally a protest against the absurdism that the human mind senses in its confrontation with the dense walls of existence)

¹ and therefore, death is the absurdism that surrounds the thought of the rebellious person who is not satisfied with the assets as they are, but rather, is motivated by the feeling of rejection by directing to the effect of any change that makes him feel his freedom; Because man (becomes free through acts of his disobedience, and by learning to say (no) to the surrounding powers) ², and this is what Albert Camus referred to in his definition of the rebellious person (he is a person who says: No, and if he refuses, he does not give up, and he is also a person who says: Yes, on the first gesture) ³, if this person says (No to death), he will fight so that he does not die with his own weapons, which will all fail at the end, but he is satisfied with the honor of trying, despite the clarity of the results.

Between the images of rebellion and revival in poetry, there is a difference that should be pointed out, as the revival in poetry is based on an update of old images that were previously present. But rebellion is based on innovative and new images that were not previously highlighted, and this rebellion comes in via the means of bold intellectual steps that create an act

¹ Phenomena of rebellion in contemporary Arabic poetry, Muhammad Ahmad Azaz, PhD thesis, Al-Azhar University, Faculty of Arabic Language, 1976 AD: 12

² On disobedience and other articles, Irish Fromm, translated by: Youssef Nabil, Rawafed for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, Edition 1, 2016 AD: 16

³ The rebellious man, Albert Camus, translation: Nihad Reda, Awaidat Publications, Beirut, 3rd Edition, 1983 AD: 18.

of surprise; which may be astonishment, either positively or negatively; Because (when the poet edits words and turns them into signals, he emanates in his work from a non-mental movement in which he exercises his function) ⁴, and perhaps for this reason, the recurrent stereotypical poems is specific to a fixed time and space, while the poem of rebellion is a living poem that transcends time.

The rebellion against death is a kind of verbal revolution launched by the poet in order to break his fear of death itself, and therefore, we always hear that if you are afraid of something, try it; So that fear will disappear, and because the poet cannot experience death, he experiments with breaking the barrier of fear from it with his language, bearing all the burdens of fear and anxiety with it; To advance it to the form of the rebellious poem; Because (He who feels death in his bed cannot feel life, so in order to live a better life, we have to have a deep sense of death) ⁵, and this feeling just so happens to occur to the poet in his poems, so he sets out to draw the horizon of death with new images, which are mixtures of both absurdity and revolution.

Poems of Rebellion Against Death

The poetic language is a language full of all forms of contradictions, so that the antagonist does not meet with its opposite except in language and miracles, and because (poetry is the highest form of expression, it expresses the secret of a person's connection with existence) ⁶, and this existence is the life in which we live, while the other being is Life after Death. So, the poet writes rebelliously against the existence; in order to remain in the first existence in an attempt of eternity, despite his certainty of the end, but he is trying to make this end live through the first existence.

Riyadh Al-Saleh Al-Hussein declares his desire to face death in all its forms in his poem (Desires), as he says:

I want to lock-down a sea

In the cell

I want to steal all cells

And cast them into the sea ⁷

The repetition of the verb (I want) in the poem is an expression of the moment of compensation for absence, for death is a forced absence, matched by a presence on its way to extinction, so the repetition of the verb (I want) came as an attempt to compensate for the realized absence, as well as saturating the poet's imagination with the idea of life.

⁴ Anatomy of the text, Abdullah Al-Ghadhami, Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, Edition 2, 2016 AD: 39.

⁵ The Incomplete Identity, Adonis, Arabization: Hassan Odeh, Bidayyat for Publishing and Printing, Syria, 1st Edition, 2005 AD: 74.

⁶ The Poetic Mind, Khazal al-Majidi, House of General Cultural Affairs, Baghdad, 1st Edition, 2004 AD: 97.

⁷ Complete Works, Riyadh Al-Saleh Al-Hussein, House of the Mediterranean, Italy, 1st Edition, 2016 AD: 208.

