Thoughts About Religion and Death: An Analysis of Julian Barnes's Nothing to be Frightened of with Reference to Derrida's The Gift of Death

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Abstract

The term death is one of the most crucial terms for the entire world from the beginning of the history; while in the previous centuries it had been discussed through a religious perspective, as time progresses and civilisations develop; people have a tendency to explain it through a rationalistic perspective. Death and afterlife are popular terms for both in the world of philosophy and literature; and the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and the British writer Julian Barnes are among these to evaluate it with their own points of view. Both figures are recognised as atheists and they put forward their ideas by focusing on the illogical presumptions on religion. In these two works, there is neither a sense of emotion, grief nor mourning after the death of a person is met. As Derrida asks logical questions to understand death and religion, Barnes expresses his and his favourite artists' ideas sometimes in an amusing and sometimes in a serious way. While Derrida tries to explain the subject within the scope of responsibility, Barnes comments about religion and death with an atheistic point of view and with reference to the details of his life with his family background and thoughts of his favourite artists and writers. The purpose of this study is to analyse Barnes's autobiographical essayistic work *Nothing to Be Frightened of* in the light of Derrida's assumptions about death, religion, nothingness and free will in *The Gift of Death*.

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Din ve Ölüm Üzerine Fikirler: Julian Barnes'ın Korkulacak Bir Şey Yok Eserinin Derrida'nın Ölümün Armağanı Eseri Üzerinden Bir İncelemesi

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Öz

Ölüm, tarihin başlangıcından beri tüm insanlık için en önemli ve kaçınılmaz konulardan biridir. Bu engel olunamaz gerçekliği insanlar, önceki yüzyıllarda dini bir görüşle incelerken, zaman ilerleyip medeniyetler geliştikçe, bu olguyu mantıksal bir çerçevede açıklama eğilimi göstermektedirler. Ölüm ve ölüm sonrası hayat, hem felsefe dünyası hem de edebiyat dünyası için oldukça popüler terimlerdir; Fransız düşünür Jacques Derrida ve İngiliz yazar Julian Barnes bu terimleri kendilerine has bakış açılarıyla değerlendirenler arasındadır. Sözü geçen bu iki önemli düşünür, ateist olarak tanınmaktadırlar ve ikisi de fikirlerini, din hakkında mantıksız buldukları varsayımlara odaklanarak açıklamaktadırlar. Düşünürlerin bu çalışmada incelenecek olan eserlerinde, ölüm kaynaklı ne bir duygu, ne bir keder ne de ölüm sonrası biri için tutulan yasa rastlanabilir. Derrida din ve ölümü anlamlandırabilmek için mantıklı sorular sormaya ve cevaplar bulmaya çalışırken, Barnes ise kendisinin ve beğendiği sanatçıların konu ile ilgili düşüncelerini bazen komik bazen ise ciddi bir şekilde ifade etmektedir. Derrida, konuyu sorumluluk kapsamında açıklamaya çalışırken, Barnes ise kendi hayatıyla birlikte ailesinin geçmişini ve sevdiği sanatçıların ve yazarların fikirlerini içeren ateist bir tutumla, din ve ölüm hakkında yorumlarda bulunur. Bu çalışmanın amacı; Derrida'nın *Ölümün Armağanı* adlı eserindeki ölüm, din, hiçlik ve özgür irade hakkındaki görüşlerinin ışığında Barnes'ın otobiyografik deneme tarzında yazılan *Korkulacak Bir Şey Yok* adlı eserini incelemektir.

