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DEATH IN THE FICTIONAL WORLD

OF

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KINGSLEY AMIS AND MARTIN AMIS

AS REPRESENTED IN THE GREEN MAN, ENDING UP.

DEAD BABIES AND OTHER PEOPLE

BY



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P R E F A C E

Kingsley Amis and his son Martin Amis have enriched British literature with their fictional work that has so far won the acclaim of a great number of critics. Since they belong to two different generations, their approaches to human issues are different. However, being father and son, they share an interest in morals. The present research deals with four novels, where the Amises write about human death from various perspectives. The moral trend is obviously noticed within these four works of art.

The introductory chapter tries to shed light on some contemporary views about death. It gives a brief idea about death in the main religious beliefs in England, namely, Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It includes also a review of the study which Professor Moody entitled Life After Life. This study is an investigation about the phenomenon of the survival of bodily death. Professor Moody calls this a "death experience."

Sometimes the brain of a man dies but his body does not. This is called brain-death. Brain death has been the criterion of many discussions and arguments, among which the writer of the thesis has selected the arguments of two eminent moralists and two ontologists.

Human death embraces both suicide and murder. This chapter analyses the reasons why people kill themselves. Most of these reasons are different forms of love hunger. The latest studies have proved that love can prevent suicidal people from killing themselves. Suicide is one of the two forms of premature death, the second is murder. Since it is

more Twentieth Century to deal with megadeath instead of individual murders, the writer of the thesis has tried to give a brief idea about the death of millions of people caused by atomic bombs and other things.

The research is divided into two main parts : the first part concerns itself with Kingsley Amis's two novels : The Green Man and Ending Up. In The Green Man, Amis writes about death as something hateful, because it is the beginning of an afterlife which inevitably includes the company of God. Amis includes the ghost element in this novel to hint that survival after death is a fact. The first chapter is an attempt to present Amis's opinion concerning death, God and afterlife.

Ending Up is a great novel where Amis the artist draws a moving picture of old age. As old age is often the painful, tasteless, pre-death stage, the oldsters in Amis's piece are portrayed as obsessed with unwelcome death. Amis studies the various horrors of old age closely and accurately, in a way that arouses pity and concern for every sixty or seventy- plus person in the world. The chapter tries to study this very small society of five oldsters, in the light of Amis's treatment of obsession with death in old age.

The second part of this research includes two chapters about Martin Amis. ~~The writer has~~ chosen Dead Babies and Other People among Martin Amis's novels because there is a delicate affinity to his father's novels. Dead Babies is a strong appeal to the youth of contemporary society to reject their ways of thought and behaviour, which they think is life, but Amis thinks it is death-in-life. Martin Amis

attacks every bad contemporary thing that people think ordinary because it is in fact fatal. The chapter tries to illustrate Amis's vision of contemporary life as disguised death, and his exasperation with people's indifference to such a state.

Other People puts death in another perspective. Martin Amis calls it A Mystery Story and makes it as mysterious as he can. This piece of art relates the second life of the life-in-death of a young beautiful girl. This life-in-death is as real as the first, but the girl who used to be an evil girl in her life is very innocent in her death. Finally, she comes back to a third life where her personality is more balanced and wiser than the two previous ones. The chapter is an attempt to provide interpretations of the mystery of this novel.

The writer of the thesis has interpreted her amnesia as a fugue which stands, according to psychology, as a substitute for suicide. As for her relation with the hero, the writer has interpreted it in terms of the devil's persuasion of the human soul. However, one thinks that other people can find other interpretations for mysterious Other People.

INTRODUCTION

DEATH : CONTEMPORARY VIEWS

By death we think characteristically of the disappearance of individuals; it does not console us to know that matter is not disappearing, but is simply being metamorphosed... But everything we see is a metaphor of death. Even seeing is a death, for there is a point beyond which we cannot see, and our seeing dies, wherever our capacity ends, we die.¹

We usually approach death as an event which always occurs to "other" not to self; even if we say that we will die someday, yet in our heart of hearts we do not accept, believe or imagine that the "I" will belong to the realm of the dead! Even the few cases in which a human being believes the idea fully, selfishness intervenes very often to make him wish that his death comes before that of the other, who constitutes a vital company without which life is unbearable. This is because "self" is prior to "other", so it prefers to let this other survive its death, for (death survival is usually more painful than death itself.) All this may operate on the unconscious level and in some cases on the conscious one. Love is the healer of such a suffering, for if love reaches such a highly desirable degree, it will naturally prefer to survive the death of the beloved and endure pain rather than be pain-causing.