This text represents a metaphysical rebellion, since this rebellion is practiced by a person against a world covered in darkness, in which he declares the desire to purify this world from that darkness as a matter of justice, and protest against the deprivation and death the world suffers ⁸. This rebellion in addressing the place of death represented by the word (the cell), and giving life to it represented by (the sea), is a rebellion outside of reality and is unattainable, but its semantic dimensions are of which that denote a rejection of everything that leads to death, and every place represents death, and the contrast of colors between the color of life, which is the color blue, represented by the sea, is evident in this text, and the black color of death, represented by the subtle expression (darkness of the cell), and this color contrast came to confirm the main idea of the text at the heart of the balance of existence. All of which is in order to create another world that does not belong to reality.

Then he does turn the scales of the first stanza in his poem, saying:

I want to steal all cells

And cast them into the sea

Here, he is declaring that he will dispense the idea of replacing the place of death with the place of life, and that he will adopt the idea of throwing the place of death in the place of death, so that the place of death dies altogether, in order to end that death. We notice the change in the significance of the sea in the first section of the poem from the significance of life, and its shift to the significance of death in the second section of the poem. That change in significance is positive, which purpose is: Letting death be lost in the sea of life, and pursuing another turn in this rebellion, while keeping the irrationality of events present. Thus, the poet depicts the great energy of language which is more than capable of absorbing all that vast imagination.

In another scene of the text, the poet says:

I want to have a gun

To shoot the wolves

I want to be a wolf

To prey upon those who shoot ⁹

The desire to face death emanates from one of the tools of death represented by (the gun) for the salvation of wolves, and wolves in this scene may refer to all the cunning people who prey on people's right to live, as opposed to imposing control and showing power over the other, and thus the text becomes a death wish for those who control the lives of others leading them to death. Then, the paradox comes in the reversal of the first depiction, while assuring the significance that the ones who deserve to die, shall die:

I want to be a wolf

⁸ See: The Rebellious Man: 33,32.

⁹ Complete Works: 209.

To prey upon those who shoot

In the first scene, the victim is the human being, and the perpetrators are the wolves, while the second scene in which the wolf has become the victim and the perpetrator is the human, as the contradiction of the two scenes came by depicting two meanings for wolves. While the wolf in the other scene is perhaps the animal, the wolf itself, that preys upon a person's right to live when hunting.

The text returns to the subconscious rebellion in the subsequent passage:

I want to hide in a flower

For fear of the killer

I want Death to the killer

***When he sees a flower*¹⁰**

As the rebellion against death in this scene lies in the realm of the unreasonable and unfulfilled justice, and this came as a rebellion rejecting the supremacy of the killer on the aesthetics of life represented by (Flower) in the text, and the poet depicted hiding in the flower to escape death; Because the killer does not see a flower, if he is a person saturated with blood and darkness, it is difficult for him to pay attention to the color of life represented by the flower, then in saying:

I want Death to the killer

When he sees a flower

We notice, implicitly depicted in the text, the transcendence to the other corner in the desire for the murderer himself to die a moral death by the most terrifying means for the same killer, which is to confront him with the beauty represented by flowers. Because if we face murder with murder, when will the killing end? If we face death with death, when does death end? Accordingly, the text was in the face of the antagonist to depict another subtle meaning that leads him to a place of peace and love, and this is explained by Adonis's saying: (Poetry does not grow except in a kind contradictory or dialectic of antagonism)¹¹, that exceptional contradiction in depicting a picture in which all its parts suffer from death without even dying.

In the conclusion of the poem, Riyadh says:

I want the word to be

A tree, a loaf, or a kiss

I want those who do not like trees

Loaf

And kisses

¹⁰ Complete Works: 209.

¹¹ The Politics of Poetry, Adonis, Dar Al-Adab, Beirut, Edition 1, 1985 AD: 16.

