

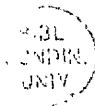
THE CONCEPT OF DEATH AND ITS DEVELOPMENT
IN MODERN ARABIC POETRY

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the treatment of the concept of death in modern Arabic poetry, and the development of this concept from the turn of the twentieth century up to the seventies. This development is seen as having gone through three major and distinctive stages.

The first stage is reflected in the neo-classical elegy. The works of the neo-classicist poets (from the beginning of the century up to the mid-twenties) are generally viewed by critics as an imitation, or at least an attempt at emulating the works of the major classical and medieval poets. The elegy, practically the only poetic composition at this time in which the concept of death was treated, is no exception to this rule. It did not treat of death as an existential concept, but simply lamented the deaths of particular individuals, and invariably in laudatory terms. The treatment of death in this period is viewed as a form of occasional poetry.

The second stage is identified with the romantic movement in Arabic poetry (from the mid-twenties to the late forties). The main influences which are seen as having affected the outlook on death in this period are the works of the great Muslim Sūfīs, which were gradually becoming available to the general reader, Western romantic poetry, which in the thirties of this century started to be widely read and translated in the Arab world, and

some Eastern theosophical doctrines, like the belief in reincarnation, espoused by some prominent and influential Arab authors such as Gibrān and Naimy. As the emphasis on the goodness of nature and the coincidence of man with its spirit was a characteristic feature of romantic poetry, both life and death are viewed in this period as two vital elements which, being in harmony with the cycles of nature, constantly maintain the continuity of existence.

The third stage is identified with developments in the period between the fifties and the seventies. The Tammūziyyūn poets, the avant-garde poets of the period seem unanimously to have utilized in various forms one or other of the ancient myths of death and resurrection. The symbols of this ancient mythology were used to express deep anxieties and fears about the decline of Arab civilization under dire political and social strains, and the hope that the Arab nation would go through a rebirth or a great revival. This hope in particular seemed to find its best expression in the ancient myths which stressed the inevitability of a resurrection after death.

Finally the concept of death is examined in Palestinian resistance poetry which is seen as part and parcel of the third stage, but which, because of the special circumstances in which the Palestinians lived and wrote, is treated in a separate chapter on its own.

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

ا	ā (a)	د	d
ب	b	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	th	ع	c
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	h	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w (ū)
ص	s	ي	y (ī)

The two diphthongs (اَو) and (اِی) are realized respectively as aw and ay.

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INTRODUCTION

ARABIC NEO-CLASSICISM AND ITS CULTURAL BACKGROUND

In trying to trace the development of modern Arabic poetry throughout its successive phases, M.M Badawī points out that,

the literary stages.... often overlapped in such a way that it would be difficult to find exact dates that could be regarded as providing sharp lines of demarcation (1).

In the light of this remark, it can be said that assigning the emergence of Arabic neo-classicism * to the last decades of the nineteenth century is more or less an approximate assumption. But it is an assumption which literary historians

* This term will be used to identify the poetic school which succeeded the era of decline in Arabic literature, and flourished approximately between the late decades of the nineteenth century and the twenties of this century. Likewise, the term "neo-classicists" will be used to refer to the poets of the above mentioned period. Sometimes the term "revivalists" is used in the course of this work to refer to the same group of poets. This is because of the general agreement among critics that it was one of the primary aims of the neo-classicists to revive the standards of literary excellence of the golden age of Arabic literature, as will be explained in the course of this introduction.

subscribe to almost unanimously (2).

One may regard the last decades of the nineteenth century as the period in which the Arab world began to witness signs of recovery from the stagnation and decay it went through during the Ottoman domination which continued in some Arab lands for a period of four centuries (1516-1917)(3). The various factors of corruption and decay in the Ottoman Empire had, for a long time, been at work and were expected sooner or later to culminate in the dismemberment of the empire and its ultimate fall. The social and political conditions in the greater part of the Arab world were abysmally bad.

The Ottoman administration was weak, and a great deal of foul play, oppression, espionage, looting, bribery and other forms of corruption prevailed.(4)

The gradual decline of Ottoman domination coincided with significant events and activities which played an important role in bringing about an era of revival. In Egypt there was the Napoleonic campaign and the political stirring it created, followed by Muḥammad 'Alī's ambitious efforts at modernization entailing the despatch of student missions to Europe, and the gradual establishment and multiplication of printing presses. Likewise, the establishment of the school of languages in 1836 during the reign of Muḥammad 'Alī (ruled 1805-1849) was perhaps a formative step in the history of modern Egypt. One must add, however, that the continuous aid given to the print-

ing presses, during Khedive Ismā'īl's reign (ruled 1863-1879),^{kl} opened up an opportunity for publishing classical and medieval works of the Arab literary heritage *. This activity in particular, one may say, should be borne in mind and considered while talking about further developments in modern Arabic literature.

In Syria and Lebanon the progress towards modernity was "more rapid and thorough among the Christian communities"(5). The contribution to the literary revival of foreign missionary schools, "where the younger generation came under direct European influence"(6), cannot be overlooked. On the other hand, the constant waves of Lebanese and Syrian emigrants who were trying to escape from the suppressive censorship of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamīd II (ruled 1876-1909), contributed to enriching the intellectual ferment in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world through the daily newspapers and literary periodicals they established. Thus, in the words of professor Gibb, "Egypt's gain was the measure of Syria's loss"(7).^E

In Iraq a literary tradition had managed to survive, but on the whole in the form of poetic composition.

This was possible because the classical poetic tradition in Iraq had been kept alive from generation to generation, preserved in the

* Classical: this term refers to the pre-Islamic literature or what is known in Arabic as al-'aṣr al-jāhili (roughly, the one and a half centuries preceding the appearance of Islam).

Medieval: this term refers to the literary contribution of the Umayyad 41(661)-132(750) and Abbasid periods 132(750)-656(1258).

college mosques of Islamic centres. The vitality of the cultural tradition in Iraq explains the early shift to a more modern kind of poetry which the nineteenth century Iraqi poets were able to make when they had to resort to a new theme.(8)

The changes which all these factors brought about began to effect the contemporaneous literary and poetic output. It was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, one may say, that Arabic poetry seemed to have achieved a degree of identification with its milieu and the problems of daily life, rather than continuing to be a mere scholastic exercise, whereas "the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century", as Haywood puts it, were "characterized more by promise than by achievement"(9). The increasing awareness of the inferiority of Arabic poetry during the period of decline, perhaps, prepared the way for the era of revival. A quick glance at the poetic output of the age of decline will show the abysmal level which it had come to. Arabic poetry from the thirteenth century to the nineteenth century(10) had been subjected to critical standards laid down by philologists and grammarians who were primarily interested in its form and its conformity to the rules of prosody. The literary atmosphere as a whole was, in the words of Badawī, "marked by a general lack of vitality and imagination, a growing feeling of complacency and self-sufficiency and an apparent unwillingness or inability to explore new horizons"(11). The poem was used to amuse or entertain or address local rulers and officials, commemorate events and important occasions, and convey messages of congratulation

on the occasions of weddings or births, and condolences on the occasions of death or other misfortunes. Furthermore,

"embellishments, like badī' (art of metaphors), jinās (pronomasia), ṭibāq (antithesis)" and similar formal exercises "made of poetry a craft rather than an art"(12)*.

Efforts, therefore, were merely expended to prove skill or resourcefulness in the choice and use of far-fetched words, and this process drove poetry to utter futility and superficiality.

But the new factors of change which were affecting various aspects of Arab life by the late decades of the nineteenth century were also working, directly or indirectly, to animate cultural life and create favourable conditions for literary development. Works of classical and medieval Arabic poetry in manuscript form started to be edited and published and made available to the reader. Those works, in many respects, represented in the eyes of readers and poets the golden age of Arabic poetry, and "because of their framework, diction, idiom, and phrase structure remained models of excellence"(13). The process of introducing the Arab literary heritage to readers seems to have provided new sources of inspiration.

* For a more detailed explanation of these terms and other strictly formal exercises in writing poetry, see S.Kh. Jayyūsī's work, Trends, from which this quotation is taken, p.25.

Discovering the healthy roots of classical Arabic poetry provided an incentive to free Arabic poetry from the artificiality of the era of decadence. This was the attempt undertaken by the revivalist poets towards the end of the nineteenth century. These were the poets who came to constitute what is described and known as the neo-classicist movement in Arabic poetry and Arabic literature as a whole(14).

When talking about the early emergence of the revivalist movement it is, perhaps, necessary to consider the role of Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1839-1904), as the leader and mentor of this school or movement(15). He, seemingly, had a strong faith that classical and medieval Arabic poetry could be a guideline and source of inspiration from which he and the poets of his time might establish a firm basis for further development and creativity. It was Bārūdī who first tried to rescue Arabic poetry from the artificiality and weakness in language and structure that it had come to during the era of decline. His attempt consisted in trying to emulate and maintain the Arabic classical and medieval masterpieces in their style and theme.

towards The tendency ~~of~~ imitation in Bārūdī's poetic works ~~could~~ be *can* clearly noticed and identified. One should perhaps add, however, that Bārūdī was not a mere imitator of the Arabic classical and medieval authors but used their conventional forms quite often in order to deal with aspects of his own time, and to convey genuine personal experiences(16).

It is commonly agreed that some prominent poets throughout

the Arab world like Aḥmad Shawqī (1868-1932), Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (1871-1923), Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī (1875-1945), Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī (1863-1936), Khayr ʿl-Dīn al-Ziriklī (b.1893) and Shakīb Arsalān (1870-1946) continued the movement started by Bārūdī and made their own substantial contribution to the revivalist movement. All these poets, while going through a conscious attempt to revive the pure diction and structure of classical poetry and its themes, did not, one may say, overlook the immediate political and social problems of their everyday life. This tendency is one of the revivalists' characteristics which seemed to be appreciated to some extent by their contemporary critics.(17)

Assessing the achievement of the neo-classicists and any possible ideology reflected in their works, M.M. Badawī says, that

although generally moralistic and even didactic, the neo-classicism of al-Bārūdī and his followers, unlike the neo-classicism of English and French poetry, has no (philosophical) foundations. It does not rest upon a theory that clearly delimits the roles of reason and the imagination, nor does it assume that (generality) is a principle that the poet must follow.(18)

It was not long, however, before the neo-classicists were exposed to serious criticism and particularly in considering the form of the classical Arabic ode (qaṣīda) as absolute and good for all time (19). Their total belief in the superiority of the classical ode and their attempts to emulate its conventional form and style, perhaps, prevented the revival-

ists from achieving any radical changes, and might be the main cause for their identification as "reactionary" or "conservative" by some of the critics of their day.

The other obstacle that hindered the neo-classicists from realizing any substantial changes in the form and content of their poetry was their fear or suspicion of alien influence, and especially Western culture (20). Their immediate reaction against foreign literary influence was, apparently, to stick even more firmly to the poetic conventions of the past. Such an attitude may explain why "the adoption of Western literary modes came much later than that of Western technology or even of Western thought"(21). Despite the interaction between Arabic and Western culture, which most of the revivalists witnessed at the turn of the twentieth century, the assumption that Arabic poetry was superior to Western poetry seemed to be faithfully adhered to. Consequently literary influences from the West, in the view of the neo-classicists, were but a direct threat to the excellence and originality of the literary products of the Arab past.

The inflexible and puritanical attitude of most of the neo-classicists against any possible change seems to have led to the conflict between the partisans of the "old" and the "new"(22), represented respectively by the poets mentioned above and some of their critics in the early decades of this century. In Egypt, there were 'Aqqād and Māzinī criticizing the

conventional poetic concepts and suggesting a new view of poetry in their joint work al-Dīwān fī 'l-Naqd wa al-Adab (1921). And in the Mahjar*, there was Mikhā'īl Naimy introducing similar views about the message of modern poetry and its medium in his critical work al-Ghirbāl (1923). There is little doubt that such a conflict between the conservative poets and their critics was necessary, if one does not say, indispensable, for preparing the way for a healthy and fruitful interaction between Arabic and Western concepts of literature.

The aim of this brief introduction was to give a general idea about the role of the neo-classicists in modern Arabic literature and their understanding of the function of poetry and its standards of excellence. Considering these outlines, one may proceed towards the main subject of this thesis which is concerned with tracing the developments that affected the "concept of death" in modern Arabic poetry in the period from the early decades of the twentieth century up to the seventies. This period seems to have boasted of being an era of significant literary ferment and upheaval in which Arabic poetry bears the seeds of change and becomes the field that welcomes bold experimentation and forward-looking movements. This is, however, the very characteristic aspect of an era which not only embarked upon the revival of the Arab own literary treasures of the past, but also attempted to acquire knowledge and guidance from Western literary experience. The benefit of this fusion was obvious.

* See note p.83 below.

For the poetic experience of centuries in the West was compressed into a few decades, and the over-all picture is dazzling to the observer. From the neo-classical revival, poetry proceeded quickly to romanticism, symbolism and, to a lesser extent, surrealism (23).

The emergence of social realism or neo-realism between the fifties and seventies must not, likewise, be overlooked when talking about the successive literary trends which affected Arabic poetry throughout this century.

Many literary studies either historical or critical have been dedicated to the examination and assessment of the various aspects of modern Arabic poetry in the light of recent developments. But the idea of death as a poetic concept ^{have been} seemed to be overlooked or only briefly treated in scattered articles and comments (24). This concept, one may say, was scarcely mentioned as a relevant aspect worthy of study in literary works, particularly as most of these works are, in general, merely concerned with examining the biographical and social background of poets or offering anthologies of their works (25).

One must, however, exclude Rīṭā Awad's book Ustūrat al-Mawt wa'l-Inbi'āth fī'l-Shi'r al-'Arabi al-Hadīth "The Myth of Death and Resurrection in Modern Arabic Poetry". This study can best be described as an examination of the symbols of death and resurrection in ancient mythology which seemed to have attracted the Arab avant-garde poets of the period between the fifties and the seventies. These mythical symbols have recently been utilized as part of modern poetic expression and

particularly in connection with the theme of "the eclipse and revival of the Arab civilization", namely expressing the fear of the nation's death and the faith in its renaissance. This symbolic aspect of the concept of death in modern Arabic poetry, which is examined in the above-mentioned work, seems to find repeated use in the Arabic poetic output between the fifties and the seventies.

With the exception of Ustūrat al-Mawt wa'l-Inbi'āth, there has not been, as far as I know, an exclusive and comprehensive study devoted to tracing and examining the development of the concept of death in modern Arabic poetry in the period from the early decades of the twentieth century up to the seventies. I am hoping that this study will go some way towards filling this gap, and that in the process of doing so it will throw some added light on various other developments in modern Arabic poetry.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

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- (2) Al-'Aqqād, 'Abbās Maḥmūd, Shu'arā' Miṣr wa Bī'ātuhum, Cairo, 1950, p.4, (Shu'arā'); Ḥusayn, Ṭāha, al-Majmū'a al-Kāmila li Mu'allafāt Ṭāha Ḥusayn, Beirut, 1973, vol:XII, p.366, (Majmū'a); Dayf, Shawqī, al-Abab al-'Arabī al-Mu'aṣir fī Miṣr, Cairo, 1961, p.41, (Adab)
- (3) Haywood, John A, Modern Arabic Literature, London, 1971, Chap. I,II, (Haywood); al-Jundī, Anwar, al-Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Mu'aṣir, Cairo, (n.d), p.7
- (4) Jayyūsī, Salmā Khaḍrā, Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry, Leiden, 1977, vol:I, p.27, (Trends)
- (5) Gibb, H.A.R, "Studies In Contemporary Arabic Literature", Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, London, 1926-28, vol:IV, p.748
- (6) Ibid, p.742
- (7) Ibid, p.760
- (8) Trends, I, p.27
- (9) Haywood, p.71
- (10) The period of decline is usually considered to start with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad. See: Nicholson, R.A, A Literary History of the Arabs, Cambridge, 1953, p.444
- (11) An Anthology, p.VII
- (12) Trends, I, p.25
- (13) Ibid, p.37
- (14) Shu'arā', p.11,12 ; An Anthology, p.X; Badawī, M.M, A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge, 1975, p.14, (Critical Introduction)
- (15) Shu'arā', p.12; Nashāwī, Naṣīb, al-Madāris al-Adabiyya fī al-Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Mu'aṣir, Damascus, 1980, p.51, (Madāris);

- Dusūqī, A, Jamā'at Apollo wa Atharuha fī'l-Shi'r al-Ḥadīth, Cairo, 1960, p.29
- (16) Dīwān Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī, ed:al-Jārim, 'Alī and Shafīq, Muḥammad, Cairo, 1971, see for example: vol: I, p.237-9, vol:II, p.81-5, 117-8
- (17) Adab, p.89
- (18) An Anthology, p.XI
- (19) Naimy, Mīkhā'īl, al-Ghirbāl, Beirut, 1964, see his articles "al-Ḥubāhīb" and "l-Durra al-Shawqiyya"; 'Abbūd, Mārūn, Alā' al-Miḥakk, Beirut, 1946, see his articles "Imārat'l-Shi'r" p.16-26 and "al-Shu'arā'", p.27-33
- (20) Dayf, Shawqī, Shawqī Shā'ir al-'Aṣr al-Ḥadīth, Cairo, 1953, p.90,1
- (21) Critical Introduction, p.14
- (22) 'Abbūd, Mārūn, Fī'l-Mukhtabar, Beirut, 1970, the essay "al-Ma'raka al-Adabiyya fī Miṣr", p.5-10
- (23) Trends, II, p.530
- (24) Al-Malā'ika, Nāzik, Qaḍāyā al-Shi'r al-Mu'āṣir, Beirut, 1974, (Qaḍāyā), see the article "al-Shi'r wa al-Mawt", p.294-305 ; Mūsā, Munīf, al-Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Ḥadīth fī Lubnān, Beirut, 1980, see the chapter entitled "al-Mawt fī Shi'r al-Shu'arā'al-Judud" p.74-97 ; Badawī, M.M, "al-Taqrīr wa'l-Īḥā' fī shi'r'l-Shābbī", Dirāsāt 'An'l-Shābbī, ed: Kerrū, Abū al-Qāsim.M , Tunis, 1966,p.108-111
- (25) Sharaf , 'Abd al-'Azīz, al-Ru'yā al-Ibdā'iyya fī Shi'r al-Hamsharī, Silsilat Iqra' , Cairo, 1980, p.119 ; Mas'ūd, Ḥabīb, Gibrān Ḥayyan wa Maytan, Beirut, 1966, p.137-140, 337-341, (Gibrān Ḥayyan) ; Kerrū, A.M, al-Shābbī Ḥayātuhu wa shi'ruh, Beirut, 1960, p.37, (al-Shābbī Ḥayātuhu)
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CHAPTER I

THE NEO-CLASSICAL ELEGY AND ITS MAIN FEATURES

I. CLASSICAL INFLUENCES ON THE ELEGY IN MODERN TIMES

A survey of the poetry of the Arab neo-classicists and the various themes they treated may lead one to notice that the conventional elegy seems to be the only poetic category (Ar. gharad, pl. aghrād) in which the concept of death was treated. This means that the neo-classical elegy appeared to be the only poetic category which displays the various aspects of an experience of death and the poets' outlook on such an experience.

One may understand that the neo-classicists were inclined to imitate the classical and medi^eval poets with a view to reviving Arabic poetry after the era of decline. Being overwhelmed by the impact of the classical poetic conventions and themes, the neo-classicists seemed to have faithfully followed the steps of their predecessors, aspiring to emulate what they

considered to be an example of excellence. The conventional elegy, one may notice, was among the classical categories which had inspired the neo-classicists, and was even adopted by them in its complete form. Thus the old basic features of the classical and medieval elegy seem to be retained in modern times including the imagery, the idioms, the conventional style and outlook.