This is perhaps the case in which death is dealt with as an event, not as a process (which is nearer to the truth). If a part of you has died since you began to read this sentence,² then death is a life-long operating force rather than a moment-long tragedy. From such a perspective, death may be reconciled with quite easily and be fairly labelled oxymoronic. Peasants are very familiar with nature's cycles of life and death, so they are more or less untroubled by human death and more patient towards it than brilliant intellectuals for instance. People say this is because of their stupidity, however, Montaigne says, "If this is because of stupidity, let us learn from stupidity."³

Though we always deny it, death is at work continually in our mental functioning: the contemporary mania about health preservation — which is accepted as the natural drive behind eating, sexual intercourse and avoiding a car in the street — implies that we live to make efforts not to die, or not to submit to the force of disintegration, the presence of which we deny but fight. Such is the complexity of human beings that almost any attempt to draw a line between life and death is doomed to failure for, as Avery Weisma puts it, every idea about death is a version of life.

Every living being dies, the brutes and the humans, yet (our knowledge that we have to die makes us human.) This knowledge, whether we admit its influence or not, has been one of the causes of worry

- Life is too short to worry about.
- Yes, that's what worries me.

and the spur pricking men to seek a reconciliation with death. Various are the ways in which man has attempted to reconcile himself to death. Hedonism, for instance, is one of these ways, for a hedonistic makes sure of enjoying life before death snatches it from him, when he has not yet had his full of its pleasures. On the other hand, pessimism offers the conclusion that if life is so wretched, then death is the lesser evil. In a society which accepts such an ideology, suicide may be considered one of the human rights, this was the case in Ancient Greece. In Ancient Egypt, things were different, for the Ancient Egyptians were dead sure that a dead person's life could be prolonged after death by providing the corpse with daily necessities and services, which were once at the person's disposal during his formal life. This was carried to extremes with Pharaoh Kings, in the form of luxurious gold tools and gigantic pyramids, not to mention mummification.

These Egyptian countermeasures were mainly physical, but commemoration through engraved or written poetry aimed at winning fame for generations after one's death. It is ironical that the fame of the recorder — whether a poet or otherwise — was greater than that of the men of action whose fame was recorded by his pen. Homer, for instance, recalls to almost everybody's mind the idea of great epic poetry, and his name is connected with the Illiad and the Odyssey, but only specialists know about the contents of each. The greater irony is that there is a possibility that, in the Thirtieth Century, not a word of what we

write to immortalize ourselves will be intelligible, hence this attempt to circumvent death has not been very successful.

One likes Marina Tsvetayeva's words which seem to be addressing every person that is on his way to do some sort of mischief to a fellow human :

And soon all of us will sleep under the earth, we
Who never let each other sleep above it.

("I know the truth" tr. Elaine Feinstein
with Angela Livingstone) ⁴

Though presently the Western World is said to have put religion aside, in order to give prominence to more pressing needs and issues, such as collecting money, owning cars, enjoying sex, challenging natural phenomena and elaborating the genius of man, the fact is that religion occupies its due place in the life of the Western people who have not yet dispensed with it. They conceive of death according to their respective beliefs and this concept is very often the designer of their behaviour patterns.

In contemporary Britain,⁵ there are six historically long standing religions, namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As far as death is concerned, the first three have common factors and the last ones share some beliefs.

The Hindus dispose of the dead body through cremation and throw the ashes in the River Ganges. If they cannot afford it, in any river, for finally the water will be mingled with that of the Ganges. They believe that the soul or "atman" goes on a long journey, so they provide it with money, food

and everything it may need cremated with the body. What happens in death is that "atman" changes the body, it goes from one person to another and sometimes to the body of an animal. What is immortal (in human beings and other living forms) is "Brahman" the Absolute all-pervading power which many Hindus call God. The "atman" projects itself into time as "jiva" and is reborn many times, until it realizes its identity with Brahman.

