

## Exploring the Theme of Death in Nazik al-Malaika's Poetry: An Analytical Study

Ahmed Mubrook Al-Hawtali  
Seiyun Community College, Seiyun, Yemen  
College of Women, Seiyun University, Yemen  
[aalhawtali@gmail.com](mailto:aalhawtali@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

This research paper aims at investigating death as manifested in Nazik al-Malaika's poetry. Throughout her literature, death is seen as a dominant theme in her poetry as it holds an important place in her thought and emotions to express different attitudes towards death. This study further reveals how al-Malaika perceived and reflected death in her poems. Methodologically, the current study is essentially based on descriptive analytical approach. In her poetry, al-Malaika uses terseness of language, eloquence, original use of imagery and symbols to serve the theme of death in its broadest meaning. The study concludes that Nazik al-Malaika played a vital role in the development of modern Arabic poetry through the use of free verse form ('taf'ila' in Arabic poetry) during the 1940s to 1960s. It is her unique artistry skill which effectively depicts the fact of death through the use of various poetic channels including images and symbols. It is highly expected that this research will significantly contribute to the critical study of modern Arabic poetry and will constitute an important landmark for future research.

**Keywords:** *Arabic poetry, death, free verse, Nazik al-Malaika, Romanticism*

### Introduction

Nazik al-Malaika is considered by many critics as one of the most influential poets in the history of modern Arabic poetry. She was not only a poetess, but also was a critic and feminist writer. As an Iraqi female poetess, she is regarded as one of the first pioneer of free verse form in Arabic poetry. This theory, however, was explained in her book 'Issues of Modern Poetry' and applied in her poems.

Al-Malaika was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1923. She was raised in a cultured and literary family. Her father was a writer and teacher of Arabic grammar in Baghdad secondary schools. He also was the editor of a twenty-volume encyclopedia on Arabic grammar and literature. Her mother, Um Nizar, was a poetess whose influence on her daughter Nazik was great and shaped her character as a promising poetess.

Nazik started writing poetry in the early years of her age against British rule under the pseudonym Um Nizar al-Malaika. Her father provided her with great books such as the principles of grammar and the classics of Arabic literature. Nazik's readings in literature and philosophy helped her acquire a dialectical thinking and ideology. Consequently, it was only natural for her to be the only student in the Arabic department to choose different grammar schools as a topic for her dissertation (Fakhreddine, 2021).

Al-Malaika gained her fame by writing poems in the form of free verse. Her attachment to poetry, however, had begun many years before her years of formal study. She declared in her autobiography that she composed her first poetry in classic Arabic at the age of ten under the patronage of her father (Moreh, 1976). In 1941, she studied Arabic language in the department of Arabic language. In 1944, she graduated from the

College of Education, Baghdad University. In 1947, al-Malaika published her first collection of poems under the title "Night's Lover." For the young poetess, "night" was the symbol of poetry, imagination, dreams, beauty of stars, moon lights and the glimmering of the Tigris river under light. She wrote her poem "Cholera" when she heard the sad news on the radio. It was reported that Cholera deaths in Egypt had reached thousand deaths per day. It is read a (Night came to a standstill listen to the echoes of wails in the dark of night, under silence and on corpses death, death, death humanity laments). In her autobiography, al- Malaika writes,

On Friday, October, 1947, I woke up and lay in bed listening to the broadcaster on the radio, who said that the number of the dead in Egypt had reached one thousand. I was overwhelmed by profound sadness and deep distress. I jumped out of bed, took out a pen and paper... I sat on a low fence and began to compose "Cholera"; a poem that has subsequently become well-known.

(Moreh, 1976, p. 79)

This poem, however, is considered the first Arabic poem to be composed in free verse, after centuries of the prevalence of the *qasida*, a poetic form identified by the principles of using mono-rhyme and the isometric verse. In her preface to the poem, Nazik expressed her ideas about poetry. Some critics consider that preface as the "first manifesto" of the free verse movement in Arabic poetry (Al-Malaika, 1981).

Significantly, the contributions of Iraqi poetess are confined to pioneering *tafila* (free verse) poetry in the late 1940s. She has developed the Arabic poem to have a new shape out of the restricted rules of prosodic system. Thus, she is one of the earliest voices of contemporary poets who called for the renewal of (*tafila*) in Arabic poetry. She wants to free the modern poetry from the restrictions of the classical period and use modern forms such as free verse with no fixed rhyme scheme or metre (Al-Malaika, 1981).