INTRODUCTION

Death is an inevitable issue for all of the human kind from the beginning of the time in which cultures and philosophers of ages have in an attempt to define and evaluate it. In the Ancient Greek, people had “excessive mourning” (Vermeule, 1981: 3) and they believed in an “underworld” serving to fulfil “anxieties about death and the dead” with a faith of “afterlife” (Vermeule, 1981: 5). Plato was closely interested in death and he uttered that when people honestly involve themselves into the true path of “philosophy” (Phaedo 64a, qtd. in Bryant, 2003: 117), they get completely ready for death since they have been already set for the process of dying by denying its anxiety. However, this relationship between philosophy and death weakened in later ages and religious beliefs from different cultures replaced it. For instance, in the Medieval period with a strong religious tradition, death was considered as “a process prepared for” and “willed” by people (Bynum, 1998: 589) that carried them to God. People strongly accepted that their bodies would resurrect at the day of final judgement when this world would come to the end. Later in these ages, human beings thought that “death” was an atonement because of the “suffering of the dying Christ” (Bynum, 1998: 592). Yet, humanity could not get stuck in only this religious perspective because societies started to improve with many social and cultural developments. Thus, in the seventeenth century, death was not “at the center of” life (Bryant, 2003: 19) due to “social factors” (Sommerville, 2000: 750) which included “secularization of space and time, language and art, play and work and power; of personal, social, and national identity; even of flags and military technology” (Sommerville, 2000: 754). This movement met with “civility, tolerance, commerce and freedom” of the eighteenth century accepted as the “age of light” (Domínguez, 2017: 273). In the nineteenth century, societies had a tendency towards faith which was believed that it was “passing over from the side of faith to that of doubt, dragging the fluent multitude after it as the sea is dragged by the moon” (Tyrrell, 1902: vi). Hence, the understanding of death began to change; it was not accepted as a reasonable effectuation in people’s lives any more, and it became “an absurd interruption” that could deprive of “its meaning, instead of giving it meaning” (Tamm, 2015: 184). Therefore, an intense relationship between religion and literature emerged and it was listed by Hugh McLeod in four categories: “the march of science”, “modernization”, “postmodernity” and “selling God” (2000: 5). Morris explains the first one as the “intellectual change” developed by “the conflict of science and religion” is the cause of “secularization” which provides a criticism of religion (2003: 964). Alan Gilbert evaluates the second category as a “long-term concomitant of industrialisation was secularisation” (1976: 207) and so urbanisation and scientific developments contribute to the process of secularisation that weakens the society’s bounds with religion. The third category postmodernity puts forward a radical change in “the conduct of contemporary social life” (Simon et al, 1993: 411) by challenging and denaturalising the concepts of religion and death. Thus, people question the validity and reliability of religion and its dogmatic belief system that let them think death as nothing away from the religious ideas and so they involve in the fourth category ‘selling God’, for postmodernism calls “into question of the powers of science as a secular religion that promises to move us ever closer to the permanent, regularizing truths of nature, and in particular, the truths regarding human nature” (Simon et al, 1993: 417). Thus, postmodernism traces “the death of God” with an “anti-philosophy” that is against “a continuation of the old theology” which presents an “ontological and epistemological certainty” (Peters et al, 2019: 1) and so the idea of after life becomes “all a trick and nonetheless” (Hammerschlag, 2016: 188) which only includes a demand that neither includes the chance of infinite existence nor the expectation of reality in the unknowable universe after death. With the help of these background information and different perspectives, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s thoughts about religion and death in his book *The Gift of Death* and the British writer Julian Barnes’s “essayistic memoir” (Lopez-Deflory, 2016: 1) *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* are significantly analysed to present their

points of view in terms of death, religion, nothingness and free will.

Jacques Derrida leaves his mark on the twenty first century with his invaluable concerns in the fields of philosophy, sociology, criticism and literature. As a crucial thinker of the postmodern period, he expresses his ideas about religion and death. According to Simon Wortham, Derrida explains two religion types as "cult" and "moral" religions (2010: 51). As the first one refers to "faith" with a passive prayer and desire, the second one points out "knowledge" that needs "action in the interests of the good conduct of life" by following Kant's ideas; with these types, it may be accepted that "Christianity" presents the "death of God", for knowledge allows people to question the canonised ideas of the religion (Wortham, 2010: 51). On the other hand, Julian Barnes is also accepted as one of "the most versatile and idiosyncratic" writers of the postmodern century (Groes and Childs, 2011: 1) with his "diversity of topics and techniques" which "blur and challenge the borders that separate existing genres, texts, arts and languages" (Guignery 2006, 1). In *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* (2008), he discusses about his "anticipation of death" with "a revision of his family history" (Lopez-Deflory, 2016: 2) through a perception of "a review of the comments artists and thinkers have made on the subject of death" in a non-fiction "essayistic style" (Childs, 2011: 8).