Surveying the genesis of the elegy in the pre-Islamic period, one may notice that the early examples of the elegy had gradually moved through the phase of primitiveness before attaining a mature stage of development (1). One can, however, perceive the complete framework of the genre in that early phase by referring to the representative elegy works of the well-known pre-Islamic poets who, one may add, seemed to have established the final form of the elegy, and presented it as the main poetic category which dealt with the phenomenon of death. The role of the elegy, as those poets understood it, consisted in displaying their grievous reaction to the death of someone known to them with great sincerity and spontaneity. It is, perhaps, important while talking about the early examples of the pre-Islamic elegy to consider the particular circumstances of a life governed by certain conventions and customs. In pre-Islamic times, the incident of death and the relevant burial ceremonies were usually accompanied ~~with~~ ^{by} particular rituals which were constantly practised and highly

appreciated by people at the time (2). Bearing in mind this particular background, one may say that an elegy written by a poet living in such social and cultural circumstances normally tended to portray the conventional ways of life and to conform to established literary expressions and forms. One can notice that the individual experiences of the death of dear relatives are quite vividly reflected in the pre-Islamic elegies, and approached a good degree of genuineness in the way they mirrored the spirit of the age (3). The characteristic elements of the pre-Islamic elegy may best be deduced from the representative examples of the genre such as the elegies of al-Khansā' (died 26/646) on her two brothers Ṣakhr and Mu'āwiya (4), the elegies of Abū Dhu'ayb al-Hudhalī (died 28/649) on his sons (5), and Labīd's elegies (died 40/660) on his brother Arbad (6). These examples may likewise give a clear notion about the principal rules which had been regarded as the general basis of the conventional elegy.

It is obvious that the pre-Islamic elegy with its various features and framework seems to have remained the standard norm throughout the subsequent medieval era, and up to the late compositions of the neo-classicists in the early decades of the twentieth century. This means that, despite the long period which separated the classical age from modern times, the genre seems to have remained as the main literary form through which the neo-classicists expressed their feelings

and views about death. They do not seem to have freed their attempts from the dominant framework and conventions of the inherited old elegy. The constant tendency by neo-classical poets to emulate classical examples in order to achieve the standards of their predecessors, may answer the question as to why the elegy in modern times remained the sole form of expression in which the concept of death was treated.

The striking similarities in theme and structure between the compositions of the classicists and the compositions of neo-classicists will be pointed out in the course of the following sections. This may shed light on the automatic resort to the classical poetic heritage on the part of the neo-classicists, and it may help to answer the following questions:

- 1- How far did the neo-classicists succeed in their attempts to emulate the classical elegy ?
- 2- To what extent were the neo-classicists, while writing elegies, able to depict their immediate experiences or reflect their own time and milieu ?
- 3- Did the neo-classicists add any new dimensions to the elegy genre or contribute to modernizing it in any form ?

II. DEATH VICTORIOUS AND LIFE EPHEMERAL

Examining the neo-classicists' outlook on the phenomenon of death in their elegy works, one may notice the following two aspects. First, death was considered as the antithesis of life. That is to say, the two phenomena death and life were pictured as not integrated phenomena, nor capable of being viewed in one light, or as complementary to each other. This betrays an unmistakable awareness of an aspect of dualism between life and death. No wonder, one may add, that death appeared with the characteristic of independence and exclusiveness which made of it a phenomenon that contradicts life and that can never be in harmony with it. Second, death was conceived of as an inexorable power that totally controls the destinies of all existence. Likewise, death was also viewed as a cruel will manipulated by evil elements which aim at dominating the living, and triumph over their weaknesses by annihilating them. Since death is depicted as endowed with such cruel dominion and sway, life, as a consequence, is pictured as being under the sway of its authoritative power, and is viewed as an ephemeral phenomenon which is devoid of permanence, glory and worth.

This particular perception of death and life perhaps

prepared the neo-classical elegy to be a repetitive timeworn poetic form which constantly portrays death as an inexorable victorious power, while life is pictured as its helpless victim which can never hope for anything other than defeat. This is well illustrated by Ruṣāfī who, while meditating man's frailty before death, presents the following picture:

هذى جيوش الردى في الناس زاحفة	لكنهن بلا نقع و لا لجب
بين الدواء و بين الداء معترك	فيه قضى ربنا للداء بالغلب
و الناس فيه عتاد للحمام فلا	ينجون من عطب الا الى عطب (7)*

Here is the army of death advancing towards people
But without raising dust or making any clamour.
There is a fight between the malady and the cure
In which the victory for the malady is ordained by God.
People are but material for death
They are saved from one form of ruin,
Only to fall victim to another.

Here Ruṣāfī seems to treat a particular aspect which is almost characteristic in the compositions of the neo-classicists. It is the aspect of the conflict between death and life which the poet sees as inevitable as long as these two phenomena are totally opposed and pictured as contradictory to each other.

* These verses cited from an elegy written on the occasion of Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī's death, a well-known Iraqi scholar.

In trying to portray this eternal conflict, Ruṣāfī resorts to the image of a battle in which death not only gains the upper hand, but also dominates the lives of all beings by means of governing their destiny. On the other hand the living in this battle represent the weak side whose lot is always and inevitably surrender and defeat. Shawqī's elegies, likewise, almost tend to portray the same imagery, in which the same severe conflict rages between death and life, and suggesting the inevitable victory of death over life. Elegizing his grandmother, Shawqī says:

مقاصد للحسام و للقناة	هي الدنيا قتال نحن فيه
كما دفع الجان الى الشبات	و كل الناس مدفوع اليه
بسم من يد المقدورات (8)	نرّوع ما نرّوع ثم نرمى

Life is but a battle
In which we become targets for swords and lances.
Everybody has been forcibly driven into this struggle
As a coward is driven to withstand (what he cannot avoid).
We are frightened and horrified, until we are at last
Pierced by an arrow of the inevitable fate.

And as death always gains the upper hand, the inevitable result has to be expected, as Shawqī concludes in the following verse from an elegy written on the occasion of the death of the vice-president of the Egyptian National Party, Muḥammad Farīd:

كل حيّ الى المنية غادى تتوالى الركاب والموت حادى (9)

Every living being will proceed towards death
The caravans follow each other,
And death is the leader.

What one does not fail to notice is that the notion of the unbounded power of death on the one hand, and the weak ephemeral essence of life on the other seems to be strongly influenced by the classical and medieval works which were constantly viewed as examples to be emulated by the neo-classicists. Comparing the preceding verses with their sources of inspiration may illuminate this point, and show to what extent the neo-classicists drew on classical and medieval examples. Some of the foremost medieval poets such as Abū al-‘Atāhiya 130(748)-210 (825), Abū Tammām 190 (806)-232 (846) and Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī 363 (973)-449 (1058) seem to have established the conventional view of death and its inexorable power, as they persistently pictured death in their compositions as the ultimate victor. This is, however, the main aspect of Abū al-Atāhiya's thought in particular. His poetry is permeated by a sense of desperation which found its fullest expression in the theme of asceticism. Here is a fragment of Abū al-Atāhiya's view of death:

أنت في دار ترى الموت فيها مستشيظا قد أذل الرقابا (10)

(O man), you are in a land
In which you keep witnessing the rage of death
Dominating people's will

Likewise, Abū Tammām seems to believe that:

فيا (غالب) لا غالب لرزية بل الموت لا شك الذى هو غالب (11)*

O "Ghālib", nothing defeats death.
Death alone is the ultimate victor.

Ma'arrī, in his turn, wrote this famous verse, seemingly, to
reveal the purport of his outlook on life and the living:

ما ح هذى قبورنا تملأ الردح بأين القبور من عهد عاد؟ (12)

O friend, here are our graves filling every expanse
(Can you tell) where are the graves since the time of 'Ād?*

Coupled with the notion of the inexorable power of death is
the idea that death works incessantly to fulfil its course. It
is a wheel that never stops to rotate^{ihg}. This is perhaps made

* It is important to note the paronomasia involved in this
verse in the name of the person (Ghālib al-Sa'dī) and the
epithet which follows it.

** 'Ād, a pre-Islamic tribe referred to in the Quran. See for
example: Sūrat Fuṣṣilat, verses xiii, xv and Sūrat al-Ḥāqqa,
verse vi

clear by Shawqī who resorts to the universally familiar metaphor of death as a cup which all will have to drink:

من ذاقها خلع العذار	كأس على الدنيا تدار
فأنا ونى قام النهار	الليل قوام بها
تدم الطوال ولا القطار (13)	وحبا بها الأعمار لم

It (death) is a cup that will be given to every one.
Whoever tastes it will throw off all restraint.
Night assiduously passes it round
And when night is overtaken by fatigue,
The day takes over.
Conferring it as his gifts, so that the aged and the
young, alike, do not last.

These lines of Shawqī unmistakably echo another verse by Abū Tammām who says:

جفّ دّر الدنيا فقد أصبحت تك تال أرواحنا بنير حساب (14)

All that accrues to the world has dried up,
And now it preys upon human lives without count.

The particular understanding of the neo-classicists of the non-stop conflict between death and life prompt one to attempt a further examination of their view about the position of man in this conflict, and the attitude he takes before the

"inexorable power" of death. One cannot perhaps mistake the stereotyped view of the neo-classicists of the human being who almost faces his inevitable fate helplessly. It is an attitude that often betrays a passive response implying little more than weakness and frailty. These signs of human weakness before death were obviously seen as inherent characteristics of human nature, since man could not overcome the inevitable nor preserve an everlasting life. The power of death was simply viewed as supreme and inexorable. On the other hand the poets present the image of man whose life is short and evanescent, and whose abilities amount to nothing but utter helplessness. It is, one might say a distinct neo-classical thought based on two basic aspects, the threat of death on the one hand, and man's fear and total helplessness on the other. The passive reaction on man's side to such a threat, which is often portrayed by the neo-classicists in their elegiac works, may illuminate the overall picture of their understanding of death, which amounts to the belief that death is the ultimate existential tragedy. This is because its destructive power always triumphs over the living and turns the earth to desolation. And in the end, the conclusions drawn are well exemplified by verses like the following cited from Ruṣāfī's poetry:

كل وجه الأرض للخلق قبور خفف الوطء على تلك المدور

والعيون النجل منها والشغور انما أنت ستفنى مثلما
قد فنوا و الموت دامى الظفر (15)*

All the surface of the earth is but graves for people
So tread gently on those chests, eyes and mouths.
For you will perish like them.
And death outlives all with its bloody talons.

This, one might say, is a typical neo-classical depiction which asserts that there is no possible way for a living being to escape the destructive power of death, for it creeps unrelentingly towards him. And sooner or later death will dispose of the lives of all living beings. Overwhelmed by this stereotyped image of death, Shawqī seems to find it convenient to make these two assertions in the context of two of his elegies:

أليس الحق أن العيش فان و أن الحي غايته الممات ؟ (16)**

* One can easily discern the similarity between these verses and Ma'arri's well-known pronouncement:

خفف الوطء ما أظن أديم ال أرض الآمن هذه الأجساد
سر ان اسطعت في الهواء رويدا لا اختيا لا على رفات العباد

Tread lightly,
For the surface of the earth is nothing but the bodies
of the dead.
Walk if you can on the air gently
Not haughtily upon the remains of people.

**This verse is cited from an elegy written on the occasion of Riyād Pash's death, who was the Prime Minister of Egypt between 1879-1891.

The Death
(1)

Is it not true that life is evanescent?
And that the destiny of the living is death?

And:

و كل أخى عيشوا ان طال عيشه تراب لعمر الموت وابن تراب (17)*

Every human being, even if his life should seem long,
Is but dust born out of dust.

Inasmuch as the compositions of the neo-classicists display the unbounded power of death, they betray the tendency to deal with life as solely and totally passive, or as a mere vehicle of dissolution and decay. This is an attitude which overlooks completely the essence of goodness in life, and evokes unmistakable doubt as to its value or worth. Whenever life itself is described in their compositions, it emerges depicted with contempt and disdain. In Ruṣāfī's words:

تعست هذه الحياة وان كانت لعمرى خلابة حساسة (18)**

* From an elegy dedicated to Ya'qūb Ṣarrūf, the founder of the Egyptian newspaper al-Muqtaṭif, who died in 1928.

** From an elegy written on the occasion of Muḥammad Maḥdī al-Khālīṣī's death in 1925.

How miserable this life is
Even though it is enticing and fascinating.

Shawqī likewise sees that:

طبعت من السم الحياة طعامها و شرابها و هواؤها المتنشق
والناس بين بطيئتها و زعافها لا يعلمون بأى سميها سقوا (19)*

Life in essence is nothing but poison
In its food and drink and the air we breathe.
And people do not know from which poison
They have been given to drink:
The slow or the rapidly killing one.

One can perhaps compile a whole anthology of classical and medieval examples of verse which disparage life and picture it as a source of misery and suffering, an aspect which has led people to speak of the philosophical desperation of the Arab. The following are some representative pronouncements of Abū al-‘Atāhiya and Ma‘arrī whose influence continued to be echoed in neo-classical works:

هي دنيا كحية تنفث السم وان حية بلمسها لانت (20)

* From an elegy dedicated to Fawzi al-Ghazzī, one of the Syrian national leaders in the twenties of this century.

Life is like a poisonous snake
Despite its smooth touch.

لا تعظم الدنيا فان جميع ما فيها صغير لو علمت حقير (21)

Do not glorify life,
For, as you know, all that there is in it
Is paltry and contemptible.

تعب كلها الحياة فما أعبـ جبالاً من راغب في ازدياد (22)

Life is a continuous harsh struggle.
I wonder why people ever wish to live longer!

And:

دنيا كتحذو بالمسا	فر والمقيم جمالها
نقصت مسرتها فما	يجد السعيد كمالها
طلقتها مذمومة	حين ابتليت خصالها (23)

The caravans of life urge on
The travellers and the non-travellers.
Life's happiness is never complete,
(For even) the happy person does not realize
unblemished happiness.
I divorced her (life) when I experienced her ways
and manners.

The previous illustrations from medieval poetry may draw one's attention to the fact that the neo-classicists were seemingly prepared to assimilate the inherited viewpoint about the insignificance of life in its entirety, and therefore tried in various contexts to give further dimensions to the pessimistic attitude of their forbears. In some of the works of the neo-classicists one notices that their depiction not only portrays gloomy images of life, but also evokes destructive philosophical views about the position of man in existence. Man, according to their pessimistic philosophy, is a fleeting shadow devoid of the attributes of choice and will. He is a frail and paltry being who is constantly threatened by factors of decay, until, in the end, he turns to nothingness. This particular view of man is almost implicit in the following image of him presented by Ruṣāfī:

ملوحة أغصانها بالسمائم	ما المرء إلا دوحة في تنوفة
و عيدانها بين النيوب العواجم	لها ورق قد جفّ إلا أقسله
و تقلعها إحدى الرياح الهواجم (24)	و لا بد أن تجتث يوماً جذورها

Man is a tree in a desert
 Hot winds blow at its branches.
 Its leaves become dry, except for a few of them
 And its branches are gnawed at by the elements (lit. sharp teeth).
 This tree will inevitably be uprooted one day,
 And one of the assailing winds will carry it away.

This is the metaphorical expression of Ruṣāfī's view of life and the living. This view seems to be reiterated by the following two verses by Shawqī, taken from different elegies, but with greater focus on the aspect of life's temporariness:

ما الليالي الأقصار ولا الدت يا سوى ما رأيت أحلام نائم (25)*

Nights are rather short.
And life is but a sleeper's dream.

ما أنت يا دنيا ؟ أرويا نائم أم ليل عرس أم بساط سلاف ؟ (26)**

What are you life? Are you a sleeper's dream?
Or a wedding night?
Or a (temporary) revelling party?***

One may trace various lines of thought which persist in picturing life as ephemeral and as being simply a dream or

*This verse is cited from an elegy dedicated to al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, the king of Ḥijāz who died in 1931.

** From an elegy written on the occasion of the death of the poet and magistrate Ismāʿil Ṣabrī in 1923.

*** Shawqī's metaphor in the last hemistich of this verse would be awkward if translated literally, (i.e. carpet spread with the choicest wines).

the clamour of a wedding night that passes soon, or a temporary ecstasy. This particular imagery, which almost evokes desperation, tends to remind man that he has little to expect except frustration and nothingness. Thus the idea is reiterated that there is no reason to be deluded by the passing glitter which might deceive the sight. Shawqī says elegizing Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf*:

وَأَرْضُكَ عَمْرَانُ وَشَيْكَ خَرَابُ	سَمَاؤُكَ يَا دُنْيَا خَدَاعُ سَرَابُ
قِيَامُ ضَبَاعٍ أَوْ قَعُودُ نَثَابُ	وَمَا أَنْتَ إِلَّا جِيْفَةٌ طَالَ حَوْلُهَا
وَمَرُّوا رُكْبَابًا فِي غِبَارِ رُكْبَابِ	قَعَدْتُ مِنَ الْأَطْلَعَانِ فِي مَقْطَعِ السَّرَى
وَمَالُوا فَلَمْ تَسْتَوْحِشْ لَغِيَابِ	أَقَامُوا فَلَمْ يُؤْنِسْكَ حَاضِرُ صَحْبَةٍ
يَرَى الْجَيْشُ خَلْقًا هَيْنًا كَذِبَابُ (27)**	تَسْوِقِينَ لِلْمَوْتِ الْبَنِينَ كَقَاثِدِ

O life, your horizon (lit.sky) is as deceptive
As a mirage.
And your earth is a prosperity which is on the

* See note p.26 above.

** These lines offer a close parallel to Abū al-ʿAtāhiya's verses:

فَكُلُّكُمْ يَمِيرُ إِلَى تَبَابِ	لِدُوا لِلْمَوْتِ وَابْنُوا لِلْخَرَابِ
نَصِيرُكُمْ كَمَا خَلَقْنَا مِنْ تَرَابِ	لِمَنْ نَبْنَى وَنَحْنُ إِلَى تَرَابِ

Get sons of death, build houses for decay
All, all, ye wend annihilation's way.
For whom build we, who must ourselves return
Into our native element of clay?

Translated by: Nicholson, R.A, A Literary History of the Arabs,
London, 1907, p.299

point of destruction.
You are but a corpse with hyenas and wolves
milling around it.
You crouch at the cross-road
While the caravans pass by one after another
And disappear each one in the dust raised by the other.
Neither their temporary company interests you,
Nor their absence disturbs you.
You guide your sons to death like a commander
Who views his men as insignificant flies.

This frustrated approach towards life does not only link life with dreadful corruption, but also shows that life does not deserve to be cherished or glorified. For it is only a precarious temporary refuge which does not guarantee man's safety nor sustain his perpetuity.

Trying to assess the preceding treatment and views of the concept of death in neo-classical poetry, one notices that these attempts were apparently inspired by features which are classical and medieval in their origin. The basic ideas they revealed, the principles and perceptions about death and life were formed in keeping with their sources of inspiration. It is obvious that the ready-made picture of death in classical and medieval poetry seems to have persisted as the main feature in neo-classical compositions. For the image of death remains as it was, revealing death as a dominant inexorable power observed through a totally pessimistic viewpoint. This spontaneous or reflex subordination of the neo-classical poets to the spell which the classicists of their language exercised on them, made it difficult for these

poets to free their attempts from the distinctive stamp and influence of their predecessors.

As a matter of fact, death is still presented in neo-classical elegiac works as a gigantic powerful will associated with hostility and evil. It is, likewise, an aggressive force which seems to be essentially wicked, for it constantly employs its power for the purposes of annihilation and destruction. Moreover, death appears with the features of a blind and chaotic will which is neither organized nor logical.

On the other hand, life appears or is described as insignificant and trivial. This is because, as the neo-classicists revealed, it does not possess the quality of permanence, nor has the ability to safeguard or maintain man's contentment and safety. Consequently the immediate reaction to such a state of desperation and apathy was manifested in neglecting the virtues of life and doubting its goodness and glory.* The purport of this view, one may add, consists in stressing the dualism of life and death. No wonder, therefore, that the neo-classicists persist in tackling each phenomenon exclusively by means of aggrandizing the power of death and belittling the worth of life. In other words, the two concepts had been obviously perceived as two antipodes which can neither be integrated nor lend themselves to the possibility of

* This notion, as it is hoped that the next chapter will show, is further developed in the works of the romanticists.

constituting one complementary phenomenon. On the contrary they sustain a constant and never-ending conflict. This conventional viewpoint of the neo-classicists, one may suggest, indicates a noticeable negligence of any existential unity in creation. It, likewise, overlooks the consideration that the phenomena of life and death may participate equally in maintaining a complete and constant cycle which should preserve the continuity of existence.*

* * * * *

* Such an approach becomes prominent in the works of the romanticists.