The importance of the last ideas of the dying person is that they guide the soul into a body where those desires, that have not been fulfilled, can be fulfilled far away. The only way to stop being born and born again is to be selfless: to have no desires even for the least for oneself. Thus rebirth depends on desire, and the form it takes is determined by "karma", i.e. the strict account of good and evil deeds or the system of reward and punishment. The traditional number of rebirths is 84,000,000. The state of "moksha", which is that of being one with God, is the pointer telling the person that he has reached his birth number 83,999,999. Hence "moksha" is becoming free from the cycle of birth and death. Though some Hindus see that the attainment of "moksha" needs millions of lives, their common nightmare is rebirth: they do not want to be born again. To them, rebirth is a greater evil than death. Hindus do not call their belief a religion but a way of life or a practical philosophy leading to union with God.

Buddhists believe that there is a continuous process or sequence of change, but no self or soul travelling through the process. Human beings are a flowing together of different energies and materials, and life is nothing but the accumulation of the five "khandas" or the five constituents of human

appearance, namely perception, sensation, mental formations consciousness and incorporation of matter. These aggregates are the things that go from life to life and the flame of life goes on just like the flame of a candle which can light another candle. Through death, the holding together of these aggregates passes off and goes to attach to any material form, such as in the womb of another woman and a man is born again. "Dukka" or the state of transience is brought to an end through Enlightenment or Nirvana.

The term Buddha means the Enlightened One and his teaching is based on suffering : to be born is to suffer, to be sick is to suffer, to grow old is to suffer and to die is to suffer. Buddha said that he came to teach them how to stop suffering. He showed them the "Dharma" or the way to Nirvana. He told them that Nirvana was a state to be experienced, not taught or described. The only description of Nirvana is the ceasing of suffering and sorrow, perfect happiness and perfect knowledge. Nirvana is the ultimate goal of every Buddhist. The way leading to Nirvana is the "Eightfold Path" : right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Sikhs share the belief of rebirth (or reappearance according to Buddha) with Hindus and Buddhists. What happens after death depends upon the Sikh's "karma", so if he has been a good person, he is supposed to go to heaven, otherwise he is reincarnated back to earth or sent to Hell. Before a Sikh becomes a man again, he has about 225,000 lives.

According to Sikhism, "karma" explains the inequalities of this life, so there is always a connection from one's previous life. That is why at the same moment a child is born in a family with no bread at all and another is born in a rich family. Nevertheless, the Sikhs believe in God's grace which intervenes in the rules of "karma". Prayer establishes a relation between man and God, His book is called Guru Granth Sahib (Guru means the teacher, and to Sikhs, the teacher is the person who brings people from darkness to light). "Moksha" will be available to a Sikh if God is gracious to him, if not the whole thing depends upon His will.

Whereas Buddhism, Sikhism and Hinduism believe in life-after-death in terms of reincarnation, rebirth or reappearance, Islam, Judaism and Christianity share the belief in afterlife in a spiritual form. Death in both Islam and Judaism mostly means the tangible separation of spirit from the human body yet in Christianity, it has other different meanings.

Muslims believe that at death the angels of death come and take the spirit, which will be restored to the body on the Day of Judgment. They ask the dead person about his God and his prophet. When he answers correctly that he believes in Allah and his prophet is Mohammad, then he will be required to wait till Yaum El Din or the Day of Judgment. The long period between the day of his death and the Day of Judgment may be one of punishment or reward, for the dead Muslim is told whether he will go to Heaven or Hell. His knowledge of this is the indirect beginning of his would-be state. In Islam, there is no question about the literal truth of the pictures of

Heaven as a beautiful garden and of Hell as a place of fire and torment, because this is how they are described in the Koran, which is the absolute word of God. The Day of Judgment is nothing but a trial to show to each person (body and soul) why he is being sent to Hell or Heaven. God will judge him by an exact balance according to his good and evil deeds : if the evil deeds outweigh the good ones, then he will definitely be punished.

The Jewish Scriptures say very little about life after death, there are only about two clear-cut passages about resurrection :

"Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise
O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light,
And on the land of the shades, you will let it fall."
(Isaiah 26:19)

and

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise, shall rise like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever."

(Daniel 12:2)

Owing to the rarity of statement about life after death, the Jews do not know definitely what will happen to them afterwards. The only continuity beyond death that they are sure of is the continuity in their children and in their remembering of them. They are doubtful about everlasting life, but the axis round which revolve all their hopes, prayers, talks