Accepted as a "nihilistic, relativistic, subjectivistic and anti-religious" (Tacey, 2012: 3) figure of the philosophy world, Derrida receives "religion about which nobody understands anything" (qtd. in Sherwood and Hart, 2005: 292). In *The Gift of Death* (1992), Derrida begins his work with his explanation of religion as the combination of "the secret of the sacred, orgiastic, or demonic mystery" which is "integrated" and "subjected to the sphere of responsibility" (1996: 2). Hence, as it can be concluded that this demonic secret is closely related with responsibility which is:

"a genealogy of the subject who says "myself," the subject's relation to itself as an instance of liberty, singularity, and responsibility, the relation to self as being before the other: the other in its relation to infinite alterity, one who regards without being seen but also whose infinite goodness *giver* in an experience that amounts to a *gift of death*" (1996: 3).

It is interesting that to him this responsibility includes "a nucleus of irresponsibility or of absolute unconsciousness" (1996: 20) that can cause "risk of absolute sacrifice" (1996: 68) with an "absolute treachery" (1996: 68) "to betray the absolute other: God" (1996: 69). Thus, irresponsibility gets involved in Christianity. People cannot be accepted as "responsible" because they are "finite" (1996: 51) and so God becomes "wholly other" (1996: 57), for "God doesn't give his reasons, he acts as he intends, he doesn't have to give his reasons or share anything with us: neither his motivations, if he has any, nor his deliberations, nor his decisions" (1996: 57).

Human beings have a tendency to explain the meaning of death with the help of religion. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida presents his ideas about this relationship with the help of responsibility that cannot be separated from "a culture of death" (1996: 10) which is represented as:

"How does one give it to oneself in the sense that putting oneself to death means dying while assuming responsibility for one's own death, committing suicide but also sacrificing oneself for another, *dying for the other*, thus perhaps giving one's life by giving oneself death, accepting the gift of death." (1996: 10)

He goes on his explanations about the interpretation of death that he accepts "to give oneself a representation of it, a figure, a signification or destination for it" (1996: 10). It is interesting that his evaluation about death also contains sacrifice, murder or suicide and he describes these scary dying types as a gift of death which is also given by God. He utters that since God has His eyes and hands on people, all of us are "inaccessible" to Him which also includes "the responsibility" "by making a gift of death (...), giving the secret of death, a new experience of death" (1996: 33). However, he is aware of his

own responsibility in dying: "My first and last responsibility, my first and last desire, is that responsibility of responsibility that relates me to what no one else can do in my place" (1996: 44).

An Analysis of Julian Barnes's *Nothing to be Frightened of*

Julian Barnes also puts forward his own ideas about religion in his work *Nothing To Be Frightened Of* with his family's religious perception: "Given my family background of attenuated belief combined with brisk irreligion" (2008: 12); his father was an "agnostic" and his mother was an "atheist" and this has been followed by their children (2008: 61). Additionally, he defines himself as "I'm afraid I'm a happy atheist" (2008: 17). Barnes utters that religion is "a supreme fiction" (2008: 57) and God is "an imaginary friend we have created for ourselves" (2008: 93) as "the fantasy of judgement" (2008: 196). He believes in "[n]o God, no Heaven, no afterlife" (2008: 18). He gives examples from his earlier years to show how religious figures were just ordinary human beings with their own weaknesses and errors; they did not behave properly or fairly, they had addictions (2008: 18) and even though they had inappropriate actions, they accused him to not "getting to heaven" "without baptism" (2008: 20). To Barnes, since people are frightened of this world, they believe in God and they try to prove their courage. In the news he remembers, a man declared "Who believes in God will be unharmed by lions" (2008: 20), so he entered into lions' cage and died. He criticises this manner with a funny questionnaire: "Does this prove a) the man was mad; b) God does not exist; c) God does exist, but won't be lured into the open by such cheap tricks; d) God does exist, and has just demonstrated that He is an ironist; e) none of the above?" (2008: 21). He introduces that people chose a religion because of their fear and also its advantages. He supposes that if he will choose one, it will be Judaism, for it seems to have advancements such as getting "extra holidays" (2008: 13) and as far as he remembers his Jewish friends "had better shoes" (2008: 13) and "they knew about girls" (2008: 13) at the school. Hence, Barnes indicates that people belong to a religion for social purposes as it is written:

"[T]he Christian religion didn't last so long merely because everyone else believed it, because it was imposed by ruler and priesthood, because it was a means of social control, because it was the only story in town, and because if you didn't believe it—or disbelieved it too vociferously—you might have a quickly truncated life. It lasted also because it was a beautiful lie, because the characters, the plot, the various *coups de théâtre*, the over-arching struggle between Good and Evil, made up a great novel. The story of Jesus—high-minded mission, facing-down of the oppressor, persecution, betrayal, execution, resurrection—is the perfect example of that formula Hollywood famously and furiously seeks: a tragedy with a happy ending. Reading the Bible as "literature," as that puckish old schoolmaster was trying to point out to us, is not a patch on reading the Bible as truth, the truth endorsed by beauty." (2008: 53).