Indeed, 1947 marked the beginning of her social maturity and literary production. She published her first collection of poetry, *Ashiqat Al- Layl* (Night's Lover) where she practised a new form in poetry called "free verse." Free verse can be defined as "a kind of poetry that does not conform to any regular metre: the length of its lines is irregular, as is its use of rhyme—if any. Instead of a regular metrical pattern it uses more flexible cadences or rhythmic groupings, sometimes supported by anaphora and other devices of repetition" (Baldick, 2001, p. 102). Poems have neither rhythm and rhyme schemes, nor follow regular rhyme scheme rules, but they provide certain artistic expression.

Significantly, there were some factors that contributed to the flourishing of neoclassicism in Arabic literature and gradually developed a vitality which gave the impetus to the appearance of new trends, particularly, at the outset of the romantic trend. Within the general atmosphere of revolutionary political and so-

cial movements that permeated the Arab world from the beginning of the century up to the forties, new literary concepts and principles began to appear on the surface (Jayyus, 1977). The new generation of poets who wrote in the twenties and thirties started to be "aware of the fact that they were living in a period of great cultural change where values were in a state of flux, and they felt it was their duty to express the malaise of the times" (Badawi, 1975, p. 2).

In 1949, Al-Malaika published her second collection, entitled *Shazaya wa Ramad* (Splinters and Ashes) prefacing it with a theory of new poetry metrics. In this theory, she explained the new theory metre by which she has introduced Arabic poetry and her own practice of free verse. The new form has found acceptance virtually throughout the Arab world where she has connected with her contemporary poets such as al-Sayyab, al-Hamshari, al-Shabbi, Shukri and others.

In 1962, the poetess published her first book on literary criticism entitled *Qadaya al-Shi'r al-Mu'asir* (Issues of Contemporary Poetry), which includes some sophisticated issues concerning Arabic modern poetry. In addition, she established the literary principles of modern poetry in her introduction of *Shazaya wa Ramad* (Splinters and Ashes). Other collections include *Qararat al-Mawja* (The Bottom of the Wave) (1957), *Shajarat al-Qamar* (The Moon Tree) (1968), and *Masat al-Hayat wa Ughniyah lil-Insan* (The Tragedy of Life and a Song for Man) (1970). She also published *Wa yu'ayer alwano albahar* (The Sea Changes its Colors) (1977) and *Lil Salah wa al-Thawrah* (For Prayer and Revolution) (1978). Certainly, she wrote other great poems such as *Sykolojia Al-Shi'r*, (Psychology of Poetry) (1979) and *Al-Aamal Al-Nathriya Al-Kamila*, (Complete Prose Works) (2002).

Due to the political strict rules, al-Malaika left Iraq with her family, following the rise of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party of Iraq to power in 1970. She lived in Kuwait and settled there until Saddam Hussein's invasion in 1990. Meanwhile, al-Malaika and her family left for Cairo, where she lived for the rest of her life (Al-Malaika, 1995). In 2007, she died at the age of 83. Indeed, she was one of the most influential Arab poets of the 20th century. Her life and works reflected the history of her native Iraqi idealism, hope, disappointment, exile, and depression. Like her contemporary poets, she was influenced by English poetry and pioneered the free verse. Significantly, al-Malaika has played an important role in the development of modern Arabic poetry (Asfour, 1984). She could break down the formalistic classical modes of Arabic poetry that had prevailed for many decades (Wadud, 2019).

## **A Historical Background**

Death is the constant source of psychological anxiety for all human beings. The poet usually laments himself, his wife, parents, or his close friend. Historically speaking, death was regularly portrayed by Greek and

Roman writers. Then, the theme of death has been expressed by many writers throughout different historical periods. Likewise, old Arabic poets depicted many images of death in their poems.

In the 20th century, modern English writers have been profoundly affected by the two World Wars. Accordingly, they have had an immediate impact on their personal lives, a matter which shapes their culture and attitudes. Those poets can be regarded as war poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Robert Graves, Rupert Brooke, T. E. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and others who have not only reflected the tragic horror of war, but also depicted their personal experiences and sufferings in their writings. In modern English poetry, for instance, death has been reflected by some English and American poets such as W. B. Yeats, Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, Walt Whitman, and others. Each has certainly been depicted from his/her own point of view. There must be painful suffering which has been depicted in different ways.