III. THE ELEGY RESTRICTED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE DEATH OF INDIVIDUALS

In his book al-‘Umda fī Mahāsin ‘l-Shi‘r, Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 390 (1000) / 463 (1070-1)*states that:

قواعد الشعر أربع : الرغبة ، والرغبة ، والطرب ، والغضب .
فمع الرغبة يكون المدح والشكر ، ومع الرغبة يكون الاعتذار
والاستعطاف ، ومع الطرب يكون الشوق ورقة النسيب ، ومع
الغضب يكون الهجاء والتوعد والعتاب الموجع . (28)

Poetry is based on four principles: desire, fear, rapture and fury. Desire is associated with the genre of eulogy and the expression of gratitude, fear invokes poems of apology and attempts to arouse sympathy, whereas rapture leads to expressions of longing and love poetry, and anger stimulates satire, threats and effective reprimand.

Ibn Rashīq also quotes the following brief anecdote:

‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān is said to have addressed the following question to Arṭa b. Suhayya:

أتقول الشعر اليوم ؟ فقال : والله ما أطرب ولا أغضب ولا
أشرب ولا أرغب . وإنما يجيء الشعر عند احداهن . (29)

*Abū ‘Alī Ḥasan b. Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, one of the most illustrious men of letters of Ifrīqiya, born at M’sila (Masīla= Muḥammadiyya) in the region of Constantine. Wishing to perfect his knowledge and to take advantage of his poetic gifts, Ibn Rashīq went to Qayrawān, then the capital of Ifrīqiya and a flourishing centre of culture, in 406/1015-6. In 410/1019, he became court poet to al-Mu‘izz. He is the poet most skilled in felicitously applying the theories and rules of Arabic poetry,=

"Do you compose poetry these days?" said
Abd al-Malik b. Marwān addressing Ibn
Suhayya. "I am not experiencing any joy
or anger, nor am I drinking or experienc-
ing any desire, and writing poetry is
often stimulated by one of these", answer-
ed Ibn Suhayya.

only

These are fragments of the classical theory of poetry, based primarily on a particular understanding of emotions and their role in stimulating poetic creativity. This theory which was variably presented and discussed by classical and medieval critics, seems to have left its distinct mark on the poetic output of that time, or at least constituted the prevailing guideline or criterion. Examining the implication of the above quotations, one can notice the connection being made between poetic creativity and the specific moral and mental attitudes from which a particular subject or theme of poetry stems. Poetic inspiration, one may understand, was seen to be motivated exclusively by incidental events and immediate emotions rather than derived from a sophisticated intellectual outlook or deliberate meditation. This attitude is perhaps behind the unmistakable tendency of dividing and even subdividing poetic themes (aghrād 'l-shi'r) according to the various moral and mental attitudes that the poet goes through in the process of his creation. One may become aware that most of the poetic works of the classical and medieval eras seem to have been meticulous depictions concerned with record-

so expertly expounded in his major work, al-ʿUmda, which remains the "basic" work for this kind of poetics."

The Encyclopaedia of Islam, III, London, 1971, p.903-904.

ing contemporaneous events and incidents or important occasions in daily life. Therefore a strong connection between the process of a poem and its motive (the occasion) had been established, and this seemed to constitute the validity of the literary mood.

The elegy was not an exception. It was, likewise, a genre which was motivated by an occasion, and this was the event of death. The death which the elegy dealt with since its earliest phase, one may notice, was often viewed as an unexpected or a sudden incident, an incident which happened to a particular person, at a particular time and within a set of particular circumstances and milieu. Death, in this respect, had been given the property of an isolated and independent incident. In other words, the focus is, primarily, on the death of a person or persons in particular. No wonder therefore that the elegy became a process of describing the sad event of the death of an individual and the agonizing response it creates.

Such characteristics or features, one must add, seem not only to have dominated the theme in the early periods but have continued to be the prevalent features of the elegy up to the modern times. For the tendency to deal with death as an independent event relating to an individual seems to persist in neo-classical elegy works. This obviously indicates a classical influence, and especially the influence of the conventional poetic theories which succeeded in dictating

and totally imposing their principles throughout successive phases of the development of Arabic poetry, that is to say from the early classical period al-‘Asr al-Jāhili down to the beginnings of neo-classicism at the turn of the twentieth century. Among these theoretical principles which prevailed is the inclination to write poetry within the framework of specified, separate and exclusive themes or categories of poetry, such as the classical and medieval critics had specified. Ibn Rashīq in al-‘Umda tells us, for example that:

قال بعض العلماء : بني الشعر على أربعة أركان
وهي : المدح والهجاء والنسيب والرشاء . (30)

Some scholars say that, poetry is based on four pillars, (or major constituents):
eulogy, satire, love poetry and elegy.

And that:

يجمع أصناف الشعر أربعة : المدح والهجاء والحكمة
واللهو . ثم يتفرع من كل صنف من ذلك فنون ، فيكون
من المدح المراثي والافتخار والشكر ، و يكون من
الهجاء الذم والعتاب والاستبطاء ، و يكون من الحكمة
الأمثال والتزهيد والمواعظ ، و يكون من اللهو الغزل
والطرد و صفة الخمر والمخمور . (31)

The major constituents of poetry are: eulogy, satire, wisdom, and diversion. From every one of these major constituents other forms branch out. Eulogy produces elegy, vainglorious poetry and expressions of gratitude; satire provokes derogation and reprimand; and from wisdom arise proverbs, asceticism and exhortation; whereas diversion stimulates love poems and depictions of riding, hunting and drinking.

To fulfil the rules of prosody, as Ibn Rashīq points out, the poet had to maintain the independence of every genre, that is to say sustain the particular distinction of each theme he treated. One may perceive to what extent this criterion propagated the principle of a division or, one might say, partition of the literary mood, and almost disregarded the wholeness of human perceptions and experiences. Examining the impact of this conventional criterion on the elegy among the neo-classicists, one may notice the total conformity to the rules it stipulates. The sharp distinction between the poetic themes, which the neo-classicists understood as a basic rule, seemed to be faithfully adhered to, and persists in the bulk of their poetry. No wonder therefore that they conceived of the elegy as a theme which deals exclusively with one person's death and does not allow the inclusion of further insights into the experience of death as a constituent of life itself or as a universal existential experience.

A survey of the elegies written by the neo-classicists may bring to light the above mentioned prevailing perception of .

the genre. It is a genre which seems to be motivated primarily by incidents of death occurring regularly from time to time. Moreover, the purpose of the poet writing the elegy was to fulfil an inevitable and practically specified duty towards the particular person who dies (32). In other words if the motive, which is the incident of death, occurs, an elegy is written, otherwise the theme may be neglected and writing on death would be irrelevant. A commentary by ʿIlyā al-Ḥawī may throw light on this standpoint of the neo-classicists. Ḥawī say:

The deficiency of these poets consists in the fact that, they used to be motivated by (specific) incidents and not by fundamental concepts. They did not realize that the (casual) event itself could be a means for provoking or occasioning a far-reaching experience (33).

What makes all this seem obvious is that all the elegies written by the neo-classicists appear invariably under titles such as the following:

(و قال يرثي فلان . . . و قد توفي سنة كذا . . .)

"He said elegizing so-and-so (a name mentioned) who died on such and such a date".

This meticulous reference to names and dates implies that

the elegy is written at a particular time, and on the occasion of the death of a particular person. This is however the only scope in which an experience of death is tackled, as far as these poets understood the phenomenon of death as merely an occasional event that casually needs to be recorded or dealt with. Such a limited treatment, one may say, would certainly minimize the dimensions of the experience of death and overlook its universality and prevalence as an existential issue. The notion of the generality or broadness of the experience of death seemed to be rarely regarded or considered in neo-classical works. Hāwī comments:

all those (elegies) which had been devoted to extolling particular persons and recording their biographies might have been embodied within the matrix of one comprehensive poem with several parts that might encompass a treatment of the experience of death on a universal human level, and treating of its various aspects (34).

Another relevant observation on the elegies written by neo-classicists draws attention to the fact that these elegies, in general, seem to have dealt exclusively with the "dead" and not with "death" as a concept. The elegy in this respect turns to be a process devoted primarily to extolling the attributes of the dead person or his accomplishments and merits. Shawqī and Muṭrān, one may assert, are among the

representative neo-classical poets who show considerable adherence to the duty of elegizing notable men of letters, or in other words exercising their eloquence by extolling the virtues and deeds of these notables. What follows are two examples in point taken, respectively, from two elegies by Shawqī and Muṭrān:

أودى الردى بمهذب لا تنتهي الآليه شمائل الرؤساء
صافي الأديم أغرأ بلج لم يزد في الشيب غير جلاله و رواه
عفا السرائر والملاحظ والخطا نزه الخلق طاهر الأهواء (35)*

Death has cut off the life of a well-mannered man,
Whose attributes are but the attributes of leaders.
He had bright and handsome features,
Grey hair did not affect his appearance,
But simply enhanced his noble looks and grace.
His soul was chaste, and so was his deportment in life.
His manners were virtuous, so were all his desires.

And:

قد مات رجب الصدر ، رجب العقل ، رجب الراحة ، الغوث ، الملا ، الأيد
مات النقي خفاؤه و ظهوره مات الوفي مغيبه و المشهد (36)**

* From an elegy dedicated to Muṣṭafā Fahmī, the Egyptian prime minister and politician in the twenties.

** From an elegy written on the occasion of Nīqolā Tomā's death, known as a scholar.

The man who was broad-minded, generous and
helpful, has died.
He who was the shelter of the people in need
and the supporter of the helpless.
He has died, (that man) who was honest in secret and
appearance.
Who was loyal in his presence and absence.

It is noticeable, that the depiction of the dead is often assessed within a framework of praise. This praise, one may add, is usually dedicated to a certain class of people who *used to occupy* important social or political positions*. In this respect, the elegy seems to betray class consciousness and discrimination**. A quick survey of the titles of the elegies of Shawqī, Ruṣāfī or Muṭrān, for example, may provide one with a list of well-known persons and pioneers who were prominent in society in their day in the fields of politics, literature, science etc.. (37). These figures, likewise, were mostly distinguished with a particular status which was highly regarded. The inclination to devote elegies to these particular figures seemed to be enhanced by the assumption

* There are few exceptions to this general rule in elegies written on the death of relatives and friends.

** Apropos of this Shawqī Dayf makes the following remark in his book Shawqī Shā'ir al-'Asr al-Hadīth, p.155:

كان شوقي يدخل عناصر أخرى في مراثيه . . . فإذا كان الميت عالماً
عرض للنهضة العلمية وقيمتها في حياة الأمم ، وإذا كان وزيراً عرض
للشئون السياسية والوطنية ، وإذا كان قاضياً عرض للقضاء ونزاهته .

that the elegy is intended for the purpose of praise, but with the simple difference that the person who is praised in an elegy is no longer alive. A glimpse at Ibn Rashīq's criterion of what constitutes rithā' may appear relevant and enlightening in this context. Ibn Rashīq says:

و ليس بين الرثاء والمدح فرق إلا أنه يخلط بالرثاء شيء
يدل على أن المقصود به ميت مثل (كان) أو
(عدنا به كيت وكيت) وما يشاكل هذا ليعلم أنه
ميت . (38)

There is no distinction between the elegy and the eulogy except that, in the elegy a stylistic device helps to indicate that the person in question is dead, like: (he was) or (we missed such and such in him) and something similar to make clear that the person is dead.

The aspect of praise in the elegy, therefore, seems to have turned it into a detailed statement that merely endeavours to record the dead person's deeds as well as some biographical data about him. This aspect is illustrated here by the following verses from an elegy by Ruṣāfī elegizing al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī the king of Hijāz:

و جدد للعروبة غرس مجد قديم كان كالعذق التريك
و أحدث نهضة في العرب هزت جنوب الأرض كالريح السبوك
و أثبت بالسيوف لهم حقوقا مؤيدة بكل دم سفيك (39)

He restored the ancient glory of the Arabs
Which was like an abandoned plant.
He animated the Arab renaissance that
Spread throughout the expanses like a blowing wind.
And, by a forceful struggle (lit. a struggle supported
by bloodshed),
He managed to realize his people's rights.

As another device of praising the dead person, the poet,
if he does not directly record the dead man's accomplish-
ments, laments over the consequences of his loss. This is
illustrated again by the following two verses from another
elegy by Ruṣāfī elegizing his teacher Maḥmūd Shukrī al-
Alūsī:

لَمَنْ تَرَكْتَ فَنُونَ الْعِلْمِ وَالْأَدَبِ أَمَّا خَشِيتُ عَلَيْهَا مِنْ يَدِ الْعَطَبِ
تِلْكَ الْمَدَارِسُ أَوْحَشَتْهَا فَغَدَتْ خَلُّوا مِنَ الدَّرْسِ وَالطَّلَابِ وَالْكَتَبِ (40)

To whom did you abandon the educational and
the cultural pursuits?
Did you have no fear that decline might sweep over them?
Here are the institutions of learning (after your death)
Left empty of students, of books and of endeavour.

Shawqī also expresses his regret that so many benefits and
services are no more to be secured since the person who used
to offer them had died. He says elegizing his friend Husayn
Shīrīn who died in 1931:

أبدا يراه الله في غلس الدجى في صحن مسجده و حول كتابه
و يرى اليتامى لأئذين بظلمه و يرى الأراامل يعتصمن ببابه
و يراه قد أدى الحقوق جميعها لم ينس منها غير حق شبابه (41)

God always sees him in the darkness of the night
Persevering in prayer and in phrasing the Quran.
He (God) sees the orphans and the widows always at his door,
Always seeking help and shelter.
He (God) sees him fulfilling the dues and rights of others,
And forgetting only what is his own due.

An obvious influence of classical and medieval imagery and framework could be easily traced in the selections from the neo-classicists quoted above. A survey of representative examples from the classical poets such as al-Khansā', Laylā al-Akhyaliyya (lived in the second half of the first century A.H), Abū Tammām and Buhturī 206 (821)-284 (892) may illuminate the aspect of similarity between the previous examples and their sources of inspiration. Here are two brief extracts from the poetry of al-Khansā' elegizing her brother Ṣakhr:

قد كان مأوى كل أرملة و مقيل عثرة كل ذى عذر
تلقى عيالهم نوافله فتصيب ذا الميسور والعسر (42)

He was the shelter of every widow
And the supporter of those who are in need.
Their relatives used to receive his gifts,
Which were beneficial to those who are in
need and who are not.

فيا بحر المنون ذهبته منه ببحر الجود في السنة الطلوع (45)

O ocean of death, you have engulfed
The ocean of generosity in the year of famine.

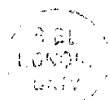
The last example is taken from the verses of Abū Tammām's younger contemporary al-Buḥturī elegizing a notable man called Abū Saʿīd:

سكن العلا أودى فهن ثوا كل
ولى و قد أوى الورى من جوده

و أبو العفاة ثوى فهن أيتام
نعما يقوم بشكرها الأقوام (46)

The one inhabiting the places of eminence
has passed away,
Thus these places are bereaved.
And the father of the poor died,
Thus they are orphaned.
He died, but he had (already) offered many
favours out of his generosity.
Thus they continue to show their gratitude.

Having examined the rather striking similarities between the elegies of the neo-classicists and their medieval and pre-Islamic predecessors, it would be reasonable to come to the conclusion that the matrix of an elegy is but a framework of praise devoted to a particular dead person who, in many respects, seems to be an outstanding or distinguished individual. The process of elegizing seems on the whole to be an effort dedicated to recording the dead man's accomplishments and deeds, that is to say recounting biographical data about persons who are no longer alive. An examination of the subject of death among the neo-classicists would lead one to the conclusion that the neo-classicists were on the whole led by the examples they tried to emulate, to a treatment of their subject which has nothing to do with the concept of death in its existential dimensions. The exclusive concern with individuals denotes the fact that man, as a being independent of name and identity and any particular traits or considerations of personal status and attributes, did not acquire in the elegies any remarkable significance, nor is his death portrayed as an existential problem that may stimulate intellectual questioning. There is little doubt that the standpoint of such a treatment in elegies distances the attempt from its essential issue which is the issue of death itself. In other words, the dead man's traits and accomplishments which the poets persist in focusing on as appreciable



and unforgettable deeds steer their attempts to irrelevant elements and prevent them from treating the very essence of the phenomenon of death which is the main issue.

What is perhaps obvious in the light of all this is that the neo-classicists were not able to achieve a wider focus in terms of tackling the concept of death in their elegies. They simply froze the elegy, so to speak, in the matrix of the conventional framework of praise, and seem to have got trapped within the narrow scope of viewing the whole issue of death through the person or individual whose death prompted them at any time to write elegies. Therefore, they were prevented from observing wider existential dimensions. These existential dimensions, if they had been considered by the poets might have turned the concept into a universal issue that goes beyond the strict bounds of names, times and places. The concept of death in this respect might have become an issue that not only concerns the entire human race, but also the whole of existence*.

* * * * *

* This view, as will be shown in chapter IV, becomes eminent in the works of the romanticists.

IV. THE VOCIFEROUS TONE OF GRIEF

The loud expression of grief in the Arabic elegy, it must be pointed out, is among the significant elements which ^{have} distinguish^{ed} the genre since its early phase, when the elegy was but a kind of primitive lament. The primitive lament took the form of plaintive declamations made in a form of rhymed prose, (saj'). 'Abdulla al-Muhannā, however, points out apropos of this subject that

the saj' cries gave way first to short metric verses consisting of a few lines, and occasionally also to some longer rajaz songs, which then gradually grew into the fully developed marthiyya (elegy) with the variety of metres and artistic forms of the qasīda poems (47).

One must add also, that the early elegies of the classicists were mostly a vivid display of agony intended to fulfil the conventional duty of mourning, as "burying somebody without a lament was regarded as a disgrace and an insult to him"(48). Ibn al-Athār in his book al-Kāmil fī'l-Tārīkh, for example, reports the death of Kulayb b. Rabī'a during the Basūs war in the pre-Islamic era, and refers to the lamentation which

was performed for him. He says:

When Kulayb's death was announced, (his people) set out to bury him, and when the burial was carried out they started tearing their clothes and scratching their faces, whereas the maidens and the ladies proceeded to perform (their part) in the obsequies (49)*.

There is little doubt that Ibn al-Athīr's fragment provides us with an important document concerning the traditional and conventional ceremonies of obsequies which were constantly practised during the pre-Islamic period. A survey of examples of classical elegy may throw further light on this piece of information given to us by Ibn al-Athīr. Moreover, they may show that the conventional lamentation was a manifest expression of grief enhanced by certain utterances and acts.

The greater part of the lament, however, was performed by women who were supposed to make a sufficient contribution to the display of grief by means of dropping their veils, tearing their clothes, beating their chests and putting on a general show of lamentation by yelling and crying (50). The following two examples give a clear picture of the traditional lament. Al-Khansā' thus says on the occasion of the death of her brother Ṣakhr:

* ظهر أمر كليب فذهبوا اليه فدفنوه ، فلما دفن شقت الجيوب و خمشت الوجوه و خرج الأبنكار و نوات الخدور العواتق اليه و قمن للمأتم .

فقومى يا صفية فى نساء
يشققن الجيوب و كل وجه
بحر الشمس لا يبين ظلا
طفيف أن تملى له و قلا (51)

O "Ṣafiyya", let's join the women
Who are (gathered) under the heat of the sun
And who do not seek the shade.
Here they are tearing their clothes,
Knowing that their suffering is worthy of
being sustained
For the sake of such a dead one.