He expands this explanation with his definitions of novel and art to present religions' reliability: "beautiful, shapely lies which enclose hard, exact truths" and "words on a page, actors on a stage or screen, colours on a piece of canvas: these people don't exist, have never existed, or if they did, these are mere copies of them" (2008: 78). He claims that without religions, people will have a tendency to be good ones, for all of us are "genetically programmed" by having "[a]ltruism", hence "whether or not there is a preacher with a promise of heaven and a threat of hellfire, individuals living in societies generally act in much the same way. Religion no more makes people behave better than it makes them behave worse" (2008: 120-121).

In this autobiographical essayistic work, Barnes "displays a self-reflexive, postmodernist scepticism regarding any truth claims, even those which potentially could anchor personal identity and

counter the simulacra of cyber culture" (Holmes, 2009: 12-13) and this idea encounters readers with the very first sentence of his book: "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him" (2008: 1) by beginning with an irony. He explains that one day he was speaking about religion with his friends and one of them asks: "why should God do that for His son" (2008: 77) indicating the crucifixion of Jesus. One of them denied the Biblical incident and said: "The point is, it couldn't have happened" (2008: 77); and so this is the main dilemma for Barnes, it couldn't but "if you're a Christian, it did" (2008: 77). To him, religious miracles are just irrational fairy tales; however, people want to believe in a happy ending scenario. In the previous pages, he utters that all over the centuries, important artists had benefitted from religion and art makes religions strong. Hence, he understands that he misses God who is the "inspirer of artworks" (2008: 118).

In *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, the issue of death is "both villain and co-protagonist" as "the figure who has shadowed Barnes since his incipient bout of thanatophobia in late adolescence" (Tate, 2011: 66). From the beginning of the book, he validly describes death including each of his parents' losses as "a modern death" (2008: 9) and "all natural" (2008: 11). He even compares their deaths and utters that his mother "had, indeed, done the dying 'better' than [his] father (...) more efficiently and speedily" (2008: 11). He follows a rationalistic pattern when he defines these deaths without any emotions such as pain or sorrow, for he is in an "attempt to find a modern, grown-up, non-religious acceptance of our inevitable end" (2008: 39). He remembers his first moment to think about mortality: "it was simple: you were alive, then you were dead, and bid the Deity farewell: Godbye" (2008: 112); because, to him "death is the one appalling fact which defines life" (2008: 126) and "life depends on death" as there cannot be planets "without the previous deaths of collapsing stars" and human beings emerge as a result of the death of "evolutionary mutations" (2008: 182) so his responsibility in this life is to live life to the fullest and to say bye to God.

He accepts that when he was young, he did not want to discuss about this simple inevitability and he avoided interviews; but then he finds himself to think about it in his older ages (2008: 124). He cannot help himself to feel panicked about death in the middle of his sleep and he tries to find a way out to settle down; and so he says to himself: "you're a *writer*, (...) You do *words*. Can't you improve on that? Can't you face down death – well, you won't ever face it down, but can't you at least protest against it – more interestingly than this?" (2008: 126). Yet, he realises that this is a futile attempt, for there is not a difference between writers and the rest of the people; writing does not help in this attempt. Additionally, he declares, "[p]eople only believe in religion because they're afraid of death" (2008: 8). Even though he strongly stresses that he "[suffers] from rational (yes RATIONAL) fear" (2008: 65), he still questions his ideas whether his "death-awareness connected to [his] being a writer" (2008: 66) by indicating that his works will survive after him; but he is also aware of the fact that one day there will be "a last reader" who is going to die (2008: 225) and Barnes will be completely erased on this world. Therefore, he gives his rationalistic list which explains his fears such as amnesia, mind confusion, being fed up with deathbed, miserable moments creating a wish to die, being helpless and so on (2008: 139-140). This list does not include any apprehension about religion, death or afterlife. However, he also evaluates people's approach to this issue and he believes "[f]ear of death replaces fear of God. (...) Death can't be talked down, or parlayed into anything; it simply declines to come to the negotiating table" (2008: 69). He points out that people can easily speak or comment about God and religion, but they cannot "do the same with death" (2008: 69), for it is certain.