Similarly, modern Arab poets have also been influenced by the horrific effects of World Wars (Abbas & Ahmed, 2020). In addition, they have been affected by the European colonization for the Arab world which shaped a new world of disappointment, suspicion, isolation, absurdity, identity crisis, disbelief, loneliness and tyranny. Thus, Arab modern poets like Ali Mahmoud Taha, Mohammed al-Asmar, Fakhri abu al-Suad, Ahmed Maharm, Buland al-Haydari, Abdul Rahman Shukri, Abu Qasim al-Shabbi, Mahmoud Gunaim, Nazik al-Malaika, Badr Shakr al-Sayyab, Abdul Wahab al-Biati, Nizar Qabbani, Mahamoud Darwish, and others who have expressed their views and sufferings as representatives of their own nation.

It is interesting to note that al-Malaika's direct contact with English literature, Western culture and civilization had a great effect on her outlook for life, literature and social issues. The influence of European literature in general, and English Romanticism, in particular, upon Arab writers at the beginning of this century is considerable. Al-Malaika is certainly influenced by the romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley. She clearly admired Keats, especially his odes and sonnets. Her admiration for Keats is reflected in her poem *ila al-Shair Keats* (To the Poet Keats) in which she refers to the poet's poem "Ode to a Nightingale". Al-Malaika refers to Keats in her article "*al-Shi'r wa al-Maut*" (Poetry and Death) in which she discusses Keats' views on death. She also claims that Keats' early death is almost a prophetic fulfillment of his preoccupation with death.

Al-Malaika's poetry often echoes the atmosphere of melancholy and sadness which are one of the main characteristics of Keats' poetry in particular, and romantic poetry in general. She has translated into Arabic some of his great poems and admitted to writing long odes in an imitation of his style. In addition, al-Malaika was also influenced by Shelley, although Shelley's influence on her poetry was not as extensive as Keats'. His poems "Ode to the West Wind" and "Adonis" influenced her. She was influenced by Shelley's yearning for death and his glorification of sadness.

In her preoccupation with the theme of death in her poetry, al-Malaika found a kindred spirit in the poet Rupert Brooke. In her article "*al-Shi'r wa al-Maut*" (Poetry and Death), al-Malaika refers to Brooke's

early death and regards this as a prophetic fulfillment of his interest in this theme. Accordingly, al-Malaika is regarded as the foremost romantic poetess among her Iraqi peers. Indeed, a strong sense of melancholy permeates her poetry. She often feels lonely and lost in the strange world which is full of worries and anxieties. Her poetry is usually associated with death and despair. This negative view is clearly seen in her first poems. Therefore, the theme of death will be highly discussed in some of her famous poems.

## **Discussion**

The theme of death is one of the most discussed themes in literature: poetry, prose and drama. It has been widely highlighted by many writers to depict the tragic mood of humanity. People are different in their perception of death; some poets see it as an enemy which threatens their life, while others accept it with calmness and fearlessness even though they realize its inevitability.

Al-Malaika is no exception obsessed with death in her poetry. As a prolific writer, she has written many collections of poems that reflect various universal themes. One of these themes is the theme of death. However, death has been a controversial issue and it has even developed into a total grief or sorrow for the poets who profoundly suffered of losing their relatives or close friends. Indeed, the theme of death in poetry has been discussed by many poets, scholars and critics.

In the case of Arabic poetry, one can clearly see that al-Malika's insightful view was to depict her pain and suffering by using death as a tool to soothe her anxiety and loneliness. Death here is used as a kind of consolation to reduce her sadness and pessimism. This expression, in fact, can be regarded as one of the great contributions to the studies of Arabic modern poetry. Death is no doubt a universal theme which happens in all times and places to put an end for one's life. For al-Malaika, it is certainly haunted the young poetess during her entire life. It is seen as a central theme which gives way to other stages of suffering, sickness, grief or sorrow. In reality, death is the crucial fact of life which cannot be denied or ignored. It is the inevitable end for those who exist on earth. Accordingly, one finds al-Malaika has responded to record her emotional response to death and reflect in her poetry extensively. For instance, in her poem *al-Ardh al-Dhaia'a* (Lost Utopia), she says:

سأبقى تجاذبني الأمنيات  
إلى الأفق السرمدي البعيد  
وأحلم أحلم لا أستفي  
ق إلا لأحلم حلما جديدا

Hopes will still attract me  
to the remote eternal horizon

I dream, dream never awake  
but only dream a new (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 46)

*Utopia* is a Greek word which means no place in reality. It is used for symbolizing an imaginative poetic city which only exists in the poetess's dreams. The poetess clearly longs to survive on dreams that keep her alive. These chains of dreams are her *Utopia* where she dies in the utopian world.