***To refrain from speaking*¹²**

In this text (the word) is made synonymous with the essentials of life that a person needs, as it is used to make the word (tree) a symbol of nature and place under which man shall be sheltered, and the word (loaf) is used as a symbol for the food with which man renews his vital energy, as for the use of (the kiss), It is a symbol of love and femininity that covers the emotional needs of man. Then, if he makes the most important components of life based on two feminine adjectives (the tree and the kiss) before depicting the (loaf) alone within the text, then this is an indication of the importance of the female in a person's life. If it was a tree, it becomes his shadow and shelter, and if it was a kiss, it is his girlfriend and the other half.

The desire to face death with the word, which is the poet's weapon, is to rise up and announce his protest against things he is not satisfied with. He is alive, and this reminds us of a passage from Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi's play (Al-Hussein is a Martyr) about his description of the Word:

The Word is light

***And some words are graves*¹³**

Because a single word can kill a thousand people, and at the same time, it can revive thousands of people, and nothing is equivalent to a word being a sign of hope in the midst of the devastation of this world.

When we move to the desire to face death from another perspective, Riyadh Al-Saleh Al-Hussein says protesting in several poems that he wrote, under the title (Explosions), saying:

I will say I love you

I love you whenever I pluck off a rose

***And whenever the knives plucked me off*¹⁴**

The poet rebels against death with love, and makes it the weapon with which he resists life itself in the state of prosperity represented by (plucking off the rose), and the state of distress represented by (plucking off knives), and from another perspective, he does not fight death with the instrument of death, but rather he fights with his feelings, thereby declaring the intensity of love that drives him to resist death and its cruelty in a form of courage. Which is the image of the true lover who rebelled against the entire life for his love; Because (courage value lies in that it defies death, and persistence value is that it faces death)¹⁵.

The use of the verb of (plucking off) is depicted for the rose and knives, which in the first depiction was fully spot-on with a direct intention; Because what is appropriate to cutting off the

¹² Complete Works: 210.

¹³ Al-Hussein a martyr, Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi, House of the Book for Printing and Publishing, Cairo, 1st Edition, 1969 AD: 39.

¹⁴ Complete Works: 158.

¹⁵ The mystery of death, Mustafa Mahmoud, Dar Al Maaref, Cairo, Dr. I, dt: 10.

rose is to pluck it off, and as for the other depiction (Knives plucked me off), this is an indication of repeated cutting, not one-time plucking. Therefore, (knives) came in the plural form, so the poet did not employ (the knife) only in harmony with plucking off one rose in the first metaphor, and this metaphor leads us to another sign, as the use of the rose as a sign of life is an assertion that the image of life is one image, and the use of knives as a sign of death, this is an assertion that the images of death are multiple, so a person dies successive deaths, and lives only one life.

There is another rebellion in the face of death, and in it we find a special philosophy of the poet in the decision of that confrontation. Because the unknown that he is trying to rebel against is open to expectations, and thus, the poet's insights abound about the problematic of this rebellion, he says in his poem (Desires):

I have a lot to give

And behind me there are lots of graves

In front of me the river, and the scent of the morning, and songs

Wonderful Humans, Travel, and Justice

And behind me, there are many and many

Of priests, statues and altars¹⁶

We directly and intentionally notice that the poem is a call to hope and rebellion against death with the aesthetics of life represented by (the river, the scent of the morning, the songs, the wonderful people, travel and justice) in front of the images of death represented by (priests, statues and altars). Whereas the depiction of (many) came twice in (behind me many, many), and this assertion was appropriate to the horizon of expectations of the unknown (death) that have no limits.

On the other hand, we find that the text deals with life as a future (in front of me a lot) and with death as a past (behind me there are many and many), while life today is what will become the past, and death is the endless future, and in this sense, the poet contradicts himself with another poem, when saying:

For the dead: let's begin

For the living: We will continue¹⁷

This contradiction of depictions raises the energy of the language used to serve the act of rebellion in the decision to confront and call to life right under the nose of death.