While Derrida states in *The Gift of Death* "in the actual trembling of terror, is nothing other than death itself, a new significance for death, a new apprehension of death, a new way in which to give oneself death or to put oneself to death" (1996: 31), Barnes has a completely different perspective about it as it can be deduced from his title of the book: *Nothing to be Frightened of*. The 'nothing' in the title has

two meanings: “death should simply not be feared” and also “there is ‘nothing to be frightened of’ because, fundamentally, there is nothing after death” (Lopez-Deflory, 2016: 3). He explains this nothingness in a passage from his diary written more than twenty years ago:

“People say of death, “There’s nothing to be frightened of.” They say it quickly, casually. Now let’s say it again, slowly, with re-emphasis. “There’s NOTHING to be frightened of.” Jules Renard: “The word that is most true, most exact, most filled with meaning, is the word ‘nothing.’” (2008: 99-100)

He utters that he is “happy not to believe in God” and “to be free of Old Nobodaddy” and he does not worry about any result; thus “death, however distant, was on the agenda in quite a different way” (2008: 18). Because he insists “death” is “indeed final, and that nothing, and nothingness” comes after it (2008: 85). According to him, life is a developing process with an aim to improve “its genes appropriately and working its way through a succession of apelike, growling, tool-handling ancestors until such time as it gathered itself and spat out the three generations of school-teachers who then made ... me”; although life is full of progresses, death “has absolutely nothing to be said for it” (2008: 115). He exemplifies this with his father’s death; in the hospital his mother said to him that he looked better and asked what he was doing. He replied “You keep asking me what I’ve been doing. *Nothing*. It was uttered with a terrible mixture of frustration and despair (“The word that is the most true, the most exact, the most filled with meaning, is the word ‘Nothing.’”)” (2008: 164). When he died, the death certificate shows that he “died of a) stroke; b) heart trouble; and c) abscess on the lung” (2008, 165). Though Barnes has a different perspective about it; to him, his father died “of exhausted and giving up hope” (2008: 165). He could not eat, drink or speak; he could not recognise even his wife. His father’s final moments were miserable and death put an end to it. Barnes accepts “[l]ife is full of pain and suffering and fear, whereas death frees us from all this” (2008: 193), hence there is nothing to be frightened of death.

The issue ‘free will’ is debatable among writers and philosophers; so both Derrida and Barnes comment about it. In Derrida’s definition of religion about free will and responsibility, he presents the following:

“However little may be known of religion in the singular, we do know that it is always a response and a responsibility that is prescribed, not chosen freely in an act of pure and abstractly autonomous will. There is no doubt that it implies freedom, will and responsibility, but let us try to think this: will and freedom without autonomy. Whether it is a question of sacredness, sacrificiality or of faith, the other makes the law, the law is other: to give oneself back, and up, to the other. To every other and to the utterly other.” (qtd. in Sherwood and Hart, 2005: 12).

As it can be deduced from this quotation, if it is accepted that religion is determined by God, it will be problematic to think about the idea of free will even though it suggests giving its believers freedom. So, the human beings have tried to live their freedom given by the ruler. As a non-believer, Barnes shares Derrida’s ideas about the term. He had a conversation with a philosopher friend and Barnes presumed that he had “free will (...) behaved as if [he] did” (2008: 117). However, his friend G. explained that it was a “delusion” (2008: 117) and he remarked:

“though we might think we are free in acting as we want, we cannot determine what it is that we want (...) At some point your wants must just be givens: the result of inheritance and upbringing. Therefore, the idea of anyone having true and ultimate responsibility for their acts is untenable; at most we can have a temporary, surface responsibility—and even that, with time, will

be shown to be mistaken. G. might well have quoted to me Einstein's conclusion that "a Being endowed with higher insight and more perfect intelligence, watching man and his doings, would smile about man's illusion that he was acting according to his own free will." (2008: 117)