Another per-Islamic poetess Āmina bint 'Uṭayba, likewise, says
on the occasion of the death of her father 'Uṭayba b. al-
Hārith b. Shihāb:

تروحنا من اللعباء عصرا
على مثل ابن مية فانهياه
فأعجلنا الالهة أن تؤوبا
تشق نواعم البشر الجيوب (52)

We went in the afternoon to al-La' bā'
Before the sunset.
Where the women were tearing their clothes
And lamenting Ibn Mayya.

This sketchy presentation of the element of lamentation in
the early examples of the elegy may shed some light on the
formulation and final standardization of the genre. The over-
whelming vociferous display of grief and sorrow over the dead,

one may say, was seemingly a necessary conventional ceremony reflecting specific customs which, in many respects, have direct connections with the particular time and milieu of the classicists.

The simple fact that the classical elegy represented the pre-Islamic age and its spirit and culture, is an aspect which does not seem to have been grasped by the neo-classicists. They seem to have been primarily preoccupied with reviving their predecessors' modes of composing elegies in their original framework regardless of the circumstances appertaining to the age in which the elegy first made its appearance. What seems obvious is that this adoption of the old elegy borrowed with it at the same time even the vociferous expressions of grief and the complete "accoutrement" of the ancient lament. In other words, the doleful tones of mourning that distinguished the classical elegy still exist in the neo-classical treatment of this genre. Ruṣāfī, for example, evokes the ancient picture of the classical lament in the following verses cited from an elegy dedicated to two young pilots who died in an aeroplane crash. It would be noticed that he introduces the clamorous "performance" of weeping, wailing, tearing of clothes and beating of chests, or, in this case, of cheeks. He writes:

لقد عظمت منا حتكم فقامت	تنوح بها الحرائر والاماء
و شققت الجيوب لكم رجال	و لطمت الخدود لكم نساء (53)

The lamentation occasioned by your death was great.
Both the noble (lit.free) women and the slaves
took part in it *.
The men's clothes have been rent open,
And the women's cheeks have been repeatedly beaten.

The imitation which the neo-classicists were driven to, did not sound or feel genuine, as was to be expected. It amounts to imagery that tends to be over-exaggerated or a mere exercise in hyperbole. Trying to elegize Muṣṭafā Kāmil, the Egyptian national leader who died in 1908, Shawqī, for example, resorted to this imagery of the classical lament which goes beyond the borders of reality. He says:

المشرقان عليك ينتحبان قاصيهما في مأتم و الداني
لما نعت الى الحجاز مشى الأسى في الزائرين و روع الحرمان
شقت لمنظر كالجوب عقائل و بكتك بالدمع الهتون غواني (54)

The East and the West are weeping for your death.
Both of them (the far and the near) are in mourning.
When the news of your death was conveyed to al-Ḥijāz,
Sorrow afflicted the pilgrims
And the Holy Places were shaken.
Women tore their clothes in grief.
And young maidens were in tears.

* It is interesting to note how this dogged attempt by the neo-classicists to imitate the ancients, makes Ruṣāfī use such a cliché as the free and slave women referring to a phenomenon which no more existed in his time and milieu.

What Shawqī displays in these verses is almost a performance of a fanciful depiction which scarcely approaches any form of reality. His attempt is solely concerned with an exaggerated interaction between the incident of death and other alien elements like: the East and the West, the Holy Places, pilgrims etc... In other words, the preoccupation with these conventional descriptions, one may say, seems to be an inconvenient employment of inadequate tools which, at the same time, have nothing to do with the profound essence of sadness that could be, in many respects, an internalised feeling unaccompanied by any external demonstrations of grief. Here is another example from Shawqī that seems to show the same tendency of indulging the fantasy in what is primarily a highly conventionalized and classical treatment of the elegy. The element of hyperbole in the description, and often in bad taste, is apparent:

نجوم في السما ۞ ملحقات	نعاہ البرق مضطربا فعاجت
اليها فهي حيرى كاسفات (55)*	كلان الشمس قد نعت عشا ۞

* From an elegy written on the occasion of Riyād Pasha's death, see note p. 25 above.

When his death had been sadly announced
 The stars were startled in the spheres
 And seemed faint and disconcerted.
 As if the sun had been announced dead to them.

Likewise, Ruṣāfī inclines to involve himself with exaggerated imagery in expressing emotions of sadness and regret, which lead him to build a fanciful structure that almost exceeds all reasonable bounds. The following verses, cited from an elegy dedicated to Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī, are a good example in point:

إذا نعيك وافى مصر منتشرا جأ أبو الهول يشكو منه أهوالا
 وإن أتى البيت ، بيت الله رَجَّ به وأوجس الركن من منعك زلزالا
 أما العراق فأمسى الرافدان به سطين للدمع في خديه قد سالا (56)*

* One can see in this and the preceding examples the obvious influence of classical and medieval poetry:

فخر الشوامخ من قتله و زلزلت الأرض زلزالها
 و زال الكواكب من فقدته و جللت الشمس جلالها

al-Khansā' , Anīs al-Julasā', p.75

When he was killed, the mountains collapsed
 And the earth shook.
 The planets vanished,
 And the sun seemed veiled.

والشمس كاسفة لمهـ ملكه و ما اتسق القمر
والوحش تبكي شجوها لما أتى عنه الخبر
al-Khansā' , Ibid, p.36

The sun was eclipsed for his death,
And the moon did not complete its course.
When his death was announced,
Even the wild animals were indulging in deep sorrow.

خرجوا به و كل باك خلفه صعقات موسى يوم دك الطور
والشمس في كبد السماء مريضة والأرض واجفة تكاد تمور
Dīwān Abī'l-Tayyib al-Mutanabbī, ed: 'Azzām, 'Abd al-Wahhāb,
1944, Cairo, p.64

The mourners proceeded with his funeral, altogether shocked.
Like Moses when he was shocked on the mountain of Tūr.
In the heart of the sky the sun seemed pallid,
Whereas the earth was disturbed and nearly shook from
side to side.

أما و أبي كهلان يوم مصابه لقد أثقلت بالرزء منها الكواهل
رأوا شمسهم في يومهم و هي ظلمة و بدرهم في ليلهم و هو آفل
Dīwān al-Buhturī, p.104

On the day of Abū Kahlān's death,
Everybody felt the weight of the disaster.
They saw the sun darken in the day.
And saw the moon at night disappear.

When the announcement of your death reached Egypt,
The Sphinx knelt down in awe at its gravity.
And when it reached Mecca (lit.the House of God, i.e.the Ka'ba)
There seemed to be the trembling of an earthquake,
Whereas the Euphrates and Tigris
Became two streams of tears rolling down the cheeks of Iraq.

Comparing the neo-classical method of displaying grief for the dead with that of the classical and medieval poets may show the persisting tendency among the neo-classicists to try and emulate the classical patterns. But in the light of the examples given above, one may say that this imitation often betrays a lack of genuineness and originality. What the neo-classicists depict is by no means related to their time and experience, nor connected with traditions or popular customs and ceremonies in their own time and milieu.

The classical form of the lamentation with its clamorous display of grief was genuine, or at least, corresponded to conventional or traditional ways of commiseration. The display of grief was perhaps simply a reflection of ancient social customs perpetuated in a particular period. Considering that poetry ought to be a true reflection of immediate and genuine feelings and experiences, the classical poets seem to have succeeded in transmitting a significant aspect of their social life and environment, which we find authentically preserved in their poetic productions.

But when, after the passage of long periods of time, the neo-classicists tried to recreate a similar atmosphere, the

endeavour was apt to be bereft of any vital impulse and become merely a lifeless form of versification. The imitation, perhaps, mirrors the traditional framework but by no means reflects a profound insight into, and expression of genuine and immediate experiences in modern times.

The resort of the neo-classicists to clamorous tones of grief in their elegies might be interpreted as a tendency to stereotype grief in terms of traditional imagery, and an overt attempt at exaggeration, and all in order to affect the reader in the customary, or better say the expected manner. This tendency, it may be said, turns the elegy into a hollow poetic structure consisting of heaps of accumulated and bizarre expressions that scarcely communicate the sincerity of human emotion towards a dead person.

In brief, the compositions of the neo-classicists in the elegy genre were invariably trite repetitions of clichés perhaps associated with mourning which by no means reflect the poets' experiences or time. These compositions remain quite obviously an expression in a highly conventionalised form of a general response to an occasion of grief. It is no facetious remark to say that any one elegy could fit or suit all occasions of death. In this respect, the neo-classical elegy can best be described as an all-size suit that fits all occasions and serves the purposes of all poets.

V. PHILOSOPHICAL AND SPECULATIVE ELEMENTS

Philosophical and speculative elements about death can often be spotted in the poetry of the neo-classicists*, and these are primarily confined to the notion of the human soul, its destiny and its state after death. This notion seems to be manifested in three main ways. The first can perhaps be described as a spontaneous or automatic exposition of Islamic ideas derived primarily from Quranic doctrine and the prophet Muḥammad's teaching. Islamic doctrine, as is well known teaches that the human soul is made immortal by the will of God. Death, as far as this doctrine is concerned, is the gateway which guides the human soul to either paradise or hell in accordance with the work of a human being in his life-time.

The second aspect of the neo-classicists' treatment of this subject, however, betrays signs of misgivings concerning the inherited religious doctrine. The poetry of the two Iraqi

* The philosophical and speculative contemplations about death in neo-classical poetry not only find their expression within the framework of the elegy, but also constitute other exclusive poems, especially those written by Zahāwī and Ruṣāfī.

poets Zahāwī and Ruṣāfī in particular seems to evoke a clear tone of doubt and even denial against the dogmatic beliefs which are imposed by religion, such as the belief in the immortality of the human being's soul and the possibility of reward or punishment which might affect the soul after death(57).

The third treatment of this subject seems to reflect an attitude of a compromising mind that almost moulds faith with doubt, and conformity with vacillation. It is simply a moderate standpoint which often adopts the method of raising metaphysical dilemmas and questions, probably to hint at the ignorance and bewilderment which the human intellect cannot escape. The endeavour, however, was merely confined to raising questions, but never to suggest an answer or provide an explanation.

Because the elegy is conceived of as a process of praise devoted to a dead person, the poet was invariably inclined to regard the dead person with the eye of uncompromising sympathy, and to see him as a representative figure of all goodness. Bearing in mind the doctrine of the divine reward which God bestows upon the righteous souls, the poet frequently hints that the men who have led a good life will be rewarded with unbounded felicity in heaven after they depart the earthly life. No wonder therefore that the elegy often portrays death as a door through which the souls of good and virtuous men proceed to ultimate happiness, or an ascent to the sublime abode of glory and total contentment. What is also obvious is that the images

of paradise which appear in elegies are almost identical with those depictions mentioned in the Quran. Elegizing Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib who was known as a lecturer and poet, Shawqī portrays his death as an ascent to a world of bliss and unbounded pleasures: ripe fruit, exquisite wine and sacred echoes of music and poetry that yield ecstatic delight. He says:

من جلال الخلق و الصنع العجب	قم صف الخلد لنا في ملكه
و سلاف في أباريق الذهب	و ثمار في يواقيت الربي
و ترنم بالقوا في في القصص (58)	و استمر رضوان عودى قصب

Tell us about the abode of eternal life
in His kingdom.
(About) the grace and wonder of creation.
The fruits in the meadows of green corundum,
And the wine in gold pitchers.
O Radwān (the angel guard of paradise) have a flute
And chant rhymes of poetry.

In another elegy devoted to Salāma Ḥijāzī who was known as an actor and singer, Shawqī resorts to depicting a clamourous party in which most of the dead musicians seem to gather in heaven, apparently to perform one of their concertos:

ثربين الميا و بين القبول	كيف اخواننا هناك على السكو
د و نفخ الامين في الارغول	كيف في الخلد ضرب أحمد بالمو
كيف عثمان فيه كيف الحمولي (59)	فرح كله النعيم و عرس

(I wonder) how our brothers are there,
On the banks of the river Kawther,
Where the soft breeze (of heaven) blows.
How is Ahmad's play on the lute,
And Amin's on the flute?
Paradise is but joy and a feast of rejoicing (lit.wedding).
Tell me, how is 'Uthmān and Hamūlī?*

Going through the imagery of paradise cited above, one perhaps cannot mistake the predominant tendency to portray sensual pleasures which do not only seem to please the taste, the sight and the hearing, but are also conceived of as the ultimate satisfaction which the human soul might attain. The conceptions about the manifestations of felicity in heaven and the human soul's delight in its final abode seem to be portrayed as a part of an inherited legacy that should be treated with considerable reserve. This endeavour on the part of the poets betrays a form of constant subordination to religious culture, and an interest in repeating what the common people unanimously believed in, or upheld as sacrosanct. Their elegies, one may assert, are the product of a mentality which could not escape the habit of repetition, and which seemed incapable of introducing fresh intellectual arguments or speculations.

Opposed to this trend of thought dominated by religious bias,

* Aḥmad and Amīn were known as musicians, whereas 'Uthmān and Hamūlī were two Egyptian singers.

was an attitude of rejection and doubt which first becomes prominent in the works of Zahāwī and Ruṣāfī. The purport of Zahāwī's view about the destiny of the human soul after death consists in the belief that the human soul goes only through one life which is the earthly life. Death is the final destiny after which the soul turns to nothingness. "I have doubts", says Zahāwī, "however much my ears are filled with promises (of eternity) or threats of punishment". "Don't trust the prevalent beliefs", is another protest raised by Zahāwī apparently against the dogmatic beliefs and the authority they exercised over the minds and thoughts of people. "These beliefs", as Zahāwī puts it with apparent confidence "are not right". This is made clear in the following four verses which seem to begin with an expression of doubt and uneasiness about the possibility of the soul's resurrection, and end with the assertion that "the earth will eat up all living beings, the happy and the miserable alike":

لست أدري أالفناء سنمضي بعدما نموت أم للخلود
 أنني في شك و أن ملأوا سمعي بوعد يرونة ووعيد
 لا تثق بالجمهور يا عقل يوما أن رأى الجمهور غير سديد
 تأكل الأرض كل حي فلا تبقي على بائس و لا مسعود (60)

I do not know if we will proceed to
 nothingness after we die
 Or to eternal life.

I am in doubt, however much they (the people) fill my ears
With what they believe to be promises or threats.
O mind, never trust (the views) of the masses.
Because their belief is not right.
The earth will eat up every living being
And never spare the miserable nor the happy.

Among other prevalent doctrines which Zahāwī seems not to
have believed in, is the view which stipulates that the soul
descended from an elevated station to the earthly body.
Contrary to this view, Zahāwī declares that:

الروح لم تهبط عليّ من المجل الأرفع
بل أنها ليست سوى جرثومة نشأت معي (61)

The soul did not descend upon me from the lofty station.
It is but a germ that originated with me.

It is perhaps convenient while examining Zahāwī's views about
metaphysical phenomena, especially those which have close
affinity to the notion of the human soul and its states after
death, to mention his long poem Thawra fī 'l-Jahīm "Revolution
in Hell". With an accent which cannot be described as anything
but ironical, Zahāwī, throughout this work which constitutes
a poetic fantasia, portrays sceneries of paradise and hell to
which he imagines that he is transported after death. Because
of his doubts concerning the possibility of resurrection and

concerning other pillars of religion, the angels of death drive him to hell to sustain the punishment he deserves. In hell, he finds that all the people who have been prosecuted are the people of great intellectual abilities and genius, figures such as poets, thinkers and philosophers. Trying to escape this "unfair" judgment, the inhabitants of hell declare a revolution against the angels and the inhabitants of paradise who are described as "the simple-minded" or "the idiotic". With the aid of the devils' forces, the inhabitants of hell succeed in the end to obtain victory ^{over} upon the angels' forces and occupy paradise after expelling "the simple-minded" and "the idiotic" from it (62).

Examining Thawra fī 'l-Jahīm, one perhaps cannot mistake Zahāwī's view about resurrection and the possibility of reward or punishment after death. However implicit his opinion was, it is obvious that he regards these matters with an eye of doubt and uncertainty if not total scorn and levity.

Like Zahāwī, Ruṣāfī reveals intelligible signs of misgivings and doubt about the inherited doctrine concerning the soul and resurrection after death. He seemingly does not agree with what is imposed by the authority of the creed. Ruṣāfī's disapproval concerns two notions. First, he objects to the doctrine which stipulates that the human soul descended from heaven, and that because it has a divine essence it will ascend again to its sublime station after death*. Contrary to

* This doctrine is made clear by Ibn Sīnā, especially in his =

this view, Ruṣāfī believes that the soul is born from the earth. In this respect, its essence is earthly and not heavenly. Thus the soul will never ascend towards the heavenly abode after death. In his words:

وما هبطت من الخضراء لكن من الغبراء أنبتها العليم (63)

It (the soul) did not descend from the sky (lit.the green land).
But God created it from the earth (lit.the dusty land).

And:

ولست من الأولى وهموا وقالوا بأن الروح تعرج للسماء (64)

I am not like the ancients who, under delusion, said that
The soul ascends skywards.

Second, Ruṣāfī boubts that the soul will sustain another form of existence after death. Death in his opinion will be both of

= well known poem which begins with the verse:

هبطت اليك من المحل الأرفع ورقاء ذات تعزز و تمنع

It descended upon thee from the lofty station (heaven);
A dove rare and uncaptured.

Trans: Guckin, De Slane, Ibn
Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary, p.443

the body and the soul. But he seems to be a little bit cautious about advocating this opinion. Therefore he assumes that, even if the soul undergoes a kind of existence after death, it will be then unconscious of itself. In his words:

و لست أظن أن الروح تبقى	إذا محيت من الجسم الرسوم
و ربما يكون لها دوام	و لكن غير شاعرة تدوم (65)

I do not think that the soul will abide
When the body perishes.
Its existence might be probable,
But it will be an unconscious existence.

One should point out in this context that the views of Zahāwī and Ruṣāfī about the soul and its states after death are, to a certain extent, hasty sketches of views which portray a state of bewilderment and restlessness of mind, but surely do not constitute a concrete or characteristic philosophy of life. When Zahāwī advocates that he does not "trust the prevalent beliefs because they are not right", and when Ruṣāfī says that he does not think that "the soul will have eternal life", they simply object to, and disapprove of the prevalent dogmatic creed, with an unmistakable tone of irony and scorn. But unfortunately, they do not suggest any plausible alternative that might constitute a distinct body of thinking.

Besides manifesting doubts, which are both bold and uncompromising, Zahāwī and Ruṣāfī sometimes resort to revealing their doubts by means of simply raising metaphysical questions. These questions, one may notice, were not meant to lead to intellectual controversy or stimulate further elucidation, as much as they were meant to point out more closed doors or enigmas and riddles (66). It is, one might say, an attitude which betrays a considerable degree of uncertainty or uneasiness of mind, and which seems to be incapable of providing any satisfactory answers. And in the end there is nothing that remains but ultimate ignorance, as Ruṣāfī puts it:

<p>ستارا فعلم القوم في كنهها نزر نقول بشوق : ما وراءك يا ستر (67)</p>	<p>لقد ضربت كفال الحياة على الحجاب فقمنا جميعا من وراء ستارها</p>
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(Man's) mind is restrained by a veil,
Thus it is confined to little knowledge
Concerning the essence of life.
We all proceed before this veil
To say with great eagerness
What is behind you, O veil?

The notion of man's ignorance or the limitation of his perceptions seems to be frequently resorted to by the neo-classicists when dealing with metaphysical problems such as the problem of life and death. The prevailing thesis which seems to appeal to the neo-

classicists, and seems to constitute, in a way, the trend of their thought consists in the motto that man knows nothing. He does not know what or where he was before life, nor can he speculate to what or to where he will proceed. It is, however, a vicious dilemma which seems only to invoke more exclamations and questions:

من أين من أين يا ابتدائي	ثم إلى أين يا انتهائي ؟
أمن فناء إلى وجود	و من وجود إلى فناء ؟
خرجت من ظلمة لأخرى	فما أمامي و ما ورائي ؟ (68)

From where, from where o my beginning?
And to where, o my destiny (lit.my end)?
Is it from nonexistence to existence,
Then from existence to nonexistence?
I proceed from one darkness to another,
So what is before me, and what is behind me?!

