

## Displacing Allah in Adonis's Poetry

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**Abstract:** This study is concerned with some of Adonis's poetry on Allah from three significant aspects. In one aspect, Adonis raises doubt about the existence of the creator while in another he questions the need to worship ilah or Allah that is in Arabic of the same root word with the word ilah. Apart from that, Adonis questions the supremacy of ilah or Allah. These three aspects on Allah in Adonis's poetry are interesting to be examined in view of Islamic creed on Allah because the aspects questioned by Adonis are in parallel with the three tenets of the Islamic creed on Allah that are the affirmation of Allah as the only khaliq, creator that is in Islamic terminology tawhid rububiyah, the affirmation of Allah as the only worshiped ilah that is tawhid uluhiyyah and finally the affirmation of Allah as the only ilah possessing supreme names and attributes that is tawhid asma' wa uifat. It is found that the questioning of Allah in Adonis's poetry to some extent represents the questioning of God common in western modernism. However, Adonis's questioning is more relevantly related to the conception of ilah or Allah in Islam in consideration of the proximity of the poetical hints in Adonis's poetry with the aforementioned Islamic tenets of belief in Allah one of which is directly referred to, i.e., rububiyah, apart from Adonis's allusion to the historical background of the Muslim World and Adonis's assertions on ilah or Allah that contradict with some essential Qur'anic verses on Allah. Thus, it can be concluded that Adonis displaces Allah from the Islamic conception of God and that Adonis embraces atheism.

**Key words:** Creator, worship, Adonis poetry, Quranic verses, islamic conception, Malaysia

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### INTRODUCTION

Al-Affani and Sayyid Ibn Usayn (2004) says that 'Ali Amad Sa'id Adonis's poetry has incited intellectual dispute to the extent that some of Arab critics do not identify him with other Arab poets. He adds that while some of the critics and readers regard him as the first explorer, the first view and the first poet whose poetry is said to represent the brilliance of Arabic poetry ever, other critics opine that he is torn between excellent and poor Arab poets. From al-Afani's viewpoint, it is more relevantly here to classify the contradicting opinions of the Arab critics as those representing the modernists on one side and the traditionalists on the other.

Like al-Affani and Sayyid Ibn Usayn (2004) agrees that there are some Muslim Arab poets of the modern time who turn to atheism as their source of literary inspiration and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id or better known as Adonis a Syrian national is one of them. Besides 'Abd al-Raziq, there are some of the traditionalists such as Isma'il 'Ali (2000) who goes deep in history and try to relate modern atheism that plagues the Muslim world to the orientalis of the pre-colonial and colonial eras who are said to have been partial in their studies of the Muslim world.

Comparatively, there is the modernist view that refutes the claim of blasphemy atheism and so on in Adonis's poems and instead suggests humanism in lieu of blasphemy and atheism. However, this study is intended to be viewed from the traditionalist perspective, basing the arguments on their traditionalism related to aqidah or Islamic creeds especially with regard to the affirmations of Allah. In this study, their traditionalism is narrowed down to the foremost Islamic source, i.e., the Qur'an that is in several places referred to.

Adonis's anthology entitled Qasa'd Ula al-Majmu'ah al-Kamilah is interestingly found to be worth of discussion in light of the claim of atheism as suggested by al-Afani and 'Abd al-Raziq above and also because of the hints of atheism underlying some of Adonis's poetry as be shown in this study. Such of his controversial poetry can be looked at three perspectives that represent the traditional and inherited tenets of Islamic belief in Allah. The tenets are composed of the affirmation of Allah as the creator and manager of the universe that is in Islamic terminology, tawhid rububiyah, the affirmation of Allah as the only worshiped ilah that is tawhid uluhiyyah and the affirmation of Allah as the only ilah possessing supreme names and attributes that is tawhid asma waifat.