وحين أموت .. أموت وقلبي  
على موعد مع يوتوبيا

And when I die ...I die, my heart  
has a date with Utopia (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 46)

Al-Mala'ika deals with death in the following collections of her poetry: *Ma'sat al-Hayat*, *Ashiqat al-Layl*, *Shazaya wa ramad*, *Qararat al-Mauja*, *Cholera*, *Unshudat al-Amwat*, *Ughniya lil-Huzn* and other ones that will be discussed in the context of this article. However, it is *Ma'sat al-Hayat* which best illustrates the poet's obsession with death. She says:

أي قبر أعددت لي؟  
أهو كهف ملء انحاءه الظلام الداجي؟  
أم ترى زورقي سيغرق بي يوما  
فأثوي في ظلمة الأتجاج

What sort of grave have you prepared for me?  
Is it a cave completely covered in darkness?  
Do you see my boat will sink one day?  
Then fall in the darkness of nights! (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 25)

The atmosphere of loneliness, coldness, misery and darkness which prevails in the grave is described in several of al-Mala'ika's poems. The theme of death has clearly been portrayed in some collections of al-Malaika's poetry. For example, *Cholera*, *Mas'at al-Hayat* (Life's Tragedy), *Ashiqat al-Layl* (Night's Lover), *Shazaya wa Ramad* (Splinters and Ashes), *Qararat al-Mauja* (The Bottom of the Wave) and other ones can be referred at when discussing the theme of death.

The first collection of her poems *Ma'sat al-Hayat* clearly illustrates the poet's obsession with death. It frequently flashes in her poetry. Apparently, al-Malaika's attitude towards death is associated with her personal experiences. The first experience which brought her face to face was with death is the death of her mother and the death of her aunt's husband. Though she was not very young, this tragic event deeply affect-

ed her psyche. It seems that these sad memories in her personal life made the poetess struggle with the cruelty of life.

Indeed, al-Malaika has gone through hard experiences that affected her soul, both emotionally and psychologically. One of these dreadful experiences was the death of her mother in front of her eyes in Britain in 1953. This catastrophic incident caused her to have a kind of depression. She was forced to accompany her with a terrified and broken heart. In the operation room, she saw her mother dying. Later, she had to attend the funeral and witness the burial. What a tragic scene she has experienced!

Significantly, the death of her mother contributed greatly to al-Malaika's sadness. It was a great shock to her because she could not comprehend it easily. At first, she was in complete denial. Then, she could realize the fact. Hence, she has written three elegies to her mother describing her feelings concerning this shattering event in her personal life: *Ughniya lil-Huzn* (Song to Sadness), *Maqi al-Huzn* (The Arrival of Sadness), and *al-Zahra al-Sauda* (The Black Flower). In her poem *Ughniya li al-Huzn*, for example, she personifies sadness or grief as the most gracious and welcomed visitor:

افسحوا الدرب له، للقادم الصافي الشعور  
للغلام المرهف السابح في بحر اريج  
.  
.  
.  
إنه جاء إلينا عابراً، خصب المرور  
إنه أهدأ من ماء الغدير  
فاحذروا أن تجرحوه بالضجيج

Clear the way for him,

For the affectionate comer,

The sensitive youth approaching in an  
ocean of fragrance.

He has come to us, bringing fertility in his wake.

He is more tranquil than the waters of a stream.

Be careful, do not hurt him with any clamour. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 311)

This is how al-Malaika describes the effect of her mother's death on her personality. In this context, she says: "In the year 1953, there was an event which shook my life to its very roots ... I saw the moment of my mother's death as a dreadful occurrence" (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 309). She goes further to describe her suffering by saying: "Poetry for the happy person is a pure mental luxury, but for me, as a sad person, it is a means of life. The "Three Elegies for My Mother" were an attempt at condolence that I resorted to after my

mother's death in sad circumstances from which I painfully suffered. I did not find any other outlet for my sadness than to love and sing for him" (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 309).