And:

و ماذا وراء القبر مما نريده و هل من مدى بعد العبور على الجسر ؟ (69)

What is beyond the grave to aspire to?
And is there a further expanse
After we cross the bridge?

Zahāwī stands perplexed before the eternal dilemma.

He says:

فكرت في الماضي البعيد لني و في مستقبلي
فما عرفت أخرى و لا عرفت أولي (70)

I thought of my distant past and my future,
But I could not know my future nor my beginning!

Because man's knowledge about metaphysical phenomena such as death is restricted and vague, the attempt at some surmise or supposition as an answer to the dilemma are not uncommon. Ruṣāfī, for example, says:

لعل حياة المرء ليل ستنجلي غيا هبه من سكرة الموت بالفجر (71)

Man's life is perhaps a dark night that
Might be cleared by the dawn of death.

But this groggy faith of Ruṣāfī in the resurrection of the human soul seems to collapse quickly under the burden of his doubts. No wonder that he resorts, in another poem, to a totally ironical tone when portraying the ascent of the soul skywards:

و ان رقيت نحو السماء فحبذا اذا أصبحت مأوى لها الأنجم الزهر (72)

If the soul should ascended towards heaven (lit.sky)
 It would be comely if the shimmering stars
 Were to become its abode.

Unlike Zahāwī and Ruṣāfī, Shawqī, while attempting to raise metaphysical questions concerning the destiny of the soul after death, appears to be generally reserved. This is in all likelihood to avoid involvement with misgivings or doubts. Thus his questionings almost denote the attitude of a submissive mind, rather than denoting disaffection or doubt. He says:

حديث الموت تبد لي العظام	رهين الرمس حسدني ملشيا
و كيف مذاقها ؟ و من السقا ؟	سرهين الرمس حسدني ملشيا
كما وقعت على (الحرم) القطاة ؟ (73)*	وسألتك ما المنية ؟ أى كأس ؟

O captive of the tomb,
 Prolong your discourse about death to me.
 Thus knowledge (lit.wisdom) may be imparted to me.
 May I ask you what is death? What sort of cup is it?
 What is its taste? And who passes its cup around?
 And do the souls proceed to (an abode) of peace
 Like a dove which alights on the Holy Place?

Interestingly, Shawqī's questions sometimes tend to proceed further and turn to enquiries about the essence of the human soul, its relation to the body after death, and whether it longs for the abandoned body after her departure or not:

* From an elegy written on the occasion of Riyāḍ Pasha's death.
 See footnote p.25

و صف لنا كيف تجفو الروح هيكلها و يستبدّ البلى بالهيكل الخالى
و هل تحن اليه بعد فرقتـه كما يحن الى أوطانه الجالى ؟ (74)*

(O dead person), tell us how the soul departs its body.
And how the decay consumes the abandoned body.
Does the soul long for it (the body) after departure,
Like the traveller who longs for his home?

Examining these sketchy questions of Shawqī about the states of the soul after death, one perhaps cannot mistake the influential spirit of Muslim philosophy, especially the influence of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of the soul**. But one cannot claim that Shawqī shows a thorough understanding, or a keen interest in Ibn Sīnā's doctrine. His verses about this subject seem to appear at random in the context of his elegies, and scarcely portray glimpses of such philosophical thoughts. There is, one may add, another distinguishing characteristic of Shawqī's meditation which has a close connection with his reserve. It is the tendency to provide the commonplace answers to the metaphysical questions raised. These answers usually betray an attitude of automatic acceptance of the tenets of his faith. The following verses are an illustration of Shawqī's resort to the traditional explanations of the

* From the elegy Shawqī wrote in 1914 on the occasion of the death of the well-known, scholar, novelist and historian, Jurjī Zaydān.

** See footnote p.67-8 above.

questions concerning the soul and its destiny after death:

و تخلد أم كزعم القوم تبلى	كما تبلى العظام أو الرفات
تعالى الله قابضها اليه	و ناعشها كما انتعش النبات
و جازيها النعيم حتى أمينا	و عيشا لا تكدره أناة (75)

Does the soul abide, or, as some people say, perish
 Like the bones and the remains of the body?
 God, blessed be his name, makes it die,
 Then He revives it like a plant being revived.
 He (God) will grant the soul the reward of the
 peaceful abode,
 And a life that is never marred by any harm.

The views of the neo-classicists concerning the soul and its destiny after death, do not at all seem to be presented within the framework of a concrete philosophy, nor do they appear characterized with any particular aspects that can be seen as outstanding or distinctive. Their attitudes are but a diverse collection of viewpoints which seem wanting in harmony and consistency. These views, one notices, vary and even contradict each other. Sometimes signs of an uncompromising disapproval and doubt of religious tenets and the cultural legacy seem to prevail. Sometimes the tone of submission to received and popularly accepted views seems to predominate. Besides these diverse ways of thinking, one can spot attempts at raising metaphysical questions, an approach which usually

denotes a moderate standpoint. These questions either tend to reveal the ignorance and limitation of the human perceptions about metaphysical phenomena, or appear to introduce ready-made answers derived from the religious and cultural legacy. Meditation and speculation about death in neo-classical poetry, one may finally assert, are but reflections of a superficial approach, repetitive of traditional modes of thought, and showing total conformity to inherited conventions of writing poetry and of thinking.

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FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

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- (2) Al-Muhannā, A, "Notes on Ancient Arabic Consolation and Lamentation", Dirāsāt fī al-Adab wa al-Lugha, Kuwait, 1976, p.55,6 (Notes); Mulāḥaẓāt, p.154; Dayf, Shawqī, al-'Aṣr al-Jāhilī, Cairo, 1960, p.207, ('Aṣr)
- (3) Al-Nuwayhī, M, al-'Aṣr al-Jāhilī, vol:II, Cairo, (n.d), p.649, ; Bint 'l-Shāti', al-Khansā', Cairo, 1957
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- (6) Al-Aṣbahānī, Abū al-Faraj, Kitāb al-Aghānī, vol:VX, Būlāq, 1868, p.139-141
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- (8) Al-Shawqiyyāt, Vol.III, Cairo, 1970, p.38, (Shawqiyyāt)
- (9) Ibid, p.55
- (10) Dīwān Abū al-'Atāhiya, ed: Sheikho, Louis, Beirut, 1909, p.29
- (11) Al-Tabrīzī, al-Khaṭīb, Sharḥ Dīwān Abī Tammām, ed: 'Azzām, M.A, Vol:IV, Cairo, 1965, p.40
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- (13) Shawqiyyāt, Vol.III, p.69
- (14) Dīwān, p.43
- (15) Dīwān al-Ruṣāfī, p.85

- (16) Shawqiyyāt, III, p.46
- (17) Ibid, p.32
- (18) Dīwān, p.165
- (19) Shawqiyyāt, III, p.111
- (20) Dīwān Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, p.51
- (21) Ibid, p.97
- (22) Saqt, p.111
- (23) Ibid, p.256
- (24) Dīwān, p.95,6
- (25) Shawqiyyāt, III, p.150
- (26) Ibid, p.104
- (27) Ibid, p.29
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- (34) Ibid, Loc.cit
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- (36) Dīwān Khalīl Muṭrān, Beirut, 1967, I, p.282
- (37) Shawqī Shāʿir al-ʿAsr, p.155
- (38) ʿUmda, p.147
- (39) Dīwān, p.221

- (40) Ibid, p.159
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- (42) Anīs, p.32
- (43) Ibid, p.28
- (44) Ibid, p.110
- (45) Dīwān, p.56
- (46) Dīwān, Beirut, 1962, Vol:II, p.101
- (47) Notes, p.56
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- (53) Dīwān, p.237
- (54) Shawqiyyāt, Vol.III, p.109
- (55) Ibid, p.43
- (56) Dīwān, p.75
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- (58) Shawqiyyāt, Vol.III, p.37
- (59) Ibid, p.138,9
- (60) Dīwān Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī, Dār al-‘Awda, Beirut, 1972, p. 628, 9
- (61) Ibid, p.644
- (62) See Dīwān, p.710-739

- (63) Dīwān, p.120
 - (64) Ibid, p.112
 - (65) Ibid, p.119
 - (66) Rusāfī, p.69,70
 - (67) Dīwān, p.91
 - (68) Ibid, p.60
 - (69) Ibid, p.109
 - (70) Dīwān, p.659
 - (71) Dīwān, p.109
 - (72) Ibid, p.92
 - (73) Shawqiyyāt, III, p.45
 - (74) Ibid, p.127
 - (75) Ibid, p.46
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CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH IN ROMANTIC POETRY

I. THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN ARABIC POETRY : ITS BACKGROUND AND FEATURES

The romantic movement in Arabic poetry seems to have developed within the circumstances of the era of revival, which had begun by the early decades of this century. The efforts of the neo-classicists, which aimed at reviving Arabic poetry from the stagnation of the era of decadence, can be considered as a preparatory step which led to the appearance of successive literary currents afterwards (1). The factors that contributed to the flourishing of neo-classicism in Arabic literature gradually developed a vitality which gave the impetus to the appearance of new trends, and particularly, at the outset, the romantic trend.

Within the general atmosphere of revolutionary political and social movements, which permeated the Arab world from the beginning of the century up to the forties, new literary concepts and principles began to appear and manifested. The new generation of poets which wrote in the twenties and thirties started, in the words of M.M Badawī, 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"(2).

Depicting the evolution of Arabic romanticism and drawing distinctions between this particular movement and European romantic movements, S.Kh Jayyūsī points out that:

The Romantic movement in Arabic literature came about without the backing of a philosophy....., and certainly without anything similar to the French Revolution. It lacked an indigenous basis similar to the thought and ideas that underlay the European Romantic movement, and it did not formulate its own principles after its development.... It simply happened. In fact, it is perhaps one of the simplest Romantic movements in the history of any poetry.(3)

It is of great importance, however, while examining the period of transition from neo-classicism to romanticism in Arabic poetry, to consider the role of Khalīl Muṭrān (1872-1949). Muṭrān, in many respects, "was an important link between the neo-classical school and the more modern poetry written in the twenties and thirties"(4). Most of his contributions, one might say, seem to be remarkably free from the rigidity of the old poetic conventions. Signs of a developing new literary taste, and the popularisation of new themes and approaches to poetry could be easily traced in his introduction to his first dīwān in 1908. In this introduction Muṭrān sees that:

the poet should rebel against the artifice, rigidity of expression and diction, the lack of unity in the classical poem, the repetitiveness of the classical theme, and against all that is sham in poetry.(5)

Although Muṭrān stressed the importance of truth and sincerity in poetry, one cannot overlook his various panegyrical works, whether in the form of eulogies or elegies which one can no doubt classify as occasional verse. But these were written out of a sense of obligation in keeping with the customs of his day. This shows that, while making an enthusiastic leap towards modern concepts in poetry, Muṭrān was obliged to arrive at a compromise between his call for abandoning the old themes and methods and the conventional literary atmosphere which was not prepared to be surprised by new adventures in poetic innovation.

The more vital contribution, which affected the output of the early romanticism of Arabic poetry during the twenties and the thirties, was undertaken by the Dīwān group and the Mahjar poets*. The three members of the Dīwān group were 'Abd 'l-Raḥmān Shukrī (1886-1958), 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād (1889-1964) and Ibrāhīm al-Māzinī (1890-1949). They were known to be, to a certain extent, influenced by English poetry and

* This is meant to refer in particular to the Lebanese and Syrian poets who emigrated to North America at the beginning of the century and founded the literary society named al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamīyya in New York, in 1920.

particularly by romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelly and Byron (6). They also showed interest in Hazlitt and his critical theory in poetry (7). The new ideas about the message of poetry, its principles and the necessity to convey personal experiences and genuine feelings, all these romantic insights find expression in the major critical work of the Dīwān group, and that is al-Dīwān fī 'l-Naqd wa al-Adab, which was first published in 1921*. The aim of this work was to start a severe campaign against the old concepts of poetry and against stereotyped conventions. The protest was mainly directed against the neo-classical school and especially against its most representative figure Aḥmad Shawqī.

One must stress, however, that the emergence of a modern critical theory of poetry during the twenties of this century was not merely an effort of the Dīwān group in Egypt. A similar movement had already begun in the Mahjar with prominent authors like Amīn 'l-Rayḥānī (1876-1940) and Gibrān Khalīl Gibrān (1883-1931). Likewise, the contribution of Mīkhā'īl Naimy (b.1889) as a poet and critic was prominent. His work al-Ghirbāl, a collection of critical essays first published in Cairo, in 1923, marked another protest against the rigidity and sterility of the conventional concepts of poetry(8). The efforts of the Dīwān group and the Mahjar poets were to culminate in the rise of a movement aiming at liberating Arabic poetry from many of the neo-classical traditions and constraints. Members of both groups called for the abandonment

* Only two volumes, however, of the projected ten volumes written by 'Aqqād and Māzinī made their appearance.

of occasional poetry, which turned the poets, so to speak, into the journalists of their day, and stipulated that poetry should probe deep into the self, and try to derive its inspiration from the sincere experiences of the individual. Poets, they said, should abandon rhetorical and declamatory verse, and, above all, they insisted on the importance of the organic unity in the poem (9). The emergence of this early romantic trend in Arabic poetry was an important step in the history of modern Arabic literature as a whole. This movement reflected, as already pointed out, influences from Western literature and a willingness to accept and assimilate foreign concepts of poetry.

The writers and poets of the Dīwān group and the Mahjar managed to change the course of literary taste. They also paved the way for the second generation of romantic poets like Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (1892-1955), the founder of the Apollo society and the Apollo magazine in 1932. Abū Shādī's aim in the magazine Apollo was to invite experimental attempts in poetry, and to encourage all kinds of poetic innovations. This, however, does not mean that Apollo was limited to one particular trend. In fact the magazine reflected many trends and poetic schools and was, in the words of Jayyūsī, "one of the richest poetic 'schools' of any time, because it mobilized and united many 'excellent' talents"(11). In his introduction to the first issue of Apollo magazine, the mouthpiece of the avant-garde poets in Egypt and in other parts of the Arab

world at the time, Abū Shādī stresses the necessity of founding such magazine, and asserts that:

There is a great need for raising the status of Arabic poetry, for helping the poets, defending their dignity and directing their footsteps to a sound artistic path..... The Apollo magazine aspires therefore to raise poetry to its former lofty position and to achieve a spirit of brotherhood and co-operation among poets.(12)

Thanks to the efforts of the Apollo magazine new talents flourished. Romantic sentiment and mood began to distinguish such avant-garde poets as Ibrāhīm Nājī (1898-1953), 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā (1901-1949), Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī al-Hamsharī (1908-1938), Abū al-Qāsim 'l-Shābbī (1909-1934) and Yūsuf Bashīr 'l-Tījānī (1912-1937). Poetry written by these pioneers mostly tended to lyricism and simplicity of language. Their primary interest was to reflect genuine experiences, to express sincerity and subjective feelings which, as Badawī points out:

were often of romantic sorrow and vague yearning, of nostalgia for lost innocence and unattainable ideals, of metaphysical awe and bewilderment, of mystery and the unknown both within the poet's self and in the darker aspects of nature without.(13)

This is a summary outline of the romantic movement which started to reshape Arabic poetry between the twenties and the

forties. With the new stress on the poetry which reflects genuine personal feelings and experiences, one can say that the new poetry tended to mirror the particular spirit of the age. In this respect, the contributions of the romanticists could be regarded as an output from which one can derive the views and attitudes of their creators.

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II. DESPONDENCY AND ALIENATION

IN THE WORKS OF THE ARAB ROMANTIC POETS

Interpreting the impulse behind the outburst of sentimentality in European romanticism after a long suppression on account of the classical epoch, Jaques Barzun points out that:

No blame need attach to eighteenth century sentimentality for it is logical that a period which ideally repressed its feeling should come to lead a double life emotionally, with all its unchanneled feelings pushed to one side, and all its reason conventional and negative. To say: Don't be an enthusiast, don't be a poet, don't fall in love, don't take a risk, nil admirari, is an infallible way to make sentimentalists.(14)

One may notice how much this remark applies to the Arab romanticists in as much as sentimentality bulks in most of their works. Some of the works written by the romanticists seem to represent the release of a pent-up flood of stifled emotions, and can be seen as giving free rein to subjectivity

and the revelation of genuine experiences and feelings (15). Influenced by the fundamental principles of the romantic movement in the West, the Arab poets in their early productions seem to have become aware of the fact that "romanticism (is) a revolt of the individual"(16), and that individual expression represents an essential value in any literary or artistic work. This understanding of the importance of the individual and his own emotions and experiences was the turning point, one might say, in the minds and thoughts of the romanticists. They began to realize, in other words, that it was high time to be themselves, and to make sure that their literary productions were the real representatives of what they felt and conceived, and not mere imitations of the works of their predecessors and their poetic conventions. This is an essential attitude of the romantic poet, as far as genuineness in poetry is concerned. For the more the poet approaches the realm of the self the more he will be capable of revealing sincerity and therefore of realizing satisfaction and self-contentment.

Various other aspects of a romantic trend were becoming distinct in the works of avant-garde Arab romanticists, as Badawī points out:

The best works produced by this group of poets were of a dominantly subjective character, expressing the poet's own response to others, or to nature or to his own predicament: poems of introspection,

confessional poems or poems which attempt to record a mood, usually one of sorrow and despondency.(17)/

Being almost in a prevailing mood of sensibility and despondency, the romantic poet, while meditating his vague sorrow and bewilderment, becomes aware of his predicament as a human being threatened by the seemingly blind elements and life's vicissitudes. Depicting this state of despondency and suffering seems for a long while to be the distinguishing marked features of the poetry of the romanticists. The romantic poets find themselves, so to speak, in the centre of a conflict between the actual reality of life, which they consider as harsh and distressing, and the desirable ideals they dream of, or, as E. Bernbaum points out:

Because of their faith that the world as it ought to be could be made an actuality, the romantics scorned the world as it was full of untruth, evil, ugliness, and at times almost to utter dejection. This mood may be regarded as the first state of the romantic mind, a state of rebellion against things as they are.(18)

The notion of the imperfection of life and the evil forces that govern most of its aspects becomes a clear form of protest in most of the Arab romanticists' works, which betray similar attitudes to what E. Bernbaum depicts in the above quotation. They often maintain that life is barren, and that

the state of the world has deteriorated through evil destructive forces. To them misfortune, despair, suffering, frustration and other elements of misery keep governing man's life and turning it into an inevitable ordeal. The Tunisian poet Shābbī, one of the most despondent voices among the Arab romanticists, gives his impression about life's imperfections and how life can turn into an endless chain of suffering and distress. He, in a poem entitled Ṣawtun Tā'ih "A Vagrant Voice", says:

قضيت أدوار الحياة مفكرا في الكائنات معذبا مهموما
و حضرت مأددة الحياة فلم أجد الا شرابا آجنا مسموما
ولمست أوتار الدهور فلم تغض الا أنينا داميا مكلوما
يتلو أقاصيص التعاسة والأسى و يصير أفراح الحياة هموما (19)

I have spent the various stages of my life
Thinking of (the mystery of existence).
(lit. thinking about all beings),
Tormented and distressed.
And attended the banquet of life and found nothing
But brackish and poisonous drinks.
I played on the strings of Time
But they did not produce except a moaning
Narrating the tales of misery and sorrow,
And turning joys to distress.