We return to the same poem in another verse describing rebellion:

I open my eyes like a little fountain

¹⁶ Complete Works: 205.

¹⁷ Complete Works: 158.

Move gracefully like the shepherds

I am starting to know

Maybe a little late -

That thousands of wars and millions of crimes

Could not prevent the cat from meowing when it was hungry

And the rose to blossom

And the rain to pour down heavily

Therefore, I walk, walk, and walk

Shining like a star in the sky

Free as a Caribou in the woods¹⁸

The form of rebellion against death came in the continuation of life represented by (the meowing of the cat, the blossoming of the rose, the downpour of rain) in front of the aspects of death represented by (wars and crimes). This is confirmation of the idea of the continuation of life despite the existence of death and the multiplicity of its forms and the different causes that lead to it, then the use of (and therefore I walk, walk and walk) came as a sign of defiance and continuation of the act of walking, and the poet emphasized the verb (walk) three times as an indication of the continuation of walking despite all the pitfalls of life that may be encountered. So, he walks brightly, not tired, free, without no restrictions, as (Spinoza) expresses: (The last thing a free man thinks about is death, for he has wisdom in contemplating life and not death)¹⁹.

The poet resembles himself to the Caribou²⁰, to the exclusion of other animals. This animal is known for its love to live lonely, without the restrictions of family and gatherings, which is reflected in the psychological state of Riyadh with his uniqueness and his pursuit of the individual life by which the creator of the law himself is following, there is no law except what he said, and there is no objection to what he says.

The decision to confront death and rebel against it differs in the poem (The Germ of the Spring):

And here I am biting my nails and thinking sadly:

On Saturday night, I will not be able to sneak into

My beloved home to play cards with her

So, I decided to die one time

Instead of dying seven times a week

¹⁸ Same source: 206-207.

¹⁹ The problem of life, Dr. Zakaria Ibrahim, Dar Misr for Printing, Egypt, Dr. I, dt, p. 7.

²⁰ Dictionary of Maqiyas Al-Linguistics, Bab Al-Waw, Al-Waal: Dhikr Al-Arwa.

Since I have neither a coffin, nor a grave, nor a shroud

I have decided to live by the number of the dead

And to open a shop to distribute love to you through this poem²¹

Moral death is more present than actual death in the text, with the presence of the energy of metaphysical rebellion in the conclusion, as this text carries out a philosophy that shows the positivity of being accustomed to feeling something so that nothing has any sort of feelings anymore. Because the person whom we think that he does not have feelings, is the person who has felt too much until he lost his feelings and his sense of things, and this matter is confirmed by Aristotle in his saying: (The sense is not able to perceive after a strong sensory effect, for example: We do not perceive the sound after hearing strong voices)²². This is why the poet decides to die once, instead of dying seven times a week, and in this text, the indication of saturation of moral death that clouded the atmosphere of the poem, and rendered it to darkness, and this is the first rebellion metaphor in the text, and then comes the second metaphor, represented by saying:

(And since I do not own a coffin, a grave, or a shroud, I decided to live by the number of the dead).

As the text in its first section represents an image of protest and tears of a homeless with no shelter, and in the second section it represents an image of rebellion against that death, which made people truly dead, and that life is not lived only once, but rather deserves to be lived by the number of all those dead Then the conclusion of the poem is celebrated with a spot of light that removes the darkness of the scene, and that light was the unconditional love that the poet wanted to distribute to people, and it was the dispossession of everything, except love and this piece of poem.

The confrontation of intangible things is more difficult than any material confrontation. Then, how if this confrontation is to face death and facing the idea of the end and extinction no way to escape from.

The poet landed to this confrontation, declaring a lot of rebellion metaphors, as he says in the poem (The Pirates):

I said to death:

When you come to me

To destroy my life

So please

Destroy it with kindness

²¹ Complete Works: 26.

²² Kitab al-Nafs, Aristotle Thales, translated by: Ahmad Fouad Al-Lahwani, Horizons for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, Edition 1, 2021: 158.