Indeed, in losing Um Nizar, Nazik lost not only a parent or mother figure, but also a close friend. Um Nizar was also a poetess who played a crucial role in upbringing her daughter and polishing her talent in writing poetry. Similarly, al-Malaika's fear of death was intensified after the death of her aunt, to whom she was very close. She saw death as a cruel thing which deprived people of their relatives and friends. In this regard, she wrote two poems to express her feelings on this occasion. They are *Ila Ammati al-Rahila* (To my Departed Aunt) where she profoundly describes her sadness. She writes:

تتعثر النغمات في شفتي  
بصراخ أحزاني وأتاتي  
مرّقت أبيامي التي سلفت  
ودفنت فيك بشاشة الآتي  
وأضعت أفراحي ومن عبث  
شبه ابتساماتي وضكاتي

Tunes stumble in my lips

by crying of my sorrows and groans

I tore up my earlier days

and I buried my coming screens

And I wasted my joys in vain

my half smiles and laughter (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 137)

She also composed *Hal Tarja'in* (Will you Come Back?!) to lament her aunt who died in 1948. She deeply laments her aunt's departure and hopes to come back to life again. She says:

ما زالت الذكرى تضج وراء إحساسي الدفين  
إن نمت ألمحها تسير معي يجسدها الحنين  
إن نمت ألمحها فتصرخ لهفتي: هل ترجعين؟  
هل ترجعين إذا حلمت بما مضى؟ هل ترجعين؟

The memory still buzzes behind my buried feeling

If I slept, I would see her walking with me, embodied by nostalgia



If I slept, I would see her crying out my eagerness: Will you come back?

Will you come back if I dreamed of the past? Will you come back? (al-Malaika, 1997, pp. 385-86)

Her poem "Cholera," has left a profound effect on her life. In this poem, she tragically described the devastating disease outbreak in Egypt. The poem drastically raised the empathy of Iraqi people and left not only emotional, but also psychological effects on the poetess's psyche and the Iraqis as well. It further illustrates her fear, feelings of death and her empathy with those dead ones. She writes:

الموت الموت الموت  
تشكي البشرية تشكو ما يرتكب الموت  
. . .  
في كل مكان يبكي صوت  
هذا ما قد مزقه الموت  
. . .  
يا حزن النيل الصارخ مما فعل الموت  
طلع الفجر

Death, Death, Death

Humanity laments the crimes of death

. . .

Everywhere lies a mourned corpse,

This is what death has torn apart

. . .

O' crying grief of Nile what death has done over

Morning rose (al-Malaika, 1997, pp. 138-40)

In this poem, one can realize the poetess deep sadness which is clear in the images of sadness, crying, silence, manifestation of the dead. The poetess has depicted poetic images with words that have many psychological and poetic dimensions. These are screams, sorrow flows, a soul cries out, the voice of death weeps, the sadness of the night, mournful lamentation, and the voice of a child.

Indeed, all these expressions carry the images of sadness and pain for the poetess. One also finds that the repetition of the word death more than five times has an expressive situation which resonates in the poetess' psyche towards this painful event. There is a connection the poet draws between (darkness and night) and (deep sadness) which is an indication that this sadness has a dimension when it passes through night and

in the time of great darkness. The poetess clearly refers to death as a man who can slaughter or tear people (tear it death) and (This is what it did the palm of death).

Thus, al-Malaika depicts sadness as a powerful tool which interferes with every passing moment in a person's life; from the stillness of the night to the cries and weeping of voices and the sadness of the night until it reaches the shrouding death. On the other hand, the word sadness is rooted in her poem *Thawra ala al-Shams* (Revolt on the Sun). She says:

وقفت أمام الشمس صارخةً بها  
يا شمس، مثلك قلبي المتمرد  
. . .  
فالحزن صورة ثورتي وتمردني  
تحت الليالي والألوهة تشهد

I stood in front of the sun screaming at her

Oh sun, like you my rebellious heart.

Sadness is the image of my revolution and rebellion

Under the nights and the divinity bears witness. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 485)

In this poem, the poetess portrays the sun as a woman who can address her. In this situation, she needs someone who hears her pain and sadness when she screams. The poem is clearly interwoven with profound sadness in the poetess's psyche. Al-Malaika's revolution which rushes from inside has painted a clear picture through the poem as a result of the inner emotion that she felt. Thus, one can note that "the general aspect of the poem is filled with sad psychological images, in addition to the multiplicity of these images depending on the state of sadness experienced by the poetess" (Romi, 2012, p. 87).