Bernbaum says:

Most of the romantics, after expressing their rebellion against contemporary evils, passed beyond the phase of despondency, and looked expectantly forwards towards social betterment. They held that the evils of the

world, including poverty and warfare, existed because the kind of men, whose motives were greed and pride....., had been allowed to misguide and to misrule it.(20)

This, one can say, is how Shābbī conceived of life and existence. In trying to seek social and moral perfection he, in another poem entitled Shujūn, "Sorrows", examines life and its ways, but he seems to find nothing but scenes of misery. Thus he seems to be convinced that misfortune is eternal, and that it governs existence from its beginning to its end (21)

Paralleling Shābbī's dejection, Gibrān declares his disappointment after experiencing the deceptive ways of life. He not only reveals that misery in life is inevitable, but he also realizes that even patience and forbearance do not seem to be the satisfactory solution, for they soon turn to betrayal. Such a view is expressed in the following verses by Gibrān:

بين ضلعيه خيالات الهموم	قد أقمنا العمر في واد تسير
فوق متنيه كعقبان و بوم	و شهدنا اليأس أسرابا تطير
فغدونا نتردى بالرماد	و لبسنا المبرثوبا فالتهب
عندما نمنا هشيما وقتاد (22)	و افترشناه وسادا فانقلب

We have been living in a valley
In which shadows of distress are constantly moving
With despair hovering above us
Like flights of eagles and owls.

No sooner had we donned patience as a garment,
 Then it burnt up.
 So we have had nothing for clothes but ashes.
 We made of patience and forbearance a pillow
 But it soon turned to chaff and thorns.

Other images of romantic despondency could be seen in the references to vague yearning and nostalgia for remote sources of satisfaction and unattainable ideals. Nāḡī, for instance, expresses these sentiments in the image of 'Āṣifat 'l-Rūḡ "The Storm of the Soul", the title of one of his poems. "Peace" is portrayed as a mirage or a port which is but an illusion to the "ship of his soul". Throughout his poem, Nāḡī pictures a hopeless sailor fighting the severity of the winds, high waves and darkness. The sailor is stripped of all hope by the tempest. The following are some of the echoes of his rage and grief:

أين شط الرجاء
 يا عباب الهموم
 ليلى أنواء
 ونهارى غيوم
 أعولى يا جراح
 أسمعى الديان
 لايهم الرياح
 زورق غفبان

.....

البلى والشقوب
 في صميم الشراع

والضنى والشحوب
 وخيال الوداع
 الأماني غرور
 في فم البركان
 والدجى مخمور
 والردى سكران (23)

Where is the shore of hope?
 O waves of sorrow.
 My night is all a storm,
 My day is overcast with clouds.
 Howl O wounds
 Let the Lord hear.
 A wrathful boat
 Will not threaten the winds.

 The sail is holed
 And rent apart,
 Fatigued and ragged.
 Shadows of farewell (appear).
 All hopes are vain
 In the mouth of a volcano.
 Darkness is drunk,
 And death is (blind with) intoxication.

One may notice in the above verses that Nājī's fast rhythms and short lines are emphatic and powerful, and betray a considerable degree of grievous anger. It is a cry of horror which depicts the abysmal spiritual distress which the poet is going through.

A similar tone of a lost wandering is raised in A.M. Ṭāhā's poem Ṣakhrat 'l-Multaqā "The Cliff of the Meeting". At the beginning of the poem, Ṭāhā portrays himself as seeking the shade of an oasis to avoid the midday heat of the "desert of

life". In further verses he seems to become a baffled bird soaring over a turbulent ocean. In this state of loss and unrest his days and nights seem to pass hopelessly. The following verses are a depiction of Tāhā's spiritual anguish:

صحراء الحياة كم همت فيها	شارد الفكر تائه الخطوات
سرت فيها و قد حطم المقدار في جنح ليلا مشكاتي	
و لكم أرمدا الهجير جفوني	و رمتني الحرور باللفحات
لم أجد لي في واحة العيش ظلا	أو غديرا يبيل حرّ لها تي
.
أنا فوق المحيط كالطائر التا	نه يعلو مواضع اللجات
وورائي الصحراء وادي المنايا	و أما مي المحيط لجّ الحياة
بين مبريها ثوت غرّ أيا	مي و حال الوضي من ليلا تي (24)

I have been wandering about in the desert of life,
With distracted thoughts and straying steps.
Travelling alone under the curtain of darkness,
Fate has smashed my lamp.
The midday heat blinds my eyes
And wafts all around me.
I have never found a shaded oasis in life,
Nor a stream to slake the thirst of my mouth.

.

Above the ocean, I am but a lost bird soaring over
stormy waves.
Behind me the desert, the valley of death.
And before me the ocean, the stormy sea of life.
Between these two the best of my days are spent,
And my bright nights wane away.

The aspects, which are portrayed in the above examples of Shābbī, Gibrān, Nājī and Tāhā, are distinct signs of despon-

déncy, suffering and bewilderment. The state of frustration and despair occasioned by the problems of life, seem to drive the romantic wanderers to abandon the world of clamour and wickedness and look for solitude. Within this solitude they can build their own fantasies and daydreams of ideal realms. The poetic solitude seems to be a state of mind and soul in which the romantic poet can enjoy his "distinctive position" above the world of the "humble masses". Likewise, the revelations he creates, as far as his narcissistic tendency is concerned, seem to be far beyond the people's understanding and perception. This seems to be similar to what the French romantic poet A.de Vigny (1797-1863) describes as a stamped bottle being thrown in the ocean of the masses. De Vigny says:

Let us throw the bottle in the ocean of
the masses after stamping it by the stamp
of the sacred solitude.(25)

Although the romanticists incline to detach themselves from others and never expect support but from their inner beliefs (26), they realize that the solitude they crave is but a temporary refuge and not a solution. Romantic solitude seems to be pleasurable on the one hand, but on the other hand it becomes the main cause of alienation. For soon the voices rise declaring the bitter feelings of being alienated in a world which is corrupt and in which the poets never find

(I live) in a fettered existence
Straying into the darkness of doubt and calamity.
I wished I had never existed in this world,
Nor seen the planets revolve around me.
I wished that the dawn had not embraced my dreams
Nor the light kissed my eyes.

With the Iraqi poet Nāzik al-Malā'ika (b.1923), suffering the vicissitudes of an imperfect life find expression in a novel way. Malā'ika, one might 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 Malā'ika's remarkable poem Khams Aghānī li 'l-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. Throughout her verses no tears are shed, nor any laments or complaints heard. Instead of that total understanding and calm prevail. Although she realizes how much the bitterness of pain is overwhelming, she seems to have managed to tame its severity and turn it to a lovely creature. Pain, as the poet portrays it, is marked with a sweet spirit which makes her not only love it and glorify its essence, but also welcome it and sing for it. It would be profitable to choose, at least, three stanzas from Malā'ika's poem Khams Aghānī li 'l-Alam in which she seems to be in harmony with her pain. She begins the first stanza with a question:

من أين يأتي لنا الألم
من أين يأتي لنا؟
أخى رؤانا من قـدم
ورعى قوافلينا
أنا له عطش وفـم
يحيى ويمـقينا (29)

From where does pain come to us?
From where does it come?
It has been the twin of our visions,
And the minder of our verses for ages.
(To it) we are but a thirst and a mouth.
When it (offers) we drink.

The poet portrays pain as a loveable child who is cherished
by a passionate mother. She says:

و من عساه أن يكون ذلك الألم؟
طفل صغير ناعم مستفهم العيون
تمكته تهويده و ربة حنون
وان تبسمنا و غنينا له ينم (30)

What could pain be?
But a little sensitive child with questioning eyes
Who can be calmed by a lullaby and a ^{coo}passionate pat.
If we smile and sing to him he will fall asleep.

Moreover, pain seems to be a pure source of inspiration to
the poet:

أنت يا من كفه أعطت لحونا و أغاني
يا دموعا تمنح الحكمة ، يا نبع معان
يا ثرائنا و خصوبة

يا حنانا قاسيا يا نعمة تقطر رحمة
نحن خبأناك في أحلامنا في كل نعمة
من أغانيها الكثيرة (31)

You (pain), whose hand has offered melodies
and songs.
You are tears which grant wisdom, a fountain
of meanings.
You are riches and fertility.
You are a harsh passion, a blow full of mercy.
We have hidden you in our dreams and in every tune
Of our gloomy songs.

Whether the romanticists enjoy their pains or reject the feelings of alienation and despondency, they all realize that even the solitude they crave cannot ease their anguish. Solitude seems to be a temporary refuge for their vagrant souls, and they feel that life will continue to be imperfect and unbearable. Aspiring for spiritual emancipation from the physical bonds to the metaphysical, from the finite to the infinite, from the known to the unknown, all these longings seem, however, to persist. But this state of anxiety and unease motivated the poets to search for a solution. Death as a metaphysical reality stood before the romanticists as an ambiguous question mark challenging their minds and animating their souls. Death, the symbol of mystery and the unknown, might be the gateway to spiritual freedom and self-realization. But in what manner death was viewed as the liberator, is the subject of the following chapters of this work, and of the remaining sections of the present chapter.

III. DEATH THE GLORIOUS ROAD TO SALVATION

The notion of seeking a salvation through death in the works of the Arab romanticists, one may say, betrays a mystical influence. Many common traits could be found in the works of the romantic poets in modern times and the medieval Muslim Sūfīs. Mystical concepts, terms and means of expression, which distinguish Sūfī poetry became a noticeable source of inspiration to the romanticists especially when dealing with the concept of death. Their way of viewing the eventuality of death corresponds in many ways to the main lines of Sūfī doctrine about the essence of the soul, its "state" of longing to depart to a perfect metaphysical world which, as the Sūfīs believe, culminates in reaching the stage of "fanā'" "passing away"*.

According to the doctrine of the Muslim Sūfīs and philosophers, the human soul existed in an ideal world before its emergence into its present "imperfect" state. The soul keeps longing for her original world where she tasted true pleasure and satisfaction. Ibn Sīnā's famous poem about the descent of the human soul from its metaphysical state is a representative example in this context. It is the poem which begins with the

* The translation of this term is taken from Nicholson, R.A, in his book The Mystics of Islam, London, 1974, p.149.

well-known verse:

هبطت اليك من المحل الأرفع ورقاء ذات تعزز وتمنع (32)

It descended upon thee from the lofty station (heaven);
A dove rare and uncaptured.(33)

This poem, one may say, is a revelation of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine in which he almost asserts three notions. First, he proclaims that the previous existence of the human soul was in a "perfect metaphysical" world. Second, the human soul subsequently undergoes a descent to an earthly life which is described as "inferior" and "imperfect". Third, since the soul has experienced the felicity of her former existence, she therefore keeps longing for her primordial origin and aspires to revert to it.

These main lines of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of the soul seem to have left their influence on most of the romanticists' works. In a poem entitled Man Anti Yā Nafsī (34) "Who Are You My Soul", Mīkhā'īl Naimy raises many profound questions about the essence of the soul. Throughout these questions he almost approaches the very idea of the "descent" of the human soul. He also, in the words of Nadīm Naimy, seems to realize that:

It is of the very nature of the human soul
to feel highly estranged in the world of
appearance and to yearn constantly for its
homeland..... Such feelings of estrangement
and yearning find their full expression in

"The Song of the Wind", a symbolic song, in which the poet, dreaming of having been carried skywards on the wings of the wind, meets a lost angel (a symbol of the emancipated soul) in whom he finds good company in looking for the way back to the original homeland. (35)

Nasīb 'Arīḍa (1887-1946), another of the Mahjar poets, clearly reflects what Ibn Sīnā said about the descent of the soul from the elevated station. Reading 'Arīḍa's verses, one may notice that he is barely able to tolerate the bonds of the earthly body which choke his soul's aspiration to a vision of eternity. He says:

أحـن شوقا الى ديار	رأيت فيها سنا الجمال
أهبطت فيها الى قرار	أمت به الروح في اعتقال
يهزني في الدجى حنين	الى الذي مر من وصال (36)

I yearn for a land
Where I have seen the brightness of beauty.
I have descended down to a state
In which the soul is chained.
Feeling in the darkness a deep longing
For that primal union.

Likewise, 'Arīḍa expresses his belief that he can only attain the desirable homeland of his soul through death:

عسى نرى في السماء دريا	نسير فيه و لا نعود
قم و اترك الجسم حيث يبلى	فالموت خير من الجمود (37)

We hope that we can see a road in the sky
Through which we may walk and never return.
Rise up, leave the body to decay
Death is better than lethargy.

Being haunted by the fantasies of a metaphysical pre-existence, Shābbī seems to believe that he, once upon a time, existed in a perfect universe where beauty and happiness embraced his soul. In a poem entitled Ilā 'l-llāh "TO God", he despairingly supplicates the Almighty:

أنت أنزلتني الى ظلمة الأرض و قد كنت في صباح زاه (38)

O Lord, you have cast me onto the darkness of the earth,
Whereas before, I existed in a bright perpetual morn.

Shābbī in this instance conceives of his pre-life experience as a magnificent dream broken by the dismal darkness of life:

كان في قلبي فجر و نجوم و بحار لا تغشها الغيوم
و أنا شيد و أطيّار تحوم و ربيع مشرق حلو جميل
كان في قلبي صباح و أيّاه و ابتسامات و لكن و أساه
آه ما أهول اعصار الحياة آه ما أشقى قلوب الناس آه
كان في قلبي فجر و نجوم
فاذا الكل ظلام و سديم
كان في قلبي فجر و نجوم (39)

In the realm of my heart, there were a dawn and stars
And oceans which were never veiled with clouds.
There were songs, birds soaring
And a bright delightful charming Spring.

In the realm of my heart there were mornings, lights
 And smiles. But alas!
 How savage is the storm of life!
 Ah, how cruel are the hearts of men.
 In the realm of my heart there were a dawn and stars.
 But suddenly everything turned to darkness and haze.
 There were a dawn and stars in my heart.

When proceeding to trace other influences of the Muslim Sūfīs on the romantic poets in modern times, one should realize that the inspiration of Sūfī poetry arose from a mystical state, ḥāl, in which, by way of meditation, the Sūfīs could approach the reality of spiritual revelation. Overwhelmed with the ecstasy of that particular state, the Sūfīs were seemingly preoccupied with two tendencies. First, the mystic longs to attain unity with the infinite "God", as the essence of goodness and perfection. This mystical love of God was the distinguishing mark of Sūfī works (40). Al-Hallāj 244 (858)-309 (922), Ibn 'Arabī 560 (1165)-638 (1240), Ibn al-Fāriḍ 576 (1181)-632 (1235) and other Sūfīs were all lovers of God. And one can compile endless examples of poetry attesting to this kind of mystical love. Second, the mystic's attempt to fulfil the aspiration of his soul by "passing away from what belongs to himself and persisting through what is God's"(41). Fanā' is a mystical term which is frequently used to identify the ecstatic state which the Sūfīs seem to have attained after going through constant "stages" of their mystical journey (42). In his book The Mystics of Islam, R.A Nicholson states that:

For some Sūfīs, absorption in the ecstasy of fanā' is the end of their pilgrimage. Thenceforth no relation exists between them and the world. Nothing of themselves is left in them; as individuals, they are dead. Immersed in Unity, they know neither law nor religion nor any form of phenomenal being.(43)

Examining the term fanā' from the mystical point of view, one should consider two aspects of it. First, the mystical journey which culminates in the state fanā' by no means represents the eventuality of the soul's being. On the contrary, it abounds with new possibilities of an exceedingly satisfactory existence. As Nicholson puts it:

Fanā', the passing away of the Sūfī from his phenomenal existence, involves baqā' the continuance of his real existence. He who dies to self lives in God, and fanā' the consummation of this death, marks the attainment of baqā' or union with the divine life.(44)

Second, the state of fanā' is usually depicted with images which seemingly spurn all manifestations of earthly life, and turn towards the unbounded spiritual pleasures of heaven. In his well-known work Turjumān al-Ashwāq, Ibn 'Arabī, for example, conveys his yearning to fulfil the desirable rendez-vous "al-maw'id", that is to say the final destination of his mystical journey, when his soul will experience the state of fanā' and be able to attain the real "source" of complete satisfaction. This could be understood from his verse:

بالجزع بين الأبرقين الموعد فأناخ ركائبنا فهذا المورد (45)

In the valley-curve between the two stony tracts is
trysting-place.
Make our camels kneel, for here is the journey's end.(46)

A full interpretation is attached to the work of Turjumān al-Ashwāq by Ibn 'Arabī himself who, for instance, explains al-maw'id "rendezvous" as "the paradise of 'Adn", and al-mawrid "resource" as "the eternal amenity which delights the spirit and the sight"(47). Then he proceeds to portray lively images of glorious horizons which evoke beauty, peace and absolute fulfilment. In other verses, Ibn 'Arabī seems to have expressed the same longing for that "promised day", when his soul will be guided to her spiritual homeland. Reaching that station, the soul will be able to get rid of suffering and of earthly hardship (48).

The point to stress is that the main line of Sūfī doctrine, as it can be deduced from their works, consists in renouncing earthly life and longing for a metaphysical existence in a higher plane. This aim, they believe, cannot be attained unless the soul departs from the physical body. The Sūfī visions about the delightful departure and the unbounded spiritual pleasures of the soul in a heavenly universe, perhaps affected the romanticists' imagination and prepared them to adopt mystical means of treating the theme of death. Thus death, in the romantics' works, is always associated with love and beauty,

and this is the very essence of Sūfī doctrine. Commenting on Shābbī's poetry, Abū al-Qāsim Kerrū points out that the ultimate existence of the human soul according to Shābbī:

is the eternal spiritual existence, which will be attained after the soul departs the ties of the earthly life. Symbolizing that ultimate existence, the poet always resorts to the images of "the far dawn" and "the new morrow"..... Death in Shābbī's poetry seems to be the remedy which will save him from misery and open the doors of eternal beauty before him. In this regard Shābbī's pessimism of life apparently consists of an optimism of the after life.(49)

In a poem entitled Ilā 'l-Mawt "To Death", Shābbī pictures his final destination as a delightful and mysterious horizon, a universe consisting of beauty and pure excitement. Likewise, his coming death* is passionately viewed within an image of a charming spirit hovering above the clouds and welcoming the coming of immortality. Sometimes death embodies a delightful cup from which the thirsty drink, sometimes it is a soft comfortable bed on which all beings eventually sleep in peace. Death is finally portrayed as a place where nude heavenly maidens appear swaying and singing lovely melodies (50).

Since death is believed to be a way to spiritual freedom and total fulfilment, it is therefore welcomed by romantic

* It is important to note that Shābbī was undergoing a subtle experience with fatal illness, and was totally aware of his imminent death.

poets with noticeable passion. Furthermore, it is something desirable whose novelty is worthy of anticipation, a charming unknown to be loved and yearned for. Thus death becomes characterized as the beloved with whom meeting is eagerly awaited. Once death is encountered, as Ṣalāḥ Labakī (1906-1955) the Lebanese poet puts it, all suffering vanishes and is thrown away with what remains of the body, whereas the ultimate essence proceeds upwards to that expanse where love and tranquility exist. In his poem Ughniyat 'l-Mawt "The Song of Death", Labakī engages in a meditation upon death in which he endeavours to grasp its essence. Overwhelmed by a vision of freedom and love, it is no wonder that at the end the poet welcomes his beloved with eager longing:

يمحو من العمر غدى	يا حسن ذاك الموعد
همّ و يغني كبدى	و يمسح الآلام والـ
تسلم رهن الأبد؟	و تسلم الأحلام هل
منفلت منفسرد	أمضي بها الى مدى
ذاء زهور جدد	هناك حيث الحب أشـ
.
في قدسك المؤمد	ما أنت في غيبك أو
ب جامع مزغرد	هل أنت الآ وحي حـ
و الملتقى حلو اليد	يطلّ حلو العين حلـ
تمحو من العمر غدى (51)	مرحى متى ما جئتني

How delightful that rendezvous will be
 When it comes to eliminate the future out of my life.
 To wipe away the suffering and the sorrow
 And give rest to (lit.put an end to) my heart.
 But saves the dreams. Can the dreams be saved for ever?
 So I can emerge with them into a unique, unbounded expanse.

Where love is (manifested) in the fragrance of fresh blossoms.

What are you death in your veil of invisibility
And in your eternal glory?
Are you not but a mighty inspiring love full of music,
Appearing with sweet eyes, a sweet encounter and sweet hand?
Welcome whenever you come to me
To eliminate the future out of my life.