### **ADONIS'S BACKGROUND**

ʿAli Ahmad Saʿid Isbar is born in 1930 in the village of Qahabin in the state of Ladhqiyyah and he did not attend any formal school before 13 years of his age but he learned to memorize the Qurʿan before his father apart from memorizing a large number of traditional Arabic poetry. He knows the traditional figures al-Mutanabbi, Abu Tammam, al-Buhtui and al-Sharif al-Riha and he is well versed in Arabic grammar and deepens the secret of Arabic conjugation and language (Adonis and ʿAli Ahmad Saʿid, 1993). He adopts the name of Adonis after a Greek god of fertility which is against the Muslim Arabic tradition of giving name. The nickname is acknowledged by his comrade Antuan Saʿadah who is a Christian and the leader of the Nationalist Party of Syria of which Adonis becomes a member. Antuan is recognized for founding a magazine on poetry and he once led its editorial board and later he founded Mawaqif magazine. This influenced Adonis who later adopted Antuan's uncompromising stance against Arabism and Islam. Thus, Adonis becomes cynical of the contemporary circumstances. He insists on changes and attempts to revive ancient Phoenician legacy including the consideration of Poenix as the lost paradise for the Syrian nationalists (Al-Jundi and Darwish, 1980).

According to Qabash, Adonis is a professor of Arabic literature in the University of Lebanon and before that he obtained a doctorate from Saint Joseph University in Beirut. His research is entitled *The Established and The Unreliable* that is a modern versioned Talmud within which he is too concerned with abolishing Islam and Arabic language. His professorship is welcome by the modernists because he champions modernism and becomes one of the leading figures in the field. His belief is mixed between his origin of Christianity and his atheism. He loves every enemy of Islam and unreservedly shows his real hatred to everything related to Islam. Of Adonis's most important works are poetry anthologies that are *Crazy Among the Dead*, *First Poems* and *Several Papers on the Wind*, the *Book of the Unreliable* and the *Journey in the Regions of the Daytime and Night*, the *Anthology on the Theatre and the Mirrors*, *Songs of the Collapsed Damascus* and *This is My Name*. Most of the poems in the anthologies are compiled in a book entitled *A Complete Collection of Poetry* (Tahir ʿAdil, 2000).

The anthology *Qasa'd Ula al-Majmu'ah al-Kamilah* that is *A Complete Collection of Poetry* in a way is an autobiography because it reflects Adonis's view and alludes to Adonis. In this respect, ʿAbbas (1992) says that the word *Mihyar* is a persona that is repeatedly

present in the anthology and based on modernist style it refers to the author. Thus, he opines that the persona expresses the researcher viewpoints and belief. Similarly, Fahil suggests that the word *Mihyar* is an adoption of the chauvinist *Mihyar* of Persia and for the sake of being different, he replaces Persia with Damascus as an attribution of place.

### **REJECTION OF THE RUBUBIYYAH OF ALLAH**

The following discussion is concerning the affirmation by heart, words and action of Allah as the creator and the universe as the creature in line with the significance of *tawhid rububiyyah*. According to Islamic tradition, the affirmation of Allah as the creator means His eternity or everlasting existence and if His existence departs from the state of commencement, He is in a way or another is created. In contrast, the affirmation of the universe as the creature means the existence of the universe is subject to the will of the creator. His will is the system by which He creates the universe. These two elements of *tawhid rububiyyah* that is creature attributed to Allah and His system on the universe are to be analyzed here as Adonis's poetry questions both the existence of Allah and His system. There are several places of the anthology that can be related with the author's questioning of Allah being as the creator. For example, he says: *Down in his coffin the creator fell dead... down the creature in its coffin* (Adonis and ʿAli Ahmad Saʿid, 1971) and this saying of his on the creator's death means that God's existence is not eternal and also that God's existence is out of commencement like a creature that exists is out of creation. In this way, Allah is denied an eternal and independent existence and thus he did not create the universe because his existence is dependent and not superior depriving him the power of creating.

Furthermore, the denial of the creator's existence as understood from the stanza above is the essential theme of Western modernism that insists the death of God and its birth can be ascribed to devolution theory first proposed by Darwin that clearly defies the existence of God and instead says the universe came into being by itself, without God's interference. This is common among some modern Arab poets but it is against the Islamic creed on Allah the Creator. As mentioned before, it disregards the requirement of the affirmation of the unity of Allah as the creator by the words.