However, al-Malaika sometimes chooses life and prefers it to death which she views with horror and revulsion. This preference is clear in her poem *Bayna Fakkayy al-Maut* (Between the Jaws of Death) which has been written while she was bed-ridden with some sort of fever. The poet conjures up a vision of death and its horrors, and soon realizes that her love for life is stronger than her love for death and whatever comfort from worldly miseries it might bring her. She fervently begs death to slacken its pace and to be kind to her youth. In her unwillingness to face death, she starts to enumerate the good things in life proclaiming her attachment to it. She implores death to give her time to enjoy the bright light of day and the music of her lute; she also asks death to show mercy towards her and unashamedly declares that her heart has fallen in love with life. She writes:

ها أنا بين فكي الموت قلبا  
لم يزل راعشا بحب الحياة  
وعيوننا ظمأى إلى متع الكو  
ن تناجي مفاتن الأمسيات  
لم أزل برعما على غصن الدهر  
ر جديد الأحلام والأمنيات  
فحرام أن تدفن الآن يامو  
ت شبابي في عالم الأموات

Here I am, between the jaws of death like a heart  
which is still throbbing with the love of life;  
Like eyes which are thirsty for the pleasures of the world  
secretly calling on the charming past time  
(I am) still like a bud on time's branches,  
fresh with dreams and hopes.  
O' Death, it would be a great shame if you buried my youth  
in the world of the dead. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 495)

It seems that the most distressing and painful thing about "death" is probably the fact that she will not be remembered after she dies. She mentions this in several places in her poetry, as the following line from the above-mentioned poem illustrates (ibid: 497):

وستمحو الايام ذكرى فتاة  
شغفتها الهة الشعر حبا

Time will erase the memory of a young woman  
smitten with love by the Goddess of poetry. (Ibid: 497)

Al-Malaika certainly tries to convince herself to accept the idea of leaving this world by reminding herself of the loneliness and suffering she has endured. Furthermore, she unsuccessfully tries to make herself hate life and tries to view it with contempt. This attitude, however, may be exemplified by the following lines:

فيما تبكي على مفارقة الدن  
يا وقد عشت في حماها غريبا؟

أنها أيها المعذب مأسا

ة تنثير الأسي وتبكي القلوبا

فاحتقرها وسر إلى عالم الأم

وات يا قلبي الرقيق طروبا

Why cry over the world,  
have you lived like a stranger within its bounds?  
O ' you, tormentor, life is a tragedy!  
It excites sadness and makes the heart cry.

Contempt life and merrily proceed to the world of the  
dead O my tender heart! (Ibid: pp. 499-500)

Indeed, al-Malaika was greatly affected by the tragic events and disasters that she had seen and practiced, a matter which broke her heart. These events undoubtedly had left a tremendous influence in her personality as a romantic and sensitive poetess. Her poetry as a whole is characterized by dark view and sad images. In this context, the Lebanese poet, Mohammed Ali Shams Al-Deen describes her state by saying:

Her feeling matches early the pessimistic philosopher Schopenhauer that the entire life is pain, ambiguity, and complexity. Love of life is a lie and the greatest comfort for the whole human race is death (Shams al-Deen, 2003, p. 121). It seems that the idea of man's annihilation, or the body alters into decayed bones, drove her to this destructive panic. This made her unstable. Nazik says in one of her letters:

I remained rejecting the matter of man's annihilation more intensely, suffering from the idea of worms that will eat us, and the skulls we will end up in. This idea including horror and grief has destroyed her soul (Ali, 1995, p. 39).

Al-Malaika goes further to describe her deep sadness and disappointment. In her poem *Ma'sat al-Hayat* (The Tragedy of Life), she addresses herself as if she laments her physical presence in this strange world where she wishes she had been among the dead ones. She says:

أسفًا يا فتاةً لن تفهمي الأيام

فلتقنعي بأن تجهليها

رحلوا عن جمى الوجود ولانوا

في سكونٍ بعالم الأموات

Alas! Girl! you won't understand days  
Satisfied to have no knowledge.

They left the fever of existence and sought refuge  
Still in the realm of the dead. (al-Malaika, 1997, pp. 22-24)

The failure of the poetess to comprehend death is certainly part of her failure in life. That is what makes her scared from death, the basic vision in her poetry. The poetess here reveals a character full of depression and anxiety. She has a gloomy pessimistic view that sees only the black side of existence. In this context, one of her scholars, the Lebanese poet Mohammed Ali Shams Al-Deen thinks that joy is associated with death. He says: "Whenever Nazik sees flowers, she only sees flowers reaper in them". She writes:

كلما أبصرت عيوني أزها  
را تذكرت قاطف الأزهار

Whenever my eyes catch flowers' sight  
I remembered the flower reaper. (Al-Arabi Book, 2003, p. 123)

The poetess clearly does not see in spiritual existence what pleases her. She even sees in human only graves moving and movable coffins. She seems to be infected early by "death phobia". She sees nothing in the snow but shrouds, and in the winds only chants of waste, and in walking people only graves that move, and moving shrouds. She refuses life with what appears to be an invitation to suicide. This growing pessimistic attitude is obvious in her poetry:

هكذا الأدمي يسلم أحد  
بابه للتراب والديدان  
ربّ لا كانت الحياة ولا ك  
نا هبطنا هذا الوجود الفاني

A man delivers his beloved ones  
for dirt and worms  
God! neither was life, nor were we  
descended this mortal existence. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 199)

Al-Mala'ika then describes how none of man's palaces, hopes and dreams can protect him from the terrifying moment of death. Death obliterates not only man's physical existence, but also his memory. Dur-

ing his short and transient life, and in his arrogant moments of triumph and power, man mocks death, but death retaliates by destroying man. She writes:

لحظة الموت لحظة ليس من ره  
بتها في وجودنا المرّ حامي  
وسياتي اليوم الذي نحن فيه  
ذكريات في خاطر الأيام

Nothing in our bitter life protects us  
from the awesome power of the moment of death.  
The day will come when  
we will be like memories by the time. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 188)

In her poem *al-Maqbara al-Ghariqa* (The Drowned Graveyard), the poetess gives graphic descriptions of a group of dead people whose graves have been washed away by a flood. Indeed, al-Malaika has written this poem to bring back the memories of the frightening flood that afflicted Baghdad in the year 1946, in which she recorded after hearing the story of a cemetery flooded by the waters of the cruel river on a stormy evening. She describes here the pale foreheads of the dead; she also mentions how their limbs and eyes float aimlessly on the surface of the water. She writes:

هذي الوجوه الشاحبات الجباه  
وهذه الأشلاء والأعين  
طففت حيارى فوق وجه المياه  
وعض فيها العدم المحزن

These faces with pale foreheads,  
these remains and eyes,  
floated aimlessly on the surface of water,  
left by sad nothingness. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 526)

The poetess also describes how the bodies of those who have recently died and the skeletons of those who had died years ago fill every dark corner of the graveyard. She says:

في كل ركن من دجي المقبرة  
تسبح أجساد وتطفو عظام

In every corner of the graveyard's darkness  
corpses swim and bones float. (Ibid, p. 527)

In another poem *Uyun al-Amwat* (The Eyes of the Dead), al-Malaika addresses the remains of the dead asking them how death treated them. She detects fear and anguish in their eyes, and a hopeless air of expectancy. She then deplores the fact that human beings seem to be unable to understand what is hidden in the eyes of the dead. She says:

يا رفاق الأموات في الأرض ماذا  
رسم الموت فوق هذي العيون؟  
أي رعب أي حسرة وشكاة  
وأي معنى من الرجاء الحزين؟

O ' mortal remains of the dead in  
the earth, what has death painted on these eyes?  
What fear, despair and suffering?  
and what meaning in dashed hopes? (al-Malaika, 1997, pp. 49-50)

Accordingly, al-Malaika, one can say, is a great lover of her pains. In her view, the conventional complaints which her contemporaries express had reached their furthest limit. After all, she feels, they have nothing to reveal but repetitive images of complaint. In her remarkable poem *Khams Aghani lil-Alam* (Five Songs to Pain), she seems to develop a new method of treating her anguish with love. She attempts to relish the pleasure of pain and enjoy it.

مُهدِي ليلينا الأسي والحرق  
ساقِي مآقينا كؤوسَ الأرق

Filling our nights with sorrow and burning  
drinking us with cups of insomnia. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 454).

Another emphatic invitation to death made by al-Malaika is in her poem *Ajras Sawda* (Black Bells). She expresses her extreme dissatisfaction with life and its meaninglessness. She gives a fairly exhaustive list of experiences that man undergoes in life; triumph, satisfaction, happiness, joy and arrogance on the one hand, and defeat, frustration, sadness, pain and humiliation, on the other hand. The man comes constantly closer to death as a result of losing his zest for life and his failure to pursue his dreams vigorously. His inertia and lack of drive renders his life meaningless. She says:

لنمئاً فالحياة جفّت وهذي  
كؤس الفارغات تسخرُ منّا  
وغيوم الذهول في أعين الأيـ  
ام عادت أجلي وأعمق لونا  
وسكون الحياة في جسد الأحـ  
لام لم يبق قطّ للعيش معنى

Let's die, life has dried up  
and the empty cups are mocking us.  
The clouds of oblivion in the eyes of the days  
have become brighter and more distinct.  
And the stillness of life in the body of dreams  
there is no meaning left to live. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 106)