With Gibrān, death seems to become the ultimate freedom,
a spirit of beauty and charm which helps people to attain
peace and repose. In the beginning of his prose poem Jamāl / 1-
Mawt "The Beauty of Death"*, Gibrān depicts the moment in
which the soul departs from the body with a mystical passion:

ها قد بلغت قمة الجبل ، فسبحت روحي في فضاء الحرية والاعتاق
فما عدت أسمع سوى أنشودة الخلود متألفة مع أميال الروح . (52)

Now, I have reached the peak of the mountain,
and my soul moves freely in the vast
space of boundless freedom..... I hear nothing
but the song of immortality harmonizing
with the longings of the soul.

* I have chosen to consider some of Gibrān's prose works
because of their close links with verse.
See: Ḥawī, Kh, Khalīl Gibrān, Beirut, 1963, Chap VIII:
"Analysis of His Form and Style", p.244; Trends, II, p.633:
"His readings (Gibrān) in Western poetry, where prose as a
medium for poetic expression was already well regarded, as
well as in the Bible, must have given him the necessary encouragement
to use a prose which, on occasions, rose to the heights of poetry".
See also: Ḥawī, I, al-Rūmānsiyya, Beirut, 1980, p.173,4:

"ان الدارس ليحار في الأدب الجبراني و درسه في باب الشعر أم باب النثر ،
الآن جبران لم يضع حدا بين هذين الغنيين و كان يعبر عن ذاته وفقما
يدفعه يقينه . وانك لتعثر في أدبه على الفلذة الشعرية الرائعة الى
جنب الفلذة النثرية "

In The Prophet, Gibrān portrays death as a ship "that has come to bear him to the isle of his birth, the Platonic world of metaphysical reality"(53). It is a pleasant departure in which the soul reaches its highest intoxication by releasing itself from the ties of casual Time and Place. Approaching this stage, the soul seemingly attains its total salvation, where "the Utopia of human existence and the metaphysical world of higher truth"(54) exist. There is, however, a more profound view in The Prophet of Gibrān which sees in the moment of departing the body a unique vision that goes beyond the imagination. It is the departure after which true knowledge is attained, and real existence begins:

For what is to die but to stand naked in the wind
and to melt into the sun?
And what is to cease breathing but to free the
breath from its restless ties, that it may rise
and expand and seek God unencumbered?
Only when you drink from the river of silence shall
you indeed sing.
And when you have reached the mountain top, then you
shall begin to climb.
And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall
you truly dance.(55)

With both the eagerness of pioneers and the intensity of spiritual yearning, the Arab romanticists seem to have given death extensive treatment. They developed a noticeable mystical outlook towards death, as a novel and contemplative experience. One may understand their aesthetic view of death as an ongoing and joyous procession towards the ultimate fulfilment.

In his commentary on Shābbī's poem al-Ṣabāh 'l-Jadīd "The New Morrow", M.M Badawī provides the following critique of the poet's vision in the moment of contemplating his imminent death:

Shābbī now regards death as a means of attaining a fuller and more significant life...Here partly by means of dominant light imagery which, like Wordsworth, he tends to use in modern (sic) to express moments of ecstasy or spiritual revelation, Shābbī manages to convey a profound experience of mystical dimensions which makes the final image in the poem of the poet unfurling the sails of his lonely boat on a strange and vast sea, welcoming the hazards of the unknown, a perfect and moving symbol of frail but heroic man.(56)

To have a close picture of Shābbī's vision, it would be convenient to refer to the last two stanzas of al-Ṣabāh 'l-Jadīd which demonstrate the hopeful view which Shābbī had of death:

و هدير المياه	من وراء الظلام
و ربيع الحياه	قد دعاني الصبح
هز قلبي صداه	يا له من دعاء
فوق هذي البقاع	لم يعد لي بقاء

.

يا جبال الهموم	الوداع الوداع
يا فجاج الجحيم	يا ضباب الأسى
في الخضم العظيم	قد جرى زورقي
فالوداع الوداع (57)	و نشرت القلاع

IV . DEATH AS A VOLUNTARY EXPERIENCE

It is interesting, while examining the aspect of the voluntary acceptance of death in the poetry of the Arab romanticists, to refer to the following verses of D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), who proclaims that:

We are dying, we are dying, so all we can do
is now to be willing to die, and to build the ship
of death to carry the soul on the longest journey.

A little ship, with oars and food
and little dishes, and all accoutrements
fitting and ready for the departing soul.(58)

One cannot, however, speak of D.H. Lawrence as having had an influence on Shābbī, or say that Shābbī read Lawrence in any translated texts*. But Shābbī seems to intensify Lawrence's vision about the voluntary experience of death in a single verse, in which he asserts that death is an experience that deserves to be tried willingly. This verse of Shābbī, which appears in a poem entitled Fī Zil/Wādī 'l-Mawt "In the Shadow of the Valley of Death", expresses a clear sense of excitement about death. It is the excitement of experiencing something new:

* Shābbī knew no foreign languages.

جفّ سحر الحياة يا قلبي البا كي فيها نجرب الموت هيا (59)

The charm of life has dried up
So come along my heart, let us try death.

This experience of death which Shābbī suggests occurs as a wish to the poet to make of death not a passive act of surrender, but an act of will carried out consciously,

for the experience of death held for Shābbī all the strange pleasure and enticing mystery that vital experiences hold..... He often mentions death when he is speaking of life, beauty, youth, hope and Spring.... He believes that a complete and deep life cannot arrive at the peak of its consciousness and realization until it merges with death.(60)

"Let's die", is another emphatic invitation to death made by Nāzik al-Malā'ika in her poem Ajrās Sawdā' "Black Bells". The experience of death which the poet welcomes seems to have had such a tempting attraction which cannot be resisted. She is like Keats (1795-1821), whom she called in one of her articles "the great lover of death"(61), finding a rare and mysterious pleasure in responding to "the soft wing of death while picking her up and flying away". No wonder that she, while examining Keats' works and the fascination death held for him (62), cites this verse from his well-known poem "Ode to a Nightingale":

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain.(63)

Some echoes of Keats' verse could be heard in Malā'ika's poem Ajrās Sawdā', in which she addresses a friend of hers:

أَكْوَسُ الْفَارِغَاتِ تَسْخَرُ مِنَّا	لَنَمُتْ فَالْحَيَاةُ جَفَتْ وَهَذِي أَلْ
أَمْ عَادَتْ أَجْلَى وَأَعَمَقَ لَوْنَا	و غَيُومُ الذُّهُولِ فِي أَمِينِ الْإِي
.
تَيْنَادِي بِنَا فَلَمْ لَا نَجِيبْ	و لِمَاذَا نَبْقَى هُنَا؟ أَسْمَعُ الْمَو
نَا وَ لَوْنِ الدُّجَى عَمِيقَ رَهِيْبِ	لَنَمُتْ فَالرِّيَّاحُ تَجْرَحُ وَجْهِيْبِ
.
ن وَ لَنْ يَلْمَسَا مَسَاءً جَدِيدَا	أَيُّهَا اللَّيْلُ لَنْ يَعْيشَ الْغَرِيبَا
دِيْ حَوْلِيْهْمَا وَ حَلَقَ بَعِيدَا (64)	خَذْهُمَا أَرْخَ جَنَاحَ الْأَسْوَدِ الْهَا

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.
Why do we stay here? I hear death calling us,
Why aren't we answering his call?
Let's die.....the winds scratch our faces
And the colour of the night is deep and awesome.
O night, the two strangers do not wish to live,
Or to go through another evening.
Take them, lay your quiet black wing around them
And fly away.

Commenting on the poetry of Adīb Mazhar (1898-1928), a Lebanese poet, S.Kh. Jayyūsī writes in this connection:

Death, as a much desired experience, is treated in Adīb Mazhar's verses in an original fashion. It is not the same factual death that is treated in conventional poetry with the usual kind of sorrow and traditional wisdom, but a fascinating experience where the poet reveals a deep, unquenchable desire for the "soft claw of death":

فيا شبح الموت اطفئي غدى بمخيلك الناعم الأسود

Oh phantom of death, blot out my morrow
with your soft, black claw.(65)

In al-Mawākib, "The Processions", Gibrān perceives of the experience of death as the ultimate achievement of the human soul. For the human soul will not experience the right existence until it is liberated through death. Life, accordingly, is but a womb for the soul, while the moment of death is the day of birth. This seems to be what Gibrān is saying in the following verses:

والجسم للروح رحم تستكن به حتى البلوغ فتستعلي و ينغمر
فهي الجنين وما يوم الحمام سوى عهد المخاض فلا سقط و لا عسر (66)

The body is a womb for the soul
In which it dwells until full term for birth is over.
When it would ascend once more to soar
While the womb recedes into nothingness.
The soul is a babe, and the day of death
Is the day of its happy birth.

Because the experience of death, in Gibrān's view, is not a dreadful eventuality but a glorious "birth" in which the soul begins its proper existence, it comes to be viewed as a pleasant experience and an occasion which deserves to be celebrated joyfully. In a prose poem entitled Jamāl 'l-Mawt "The Beauty of Death", Gibrān depicts himself as a dying person, and describes the hour of his death. He does not only seem to

be enjoying the experience himself, but seems to invite others to participate in the glorious ceremonies preparing for his departure. Thus a festive atmosphere of candles, blossoms and fragrance harmonizes with lovely sounds of lyres and flutes on the occasion of the poet's death, an occasion which he deliberately wants to be a great celebration:

دعوني أرقد ، فقد شبع روعي من الأيام والليالي .
 اشعلوا الشموع وأوقدوا المباخر حول مضجعي ، وانثروا أوراق
 الورد والنرجس على جسدی ثم انظروا وأقروا ما تخطه
 يد الموت على جبهتي .
 انفخوا الشبابات والنايات وحوكوا من أنغامها العذبة نقابا حول
 قلبي المتسارع نحو الوقوف . (67)

Let me rest, for my spirit has had its fill
 of days and nights.
 Light the candles and burn the incense around
 my bed, and scatter leaves of jasmine and roses
 over my body, and read what the hand of death
 has written on my forehead.
 Play the flutes and let their sweet tunes
 surround my dying heart.

In The Prophet, there is another pleasant image of a dying person experiencing a "thrill of joy" while receiving the "mark" of death, "the king":

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the
 shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand
 is to be laid upon him in honour.
 Is the shepherd not joyful beneath his trembling,
 that he shall wear the mark of the king? (68)

According to this view of Gibrān, death is but a rich experi-

ence which deserves to be willingly welcomed in order to give the ultimate spiritual satisfaction. This experience, according to the author of The Prophet, need not suggest fear nor distress. Thus Gibrān appeals to the farewell assembly gathered around the dead not to cry, but to "raise their heads and watch the white wings of the bride of dawn soaring throughout the vast space". Likewise, he asks the assembly around the dead not to wear black but to be dressed in white, not to lament, but to sing joyfully, for mourning and weeping may disturb the repose and tranquility which the dying enjoy (69).

Gibrān's picture of death as a rebirth in his prose poetry finds many an echo in the works of the romanticists in general. It is obvious that the conventional attitude of pessimism towards death is almost reversed. Likewise the demonstration of vociferous grief and mourning on the occasion of death seems to be turned to a meditative calm and total serenity. Sadness for the dead in the works of the romanticists seems to be a form of meditation which overwhelms the soul with a sense of peace. With this sort of sadness, the romanticists seem to have reflected more understanding of the painful experiences of the deaths of dear ones. They adopt an attitude through which they discover the pleasureable side of pain and sadness. The grief for the dead, therefore, began to find expression in a new way. The harsh grief, which used to be demonstrated by the neoclassicists with such vociferous and exaggerated declamatory verse, seems to be absolutely

abandoned by the romanticists. The romanticists deal with their sadness with considerable composure and understanding. They, so to speak, ultimately tamed the harsh element of sadness, invariably expressed in a rhetorical manner, and expressed their grief in a more intimate manner and much quieter tones. Malā'ika, for example, wrote the following brief comment as a prelude to her poem entitled Thalāthu Marāthi li Ummī "Three Elegies to My Mother":

I have not found to my pain a better outlet other than to love it and to sing for it.(70)

Malā'ika then followed this brief statement with a short stanza entitled Ughniya li 'l-Huzn "A Song for Sadness", in which she personifies sadness or grief as a most gracious and welcome visitor:

افسحوا الدرب له ، للقادم الصافي الشعور
للغلام المرهف السابح في بحر أريج
انه جاء الينا عابرا خصب الممرور
انه أهدأ من ماء الغدير
فاحذروا أن تجرحوه بالضجيج (71)

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.
So be careful, do not hurt him with any clamour.

This stanza perhaps represents the views of most of the roman-

tic 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 candour. Malā'ika further adds in her personification of this visitor:

أبدا يجرحه النوح و يفضيه العويل
فليكن في صمتنا ظل ظليل
يتلقاه و أحضان خفية (72)

Mourning and weeping always hurt him.
Let our silence be his protective shelter,
In which he is welcomed and embraced.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

- (1) Al-Jundī, A, al-Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir, p.264-9; Ḥawī, I, al-Rūmānsiyya, Beirut, 1980, p.137-9
- (2) An Anthology, p.xiv
- (3) Trends, II, p.361
- (4) Ibid, p.55
- (5) Quoted from: Trends, I, p.57; See also: An Anthology, p.xiii
- (6) Al-'Aqqād, A.M, Shu'arā', p.192; al-'Aqqād, A.M, Sā'āt Bayna 'l-Kutub, I, Cairo, 1950, p.114; 'Abd 'l-Ḥayy, M Tradition and English and American Influence in Arabic Romantic Poetry, London, 1982, p.3-4; Khafājī, M.A, al-'Aqqād wa Qaḍiyyat 'l-Shi'r, Cairo, 1979, p.52
- (7) An Anthology, p.xiv
- (8) Naimy, M, al-Ghirbāl, Beirut, 1964, p.147-8
- (9) Khafājī, M.A, al-'Aqqād wa Qaḍiyyat 'l-Shi'r, p.57-68; Naimy, N, al-Ghirbāl, p.70-1
- (10) 'Abd 'l-Ḥayy, Tradition, p.163-4
- (11) Trends, II, p.384
- (12) Apollo, No.1, Sep, 1932, p.4-5, (translation quoted from: Trends, II, p.386
- (13) An Anthology, p.xv
- (14) Romanticism and the Modern Ego, Boston, 1944, p.106
- (15) Ghunaymī Hilāl, M, Dirāsāt wa Namādhij, Cairo, (n.d), p.83, (Dirāsāt)
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- (17) An Anthology, p.xiv

- (18) Bernbaum, E, Anthology of Romanticism, Newyork, 1948, p.xxvii
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- (20) Anthology of Romanticism, p.xxvii
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- (22) Gibrān, Gibrān Khalīl, al-Badā'i' wa 'l-Tarā'if, Cairo, 1923, p.207-8, (Badā'i')
- (23) Dīwān, Cairo, 1961, p.299-300
- (24) Dīwān, Beirut, 1972, p.118-121
- (25) As quoted by Ghunaymī Hilāl in Dirāsāt, p.84
- (26) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (27) As quoted in Romanticism and the Modern Ego, p.106
- (28) Aghānī, p.112,3
- (29) Dīwān, II, Beirut, 1971, p.461
- (30) Ibid, p.461-2
- (31) Ibid, p.467-8
- (32) Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-A'yān, ed: 'Abbās, Iḥsān, Beirut, 1969, p.160
- (33) Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary, Trans: Guckin, De Slane, I, Paris, (n.d), p.443
- (34) Hams al-Jufūn, Beirut, 1974, p.16-21, (Hams)
- (35) Naimy, Nadīm, Mīkhā'īl Naimy, An Introduction, American University of Beirut, 1967, p.189, (Mīkhā'īl Naimy)
- (36) Al-Arwāḥ al-Hā'ira, Newyork, 1946, p.179-180, (Arwāḥ)
- (37) Ibid, p.179
- (38) Aghānī, p.99
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- (40) See: Nicholson, R.A, The Mystics of Islam, London, 1974, p.102, (Mystics); Arberry, A.J, The Doctrine of the Sūfis, Cambridge, 1935, p.101-104, (Doctrine)
- (41) Doctrine, p.120
- (42) Mystics, chap.I
- (43) Ibid, p.163-4
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- (45) Ibn 'Arabī, Muhyī 'l-Dīn, Turjumān al-Ashwāq, Beirut, 1961, p.112, (Turjumān)
- (46) Turjumān al-Ashwāq, Trans.and ed. Nicholson, R.A, London, 1911, p.101
- (47) Ibn 'Arabī, Turjumān, p.112
- (48) Ibid, p.189-90
- (49) Dirāsāt 'An 'l-Shābbī, p.9
- (50) Aghānī, p.76-7
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- (55) Gibrān, Gibrān Khalīl, The Prophet, London, 1974, p.91-2
- (56) Critical Introduction, p.167-8
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- (58) The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence, II, ed: Pin, V.de S & Robert, F.W, London, 1967, p.718
- (59) Aghānī, p.143
- (60) Al-Malā'ika, N, Qadāyā, p.294-5
- (61) Ibid, p.296

- (62) Ibid, p.296-7
- (63) The Poetical Works of John Keats, ed: Buxton Forman, H, London, 1914, p.232
- (64) Dīwān, II, p.104,6,7
- (65) Trends, II, p.489
- (66) Gibrān, Gibrān Khalīl, al-Mawākib, Newyork, 1958, p.67
- (67) Gibrān Hayyan, p.137
- (68) The Prophet, p.90-91
- (69) Gibrān Hayyan, p.137-9
- (70) Dīwān, II, p.311
- (71) Ibid, p.313
- (72) Ibid, p.314

CHAPTER III

IMAGINARY JOURNEYS TO THE WORLD OF DEATH

A Study of Two Long Poems:

I. 'Alā Tarīq Iram, by: N. 'Arīda

II. Shāṭi' al-A'rāf, by: M.A. al-Hamsharī

The motif of exploring a perfect world through death seemed to have gained such a noticeable momentum in Arabic romantic poetry from the outset. One may find some scattered examples of verse expressive of longing to discover this "perfect" world in the early compositions of some romanticists. This world of total contentment seems to have been initially perceived by those romanticists as a "Utopia" or a land of spiritual refuge. "The veiled land" is another name chosen by Gibrān to describe the world which he pines for. In a poem bearing the same title, Gibrān depicts a spiritual longing for a land which can neither be defined or described, but only speculated about and searched for. Likewise he conceives of this "veiled land" as a persistent hope of attaining perfection which he cannot ignore or dismiss. Gibrān gives

expression to his quest in the following verses:

يا بلادا حجبت منذ الأزل	كيف نرجوك ، و من أىّ سبيل
أىّ قفر دونها أىّ جبل	سورها العالى و من منا الدليل
أ سراب أنت أم أنت الأمل	فى نفوس تتمنى المستحيل (1)

O land veiled since eternity
How could we reach you, and through which way?
Which desert hides you? which high mountain surrounds you?
And who will guide us to you?
Are you a mirage? Or are you the hope of souls
Longing for the impossible?*

Malā'ika used the term Utopia to identify a similar world she longed for. She perceives of this world as a place where light exists for ever, and life and youth are not marred by any considerations of age or decay:

و يوتوبيا حيث يبقى الضياء	و لا تغرب الشمس أو تغلس
و حيث يظل عبير البنفسج	حيا و لا يذبل النرجس
و حيث تضيع حدود الزمان	و حيث الكواكب لا تنعس
هناك الحياة امتداد الشباب	تفور بنشوته الأنفس
هناك يظل الربيع ربيعاً	يظل سكان يوتوبيا (2)

Utopia, where light lasts for ever
And where the sun never sets, or darkness falls.
Where the fragrance of violets remains alive,
And the narcissus never fades.

* It is interesting to note how reminiscent this is of Shelly's verses in "To a Skylark":

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not.

Where the borders of time vanish,
 And the stars never set (lit.sleep).
 There, life is but a constancy of youth beaming with ecstasy.
 There, Spring remains fresh,
 Surrounding the inhabitants of Utopia.