As in the anthology Adonis's questioning of Allah the creator develops into his rejection of the *rububiyyah* becomes much assertive as he says:

As a traveler, I left on my head...the glass of my lamp. My map is the earth without the creator...and the denial is my Bible (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

As for Adonis's denial and disdain of the universal divine system that points to Allah's existence, the following stanzas echo his disdain of the tenet:

A know now...Where is the night when the day comes  
and (where is) the day when the night comes  
I know that the sex of the rububiyyah originates in the earth and breeds  
I know the earth with the earth...and the heaven with the earth's light.  
In this manner, I appear in my new shirt  
(Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

As is obvious in the 3rd line of the stanzas, Adonis clearly mentions the word rububiyyah that is followed by his words that attributes sex and sexuality to the ilah and this is a clear intension to tarnish the word that is one of the tenets of belief in Allah as mentioned before. Adonis's misidentification of rububiyyah with sexuality is reinforced with sexual insinuation as can be discerned in the 4th and 5th lines. This sexual attribution and allusion to Allah is to be extended in the later discussion of Allah's supremacy that is that tawhid asma' wahifat. The 3rd line of the stanzas imply that there is no ilah or God as Adonis associates the term rububiyyah that refers to Allah in Islam as the Creator with the earth origination and the bare mention of the earth origination understood from the expression of the earth with the earth as in the fourth line denotes that there is no divine interference in the creation of the earth and that there is no ilah who creates and subsequently oversee and manage the earth. The whole stanzas also are contemptuous of God's system of the universe that points to the existence of Allah because the writer contradicts the Qur'anic intimation in the Qur'an (31: 10 and 32:4-5) regarding the beginning of the universe from the sama' or heaven. According to Tahir 'Adil (2000), the 4th line I know the earth with the earth...and the heaven with the earth's light indicates that Adonis rejects the concept of rubybiyyah or Almighty Allah believed in as the creator. In this sense, the line misrepresents and refutes the related Qur'anic verses on the orderly creation of the heaven first and the earth later by reversing the places of the two portions of the creation of the earth on one hand and the creation of the heaven on the other thus rejecting in the Qur'anic verses. Tahir also suggests that the line indicates that

earth is a distinguished presence or it originates on its own and that the existence of heaven is dependent on the existence of the earth. This clearly rejects the assertion of the Qur'an with regard to the orderly creation of the heaven and earth.

## REJECTION OF THE ULUHIYYAH OF ALLAH

Ilah in this study context is a Qur'anic term related to Allah meant be worshiped as opposed to other alihah, plural of ilah, purported to point to other claimed gods as is shown in several places of the Qur'an (1:5, 2: 133, 4: 36 and 5: 72). These Qur'anic verses are the essential requirements of the ilah, i.e., worship of Allah, obedience to His commandment and abstinence from His forbiddance. These acts of worship, obedience and abstinence make up what tawhid uluhiyyah is, i.e., the affirmation of Allah as the only worshiped God and there is no partnership of other gods to be worshiped. The acts of obedience and abstinence represent the recognition of Allah as the worshiped ilah is an acceptance of His prescribed ways of worship as mentioned in the Qur'an and later explained in the related Hadith.

However in this study, the focus of tawhid uluhiyyah is on the worship aspect. Based on the verses of the Qur'an, anything implying a dismissal or rejection of the worship to Allah is considered to be an act of rejection of the tawhid uluhiyyah. Dismissal or even disdain of worship is perceivable in the in the following stanzas:

The Ummah took a rest...in the washing of juice  
whereas the mihrab...  
the creator guards is like a trench...and a blockage  
No one knows where the door is...Nobody asks  
where the door is (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

The ummah is identified as sluggish and unenergetic because of excessive worship associated with the mihrab and prayer and because the creator guards the mihrab by blocking its way with chains and barricades which prevent the ummah from getting the way out from the sluggishness and fatigue.

This is a clear mockery or derision of Allah's religion and law of worshiping. Based on traditional Muslim view such act of mockery of religious matters is an act of mockery of the affirmation of Allah as the only worshiped God.