Obviously, the experience of death which the poetess welcomes seems to have had such a tempting attraction that cannot be resisted. In this regard, al-Malaika' s deliberation and thoughts lead her to the inescapable conclusion that death is the ultimate victor, and that human beings are the confused, weak and vanquished victims of death. Victory, in the real sense of the word, belongs to death only, with the result that what human beings call victories are not true at all. She writes:

هكذا الموت غالب أبد الدهـ  
ر ونحن الصرعى الضعاف الحباري  
وله النصر الفخار علينا  
ما كذبوا ما دعوتموه انتصارا

Death is always victorious  
while we will tie the slaughtered, the weak and confused.  
Victory and glory belong to it rather than to us,  
so bewail that which you call victory. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 58)

This stanza perhaps represents the views of most of the romantic poets concerning the sort of sadness with which death should be faced. It amounts to a charming feeling represented by the image of a sweet youth who not only arouses affection but also rejects to be received by mourning or weeping or any form of affected candor. Al-Malaika further adds in her personification of this visitor:

إنه ذاك الغلام الدائم الحزن الخجول



ساكن الأمسية العرقى بأحزان خفية

ابدا يجرحه النوح ويضنيه العويل

فليكن في صمتنا ظل ظليل

يتلقاه واحضان خفية

He is that eternally sad, shy boy  
The drowned evening dweller with hidden sorrows.

Mourning and weeping always hurt him.

Let our silence be his protective shelter,  
In which he is welcomed and embraced. (al-Malaika, 1997, p. 312)

In the poem *Unshudat al-Amwat* (The Sonnet of the Dead), al-Malaika gives a fairly detailed description of the act of burial and then describes what happens to a dead person in the grave. The frightening grave engulfs the corpse and subjects it to loneliness, darkness and punishment. Physically, the world of the grave consists of thorns, dust, sand, stones, rocks and, worst of all, the worms that prey on the dead man's body consuming it with great relish and venom. She writes:

وينيمونه على الشوك والصخ  
ر وتحت التراب والأحجار  
ويعودون تاركين بقايا  
ه لدنيا خفية الأسرار  
هو والوحدة المريرة والظلم  
ة في قبره المخيف الرهيب  
تحت حكم الديدان والشوك والرم  
ل لأيدي الفناء والتعذيب

They lay him on thorns and rocks,  
under the dust and stones,  
And they return, leaving his remains  
to a world of hidden secrets.  
Left to bitter solitude and darkness  
in his awesome and frightening grave,  
Under the reign of worms, thorns,  
sand and the powers of extinction and punishment. (al-Malaika, 1997, pp. 195-196)

The poetess here describes how the corpse disintegrates and turns into food for the willow and fig trees. She views this as a great punishment. In this poem, al-Malaika goes further to compare man's condition in this world with his condition after he dies and is buried in the grave. In life, the man experiences happiness, makes future plans, nurtures his hopes and dreams as he enjoys the sound of the wind, the waves of the sea and music. He also builds palaces and arrogantly mocks fate and ignores the cries and pain of nature.

## Conclusion

To conclude, al-Malaika is preoccupied with the theme of death in her poetry. She has been influenced by the pioneers of the Romantic English movement such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelly, and Keats. But it was John Keats who was her favorite and memorized most of his poetry. The trace of romanticism can be seen clearly through her first collection of poems and her critical writings. It is also obvious in her translation of some English poems. She was in close contact with English poetry since the beginning of her literary life. Her first collection of poems is characterized by the concept of death, melancholy, pessimism, and disappointment.

Her influence with the romantic movement is ascribed to several factors; the most important one is the general social and political situation. Another reason is her literary contact with Arab writers during her stay in Egypt. One more reason is probably World War II which had left negative effects on her psyche. Al-Malaika has employed grief as a melancholic psychological charge to confront reality and as imaginary justifications in facing the living experience of failure. Hence, her works include in addition to sorrow and melancholy visionary trips to seek ideal worlds.

The significance of al-Malaika's poetry lies in the richness of imagery by which she deals with the theme of death. The treatment of death is the strongest romantic feature in her poetry. Death is a major theme in romantic poetry and is regarded as both a source of inspiration and as a world of calmness and peace. In this respect, her infatuation with death is similar to her infatuation with nature. She sees death as a refuge from life's miseries, fear, sorrows and frustration. Accordingly, she is regarded as one of the first Arab romantic poets as well as the first pioneer of writing poetry in free verse.

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