Then I said to death:

do not approach me

Lest you return to your mother

With a broken neck²³

The text begins with an atmosphere of intimacy and humanizes death, as if it is a heavy guest who is not welcome, and that depicting (to destroy my life) has transcended the idea of death itself. Because death is the completion of life in another existence, and it is not a means to destroy a person's life. Moreover, seeking to destroy with kindness is a request for a merciful death without pain, a quick death that does not exhaust the man. After that comes the image of rebellion in his other speech of death: (Do not approach me), and in it there is a sign caution warning of danger, and to take the role of power over the strongest, by depicting the humanity of death, and that death is nothing but a weak creature that the poet pursues to return to his mother with a broken neck. This is a rebellion against God, and a form of rebellion against the divine, and an indication of a conflict relationship between human death and the person who is rebellious against that death. Perhaps, the poet is not referring to actual death in his text, but is a reference to the enemy whose presence resembles the presence of death. His presence is dark and opaque.

He has been writing since he died

He writes even though no one is reading what he is writing

He writes without stopping

He writes with desire, and motivation

Does nothing but writing

Writes

Probably

Because writing is an act of life²⁴

The use of (He has been writing since he died) shows the time of writing, that is, he started writing since he died morally, so injustice, oppression, and deprivation are actions that kill a person and make him full of feelings that are not told as much as they are written, and because sadness is the basis of inspiration for many poets, the sad poem is the most influential on the other and the poet himself.

With this text, the poet reaches his final destination in the face of death, as he declares his rebellion with the word that guarantees his survival despite extinction. The more he writes, the more he guarantees his immortality. As Riyadh relieves the tension in confrontation and material

²³ Complete Works: 141.

²⁴ Complete Works: 241.

rebellion, declaring the authority of the **word** alone to prove existence despite non-existence. Linguistic images in the form of rebellion are the solution to the problem of death that the poet is incapable of stopping.

Results

Out of all these representations of the rebellion against death that we have mentioned, we find that the space of metaphysics is occupied via poetry in a special way, and that the poet's use of this space in a great way in his handling of the topic of death, is a special philosophy that is appropriate to the dilemma of rebellion against death. Perhaps, what Erich Fromm had said: (Human history began with an act of disobedience, and it is not unlikely that it ended with an act of submission)²⁵, is an affirmation of the beginning of the idea of rebellion in the human being, leading to the radiation of this idea and its application within the various cosmic rules which any human being is not satisfied without the other rules. Also, the most important rule might be the base of his mortality, which he is trying hard to conquer without hope, but he tries, and George Tarabishi referred to this idea, saying: (Insisting on a hopeless struggle is a futile struggle before a force that no human has accepted)²⁶, and that the form of the struggle represents whatever is represented in Riyadh's rebellion against the idea of death. But, and out of that, he was able to create a special philosophy for this rebellion with different depictions between three axes:

- 1) Desire to face death.
- 2) The decision to face death.
- 3) Confrontation.

He did not start defiant, and did not remain defiant, but has been gradually growing in his rebellion, declaring a state of rejection to the end, and his poetry was a mixture of contradictions and visions that empowered the heftiness of death on the poet. Add to that, if Riyadh had not felt that death is a heavy matter for him, he would have not rebelled against it, and used his poetic platform as a station to record his position towards the end that he refused to reconcile with, for he said:

I am of three cries

The first: of adventure

The second: of love

The third: of going to work at eight as usual²⁷

Between adventure, love, and work, Riad Al-Saleh Al-Hussein's life lies in a mixture of groans and contradictions, and the pursuit of hope, despite everything encouraging him to not live and believe in such hope.

²⁵ On disobedience and other articles: 9.

²⁶ The Complete Works of Art, George Tarabishi, Madarak Publishing House, Emirates, 1st Edition, 2013 AD: 247/ Part 1.

²⁷ Complete Works: 185.