Apart from the dismissal of Islamic worshiping, some of Adonis's poetry proposes divine partnership that is there is god or gods besides Allah as can be seen in the following verses:

Oh the soothsayer of the generations say to us something about Allah who gives birth. Say is there in his eyes something worth of worshiped (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

Besides, the stanzas above defy the Qur'anic verses (112:1-4) that deny the sayings of unbelievers that Allah gives birth. In another place, Adonis seems to reinforce the divine partnership as he says Oh our earth Oh the wife of God and tyrants...submit yourself to the fire (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971).

In this stanza, there is the wife of God and this is clearly contradictory to the affirmation of Allah as the only worshiped God.

#### **REJECTION OF THE ASMA' AND HIFAT OF ALLAH**

Rejection of Allah's asma' and Hifat is the rejection of the supremacy lying in His supreme names and attributes. There are ninety nine of His names and attributes revealed in the Qur'an (7: 180, 17: 110: 8 and 59: 24) that relates His names including the underlying attributes to the word al-Husna connoting supremacy besides its root meaning of the most beautiful. The word al-husna including its connotation of supremacy is the faith of Muslims and the essence of the 99 of Allah names and attributes. This supremacy or absoluteness means being unsurpassed and it is not shared by others. As the essence of Allah's names and attributes, the supremacy belies any similarity and association with creature.

The stanzas I know that the sex of the rububiyyah originates in the earth and breeds, I know the earth with the earth...and the heaven with the earth's light, In this manner, I appear in my new shirt (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971) as previously discussed above suggest similarity with creature and this definitely disregards the tawhid asma' wahifat. The following stanzas also seem to suggest the similarity of Allah with creature as Allah is described as depending on space and this denies Allah's supremacy:

And for every speech is a tree...and for every pace longing. And Allah in every home swells like a lake (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

Besides the wrong attribution of sex and sexuality to Allah, the previously discussed stanzas are contemptuous of the supremacy of Allah's name of the One that means He does not need or depend on partnership and in many places of the Qur'an Allah asserts that He neither gives birth nor is born and in another place the Qur'an (42:11) mentions that He never takes after or simulates the creations and in this case He

impossibly has the human attributes of sex and sexuality and so forth. The following stanzas reinforce Adonis's rejection the Oneness of Allah:

Indeed in my country, there are creators...spreading its every spacious corner. Pure like the sun in its nakedness...young like the glittering stars. Indeed in my country, we are creators...with the pulse of its veins making it prosperous. Eradicating the stammering of despair and those disappointed with their closed eyelids...With their joy for possessing this existence with their grief. Here we shed their blood into the time...here we shorten their age in seconds. Here, we fill everything with belief (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

Apart from oneness, the supremacy of Allah is also related to His eternity that is derived of His name the Eternal (Baqi). As for rejection or denial of the eternity of Allah, it is of denial of part of His supremacy that is essential part of His names and attributes and such a denial is discernable in Adonis's poetry. In this light, Adonis seeks to emphasize that there is no existence for any essence including God, other than all material or psychological beings, moral, social and economic phenomena because it cannot be understood in relation to the material existence. Such a denial can be seen in his following stanzas:

To whom does our generation burn incense for those prostrating...which god is worshipped?  
To whom does it give allegiance and get ready...and live healthy and struggle (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

Apart from eternity, there is another of Allah's name that incites discussion here that is the Observer. The following stanzas question His observation by attributing limitation to it:

Your eyes do not see me...as a virgin like semen that creates  
They do not see me depart from here...in the procession of vows  
And in my speech people and lightning...tomorrow in fire and spring  
Your eyes know that I breed the seeds...tomorrow trust me (Adonis and 'Ali Ahmad Sa'id, 1971)

#### **CONCLUSION**

To sum up all of the three aspects of the affirmation of Allah as the creator as the worshiped and as the supreme are questioned in Adonis' poetry and it can be

concluded also that Adonis is influenced by Western modernism's notion of the death of God. Adonis as suggested by Al-<sup>°</sup>Affani and <sup>°</sup>Abd al-Raziq is one example showing that the Western modernism sweeps across modern Arabic literature displacing Allah and denying His attributes as being held in Islam.

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