Barnes admitted that his friend was right; even though he knows free will is impossible, he goes on to "rely on this delusionary mental construct to help [him] along the mortal path to that place where no will of [his], free or fettered, will ever operate again" (2008: 117). Yet already he points out that if a person is young, he/she believes that he/she will be different from their parents and break fresh grounds; though as he/she ages, the reality will be different as Barnes's "resemblance" in his acts to his father (2008: 118), so he confesses that it is "definitely not expressions of free will" (2008: 118-119) and "We live as if we are creatures of pure free will when philosophers and evolutionary biologists tell us this is largely a fiction" (2008: 119). He also allows a specialist's concerns about the term who said "the concept of free will" can be explained as "making conscious decisions from a little self inside must be discarded", for "we are machines for copying and handing on bits of culture; and that the consequences of accepting all this are "really weird" (2008: 184). The specialist continues her statements as "these words coming out of this mouth at this moment, are not emanating from a little me in here, they are emanating from the entire universe just doing its stuff" (2008: 184). Thus, free will can be described as "a mere example of cultural copying" (2008: 185) that allows people to build "character and largely consistent beliefs" (2008: 186).

Conclusion

Death has been an unavoidable fact from the first moment of mankind on the earth and many theories and understandings have tried to explain it throughout ages. The Ancient Greeks believed that it was a deep mourning but it could be diminished because of the faith in afterlife. For Plato, if someone acted appropriately upon the philosophy that helped him/her with death, so he/she should not worry about it. In the Middle Ages, people passionately involved in death with a belief of resurrection because of their intense religious faith; death was accepted as a purgatorial necessity, for they should experience the pain of Christ. With the seventeenth century, perspectives towards death began to change due to changes in societies with the rise of secularism and freedom which have lasted over centuries. Postmodernism is another movement that affects the description of death by challenging and questioning the canonised rules of religion.

The French philosopher Derrida and the British writer Barnes have shared their concerns about religion, death, nothingness and free will in their death based works: *The Gift of Death* and *Nothing to be Frightened of*. According to Derrida, religion may include holy or demonic concerns; but whatever the including is, it requires responsibility which is defined as a denial, a resistance and also a consideration on a belief system. However, this responsibility comes from the other: God; and so human beings are considered as the responsible ones who should follow the rules of God. He declares a surprising statement here: how does a person obey the immortal one when he/she is mortal? He states that death is a new experience and it is also a kind of responsibility that a mortal one should appreciate it as a gift even though it may be one of the scariest versions of dying. On the other hand, the non-believer Barnes does not believe in responsibility of religion and death, but he strongly considers another kind of responsibility which is to live life through his experiences. To him, religion is a fiction arisen from a determined scenario with a happy ending to enjoy its believers. It is also a social and cultural acceptance in which people want to have a proper space and status. Yet, he still likes and misses religion, for it has been a muse for the great works of successful artists, painters, and composers. He puts forward that people believe in God because they are afraid of death and the uncertainty after it; but death is an end which takes away all of the problems and troubles on the earth. Additionally,

afterlife is a lie because there is nothing after death which is the final point; thus there is no need to be frightened of it. Because of these reasons, to Barnes, death gives the meaning to life and all of us have existed due to previous evolutions, thus a person should experience this process according to what it requires; this is the responsibility. About nothingness, Derrida puts a stress on the fear of death by emphasising on nothing other than death; however, Barnes says the fear of death is unnecessary, for there is nothing after it. Thus, Barnes is not afraid of death, but the terrifying topics for him are the possible miserable moments before death. That is to say, for Derrida fear of death is so strong that nothing can be as powerful as it; but for Barnes, the worst fears come out at the final moments on earth. In the scope of free will, Derrida thinks that there is a discrepancy between the idea of free will and the ruler – God. If it is accepted that people's roles in this world have been previously determined, it will be absurd to speak about free will and to expect people behave freely. Barnes shares Derrida's ideas; since he does not believe in God, he mentions that free will is shaped by cultural and social concerns. Nevertheless, sometimes he wants to believe in having a sense of free will, but in fact he is totally sure that he has not because it is also a fiction. In this paper, Barnes's *Nothing to be Frightened of* and Derrida's *The Gift of Death* are firstly examined together and so this is a total new study in fields of literature and philosophy. In the world where everything can be questioned in terms of truth, even though death becomes the ultimate reality, it also embraces uncertainty about what is waiting for us in the afterlife. Hence, while Barnes strongly opposes the idea of having an eternal life in heaven or hell, Derrida focuses on death and accepts it as a new experience without dealing with the idea of afterlife. Consequently, through these two important literary and philosophical figures, it can be uttered that thoughts about religion and death have changed from feeling intense sorrow into an emotion-free rationalistic understanding; hence Derrida and Barnes are among crucial thinkers who explain their ideas without including any religious statements.

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