In another stanza from the same poem which is entitled Utopia
 'l-Ddā'i'a "The Lost Utopia", Malā'ika seems to believe that
 her soul will never be rewarded by the discovery of this
 wonderful Utopia unless she goes through the experience of
 death. Accordingly, Utopia is a metaphysical "no-place" rather
 than an earthly paradise. Likewise, it is a tempting goal
 which arouses restless longing, and death is the exciting
 gateway that leads to it. Malā'ika says in this connection:

و فى حلمى صحت : أين أسير	فرد صدی : قرب یوتوبیسا
و أحست فى قعر روحى جنونا	و شوقا عميقا كبحر عميق
یرید انتها الطریق الغریب	الى البلد المتمدنى السحیق
سأبقى تجاذبنى الأمنیات	الى الأفق السرمدى البعید
و حين أموت أموت و قلبى	على موعد مع یوتوبیسا (3)

I called in my dream: where am I walking?
 "Near Utopia" an echo answered.
 And I felt a thrill of excitement in my soul,
 And a deep longing like a deep ocean,
 Striving to end the strange way
 Leading to the desired remote abode.

I will remain tempted by the hope of approaching
 that distant eternal horizon.
 And when I die, I shall die with the promise of
 finding Utopia.

One may notice that in the last verse, the poet sums up her view about the experience of death. It is the gateway to the desired Utopia, or an adventurous journey towards that perfect and charming world.

Besides this sketchy treatment of the motif of the desired land in short poems by various authors, one can find lengthy works dedicated to the notion of exploring imaginary worlds, and only finding them through death. This exploring takes the form of spiritual journeys. Nasīb 'Arīḍa of the Mahjar school of poets, and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Muṭṭī al-Hamsharī the Egyptian romantic poet, wrote one poem each of an epic range, and both devoted to speculation about the after-life. Both poems depict an imaginary journey towards a perfect and elevated world. 'Arīḍa called his world Iram, after the city by this name mentioned in the Holy Qurān (4), whereas Hamsharī called it Shāṭi' al-A'rāf, after Sūrat al-A'rāf in the Qurān (5). Both long poems were dedicated to identifying the unknown way which, as is hopefully anticipated, may lead to salvation.

I. 'Alā Tarīq Iram:

Introducing his long poem 'Alā Tarīq Iram "On the Way to Iram", 'Arīḍa writes a prologue in which he tries to paraphrase the ancient myth relating to Iram. He says:

In Arab mythology, Iram Dhāt 'l-Imād is a wonderful city which a mythical Shaddād b. 'Ād built of stones of gold and diamond. It

was thus an enchantment to the sight. Nobody could stare at it from afar in the daylight. Then this city of wonders perished and vanished in the desert. It still exists though, in a hidden place, abounding with magical palaces and unprotected treasures. But nobody can approach this city. Many people have strived to discover it, but they perished or were lost in the desert, or returned home empty-handed.

‘Arīḍa then adds the following explanatory note:

This is the mythical Iram. But the Iram which the author dwells upon in this (epic) is a spiritual one. He travels far with his caravans seeking it and describing the road he traverses stage by stage. At the last stage he imagines that he has seen a beacon of it from far away(6).

‘Arīḍa's long poem ‘Alā Tarīq Iram was composed in 1925, with a total of 236 verses. The myth of Iram Dhāt ‘l-‘Imād was seemingly a poetic dream apt to arouse an irresistible temptation to seek and discover it. Iram according to ‘Arīḍa is a desirable world for contemplation, the world which he longs to reach and explore. This long poem is based on two main notions. First, Iram is the last peaceful refuge that might offer the pioneer the total fulfilment he longs for. Second, to reach Iram, the pioneer (al-murtahil) must be prepared to endure the journey to it, that is to say, experience the toils of the road and strive to surmount all the difficulties which might face him. The ordeal of the journey, in other words, will not be in vain, for the pioneer will have the reward of finding Iram at the end of it.

In 1953 M. Naimy, 'Arīḍa's colleague in 'l-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya*, wrote an article in al-Ādāb magazine concerning 'Arida's work 'Alā Tariq Iram. The article was entitled "Nasīb 'Arīḍa: Shā'ir 'l-Tariq" "Nasīb 'Arīḍa: the Poet of the Road". In his description of this work, Naimy pointed out that:

'Alā Tariq Iram is a long poem in which the poet depicts his struggle, and the struggle of others like him, aspiring to find Iram Dhāt 'l-Imād, the symbol of their spiritual refuge.(7)

In Naimy's words, 'Arīḍa had managed to surpass other Arab and foreign poets in describing the road of life, on which he experiences endless yearning for an unknown phenomenon that glitters attractively from far away but is hardly ever attained. 'Arīḍa's long poem depicts life as being little more than "a coarse and long road, a road whose beginning is veiled by the mist of ignorance and its end obscured by the lack of knowledge"(8). In the words of Naimy, again:

Yes! the persistent march, the road, the road!
and at the end of the road, there is the indescribable aim, the aim of knowledge, repose
and manumission from the bonds of the flesh
and the blood.(9)

To understand the basic framework of this long poem, it would be necessary to examine, albeit briefly, its various

* See footnote p.83 above.

parts. Under the subtitle, Awwal 'l-Tarīq "The Beginning of the Road", 'Arīḍa tries to egg an imaginary companion to persist in his high hopes of fulfilling his celestial aspiration. For then they may taste the pleasure of heavenly bliss which they were deprived of in their daily life. He says:

قم بنا يا سمير نفسي	نقفوا الأمانى الى الكمال
قم نتخذ للمنى جناحا	يطير من عالم الحدود
عسى نرى فى السماء دريا	نسير فيه و لا نعسود
نؤم خدر الدجى و نحظى	بما حرمانه فى الوجود (10)

Rise up, companion of my soul,
Let's follow this longing to the land of perfection.
Rise up, let's ride on the wing of hope
And go beyond the finite world of limitations.
We may see a road in the sky which we can take,
And never return.
In order to reach the abodes which the night offers.
And attain what we are deprived of in life.

But the poet suddenly realizes that he cannot attain the bliss of the metaphysical world unless he abandons his earthly body. So he goes on to say:

قم و اترك الجسم حيث يبلى فالموت خير من الجمود (11)

Rise up (and let us move), leave the body to decay.
For death is better than standing still.

Trying to find a link between a previous existence of his soul before birth, and a latter existence after death, 'Arīḍa

expresses the belief that his soul existed in an ideal world before it descended into the earthly body. It therefore keeps longing to return to its origin, the ideal world where it came from. Accordingly he pictures death as a "return" rujū^c and "arrival" wuṣūl. In his endeavour to identify the "road of his return", the poet seems to have encountered the difficulty of distinguishing between the roads which rightly guide him to his goal, and the misleading roads. Thus he wonders:

هل من طريق الى وصول	هل من سبيل الى رجوع
بحاصل أو بمستحيل	تهيم نفسي ولست أدري
والسبل فلت عن الضلول (12)	يا صاح قد حرت أين أمضى

Is there a way for (our) return?
Is there a hope of arrival?
My soul wonders, not knowing what is
possible or impossible.
O my companion, I am bewildered,
And the right road is hard to discern.

Soon, however, a good omen appears. It is the lightning, the guiding sign at the beginning of the road. The poet conceives of lightning as the fire of former caravans which preceded him on the road. He consequently feels that if he proceeds to dog their steps he may reach his aim:

فانه أول الطريق	فما تلمح البرق هل تراه
تعرفه النفس في البروق	انظر فلي في البروق سر
تقدمونا على الطريق	ألا ترى البرق نار ركب
نصر الى منبت الشروق (13)	فسر بنا نقتفى خطاهم

صاح ، قل هل ترى فوق أوج الذرى
بارقا قد سرى ما وراء الحدود؟
تلك نار الخلود

ضل عنها الأنام واستحبوا الظلام
فهي تدعو النيام : أقبلوا يا رقاد
نحو سعد السعود (16)

O my companion, do you see above the peaks
A lightning spreading far beyond?
It is the fire of immortality.

People lost their way to it,
And got used to darkness.
Iram's beacon is calling those who are asleep:
Come on sleeping ones to the greatest felicity.

Approaching the end of his journey, the poet realizes that he cannot attain the honour of standing before the beacon of Iram unless he willingly experiences death. Only by immersing himself in the experience of death can he satisfy his hunger and accomplish his journey:

تلك نار تشيق كل طرف طليق
هل اليها طريق غير درب اللحد
اذ تحل القيود

تلك نار القرى والجياع الورى
من اليها سرى ما أراه يعمود
بل سيغدو الوقود (17)

That beacon tempts the sights of the aspiring,
And there is no way to it but through death,
When all the bonds come undone.

That is the beacon of hospitality*,
The beacon of the hungry.
Whoever walks to it
Will never return.
He'll become part of the fuel which feeds it.

In the end 'Arīda composes his own exciting "song of the open road", in which he encourages himself to quicken his steps towards the goal of his quest. For the road is visible now, the call is clear and his thirst is desperate:

نحو ذاك الوميض سر بنا نستغيث
عن ظلام الحضيض وشقاء الوجود
بمناء الوعود

ايه ضوئى البعيد لح و لح ما تريد
ليس طرفى يحيد عنك حتى يعوود
لتراب ودود

لح و لح فى الغطاء قد سمعت النداء
و دليلى الرجاء فعساه يقوود
ظامئا للورود (18)

* A reference by the poet to how the Arabs in the desert used to light fires on high places to guide travellers in need to their tents, where they would find help and hospitality.

Let's walk towards that beckoning brightness.
(Let's) exchange the darkness of the earth,
the misery of existence
With the light of reunion.

O my remote light
Sparkle and shine as you like.
My sight will never turn away from you
Until I reach my death.

Sparkle, sparkle in the vast space.
I have heard the call.
Hope is my guide,
And I trust it to guide the thirsty to the fount.

* * * * *

II. Shāṭi' al-A'raf

The long poem of Shāṭi' al-A'raf "The Shore of al-A'raf" by Hamsharī was published in Apollo magazine in 1933, and is in 307 verses. Sūrat al-A'raf of the Holy Quran (19) was, apparently, the main inspiration of Hamsharī's long poem. As a point of clarification, the poet appended this footnote to his work:

Al-A'raf, as it has been interpreted by the interpreters of the Quran, is a place between heaven and hell. But in this work the name is given to an imaginary shore which lay beyond the borders of life, but overlooks the world of death.(20)

To illustrate the way the poet conceives of this work,

Hamsharī added:

When the poet died, the goddess of poetry took him on board her magical boat and sailed across the ocean of time. Then she anchored on this shore. The poet, all along his journey, describes the wonders of death which he has witnessed - the wonders which every poet's imagination dreams of.(21)

How did the idea of this work emerge? This question is raised in the prologue of the long poem written by the poet himself. In this prologue Hamsharī depicts a particular atmosphere of mystery and awe in which the idea of this long poem first suggested itself to him:

I was standing beyond al-Jazīra watching the Nile, the eternal river which seems to me as if it were a poet singing before death meaningful songs, but whose meanings get lost in the haunting tunes. I frequently visited a quiet spot there in the evenings. This spot overlooked the Nile and a marvelous view of high trees and bushes. At night the view becomes remarkably impressive. This atmosphere was basically the incentive of the emergence of Shāṭi' al-A'rāf. The Nile was but the river of life and death, whereas the awesome darkness intimated to me the awe of eternity throughout the realm of al-A'rāf.(22)

To acquaint ourselves with the basic framework of Hamsharī's long poem, it will be helpful to examine the essential parts of the work. This may provide a clear perception of the poem as a whole.

In order to reach the shore of al-A'raf and experience its phantasy, Hamsharī resorts to the "ships of death". With these ships the poet hopefully starts the adventurous voyage towards the final spiritual refuge of al-A'raf's shore. Although darkness is spreading all over the horizon, the ships of death begin to sail smoothly enhanced by a flag pointing to the shore and a high spirit guiding the poet onwards:

نصلت من غبارها سفن الموت	ت و سارت بمن تقل خفافا
لغها الموت في غياهبه السو	د و أسرى يطوى بها الأسدا
وبها راية تشير إلى الشط	و روح يهدي له زفزا
كلما طافها الغناء بصوت	رفعت قلعها له ارهافا (23)

The ships of death emerged from the mist
And proceeded smoothly with those on board.
Death enveloped them (the ships) with its black haze
As they sailed through darkness.
On top of them there was a flag pointing to the shore,
And a high spirit guiding their speedy move.
As soon as the voice of death passed them,
They lifted their sails as if to listen with care.

Among the ships of death appears the poet's ship. Its course is not a smooth one. Terror and hardship surround the poet and his ship. But aspiration of reaching his goal almost provides the poet with new energy and make his ship move with greater speed (24). The poet suddenly becomes aware of a brilliant light spreading throughout the horizon. When he asks about it, he is told that the light was caused by the appear-

ance of the goddess of poetry. The goddess seems to have overcome the storms and the high waves and emerged before the fatigued poet in all her magnificence. Thus the poet says in amazement:

أى نور هذا الذى يبهر الأفق ق و يزهو مغشياً جنباته ؟

What sort of light is this that overwhelms the horizon
And spreads brilliantly throughout the expanses?

The goddess answers him:

هو يا شاعرى الصغير ركابى و يشع الضياء من مشكاته
قد تخطى اليك كل هبوب و مسفً اللجات فى ما ثباته (25)

O my poet, it is my mount which radiates light.
It has surmounted the storms and the waves to be with you.

As the meeting takes place between the goddess of poetry and the aspiring poet, the goddess seems to have been pleased to reward the poet, since he bravely sustained the suffering and the toils during his adventurous voyage. She says to him:

ايه يا شاعرى تحملت صبرا فى عذاب قد فاق كل عذاب
لكأنى أراك فى نشوة الفكر شكيا تشكو من الأوصاب
أترى ترتضى اصطحابى الى الجنة مثنوى الشوادن الأشراب (26)

What do I see? Are you going away?
O goddess of poetry...woe to you...do not leave me.
Where are you going (in the mist) of death?
Come on take me with you...take me with you.

The goddess answers:

اقتبل أنت ناعما و تفكه	فى جنان طابت جنى و ظللا
اننى سوف التقى بمنايا	تصرع الريح تنسف الاجالا (27)

Enjoy the bliss of paradise,
Which abounds with fruit and shade.
I will face various horrors
Which can cow the storms and threaten lives.

At last the goddess seems to have responded to the poet's
appeal and agreed to take him with her to al-A'rāf's shore.
She accordingly says:

هاك فلكى على الدجى يتراءى	مستضاء كالكوكب اللماح
فاصطحبنى اذن عليه و هيا	فوق هول الفناء نمضى سويا (28)

Here is my ship glittering through darkness
Like a shining star.
Come with me then,
And let's go together through the terror of death.

As soon as the poet approaches the shore of al-A'rāf on
board the goddess's ship, he begins to hear lovely sounds

emanating from the "organ of death". Enjoying the delightful tunes, the poet asks the goddess about the essence of what he hears and the secret of his spiritual ecstasy. "It is the organ of death", says the goddess, "reiterating various tunes of the manifestations of life which existed one day, and now are but echoes passing through the ears".

The various tunes that found their way to the poet's awareness are subsequently followed by the appearance of al-A^crāf's shore shining through the darkness. Suddenly the poet starts astounded, and exclaims:

ايه رياه ما أراه أما مي ؟ أي نور في أيما أسداف ؟

O my God! what am I seeing in front of me?
What a light in the midst of such darkness?!

Then the following exchange follows between the goddess and the poet:

الآهة :
هو شط الأعراف . . .
(الشاعر)
أية شط ذا المسمى بشاطئ الأعراف ؟

الآهة :
هو مشوى الأحن بعد شتات و مقر الأرواح بعد طواف (29)

The goddess:

It is the shore of al-A'raf

The poet:

What is this shore that is named al-A'raf?

The goddess:

It is the home of the scattered tunes
And the abode of the wandering souls.

Later on the poet realizes that the delightful light which he had witnessed on his arrival at the shore of al-A'raf was not the only manifestation. There are other phenomena which almost suggest awe and gloom. The goddess herself proceeds to depict some of those overawing scenes:

ليس شيء يحيى المنى فيه إلا	أبيضاض الثلوج فوق الصخور
.....
مزقت نفسها الرياح عليه	داويات من فوقه معجلات
.....
تبصر الدوح ما عدا في فضاء	يتراءى عليه كالأشباح
فى لبوس من الدياجير دا ج	لقه غيب مسف الجناح
و ترى البرق مومضا يترامى	فى ثنايا الأسداف مثل الجراح
.....
و ترى الموج فوقه يركب الموج	و يعلو مهاجما شطآنه
ظلمات من فوقها ظلمات	تعجز الطرف فى مداها الأبانة (30)

There is nothing to revive the hopes (on that shore)
But the white snow on the cliffs.
The storms blow violently, roaring and wailing.
The trees rising up through the space like ghosts
Clothed with darkness, wrapped with its wing.
The lightning flashes through the darkness like wounds.

The waves in succession,
Rising high and beating against the shore.
Darkness above darkness
Through which nothing could be perceived.

Going through all these manifestations, the poet realizes that what he had seen is but a part of al-A'raf's shore, and that there is still more which is unknown to be discovered. Urging him to move to other places on that shore, the goddess says:

ايه يا شاعري كفاك مقاما	ها هنا ، فالغناء جم الضفاف
ليس شط الأعراف هذا و لكن	هو ركن من شاطئ الأعراف (31)

O my poet, you do not need to stay here any longer.
The expanses of the shore extend endlessly.
This is not the whole shore of al-A'raf.
It is but a part of it.

The next move they make was to qabr al-layālī "the grave of the nights":

فإذا هكل يلوح على الأفق	عليه من المنايا شحوب
ترسل الطرف نحوه فيالقي	حجرة الموت فوقه فينوب
وحشة تصرع الأمان و خوف	اثر خوف على الردى محسوب (32)

Suddenly an edifice appears on the horizon
Enveloped by the pallor of death.
Whenever you glance at it,
Your sight is struck by death and turns back.

It is a dreariness that conquers peace and safety.
It is terror followed by terror, all caused by death.

Subsequently the poet observes the procession of the various manifestations of life proceeding towards their destination which is darīh al-Layālī "the tomb of the nights":

هو ركب الحياة يمشى حثيثا	مستخفا الى ضريح الليالى
فهو مثنوى الأحقاب بعد تمام	و مقر الأجيال بعد اكتمال
.
و سرت خلفه زوارق شتى	تترأى كأنها أحلام
فترى زورق الجمال عليه	مسمعات غنا وهن سلام
و ترى زورق الشرور عليه	مسمعات غنا وهن سلام
و ترى خلفها زوارق شتى	منشئات و كلها آثام (33)

There is the procession of the various forms of life
Proceeding slowly towards the tomb of the nights.
It is the destination of the ages after completion
And the abode of the generations
After fulfilling their terms.
Various boats sail behind (this procession),
And emerge like flags.
There is the "boat of beauty" with singers on board,
Singing for peace.
And there is the "boat of evil" with singers on board
Singing for wickedness.
And there are various boats following them
Lifting their sails bedecked with sins.

Eventually, the procession of the manifestations of life
vanishes within the "tomb of the nights" like a passing dream
or imaginary vision, whereas endless tranquility begins to
govern the whole atmosphere.

At the end of this long poem, the reader comes to the scene of a sad singer who tries to play a tune on his broken lyre, but he cannot do that. Apparently, this singer is the symbol of the poet himself. He is overwhelmed by a persistent longing to explore the world of death and its secrets. But in the end he seems to be disappointed, because he does not find the pleasant fantasies he anticipated and dreamt of. He therefore stands looking over the "valley of death" deprived of all his tunes and hopes. He now owns nothing but a broken lyre on which he cannot play a single tune. It looks as if the cruel will of death were able to frustrate the poet and conquer his aspirations. No wonder that the last verses reiterate echoes of total despair:

رجّع اللحن أيّ هذا الشادى	ساحر الموت طال صمتك هيا
و ابعث النغم فوق صمت الوادى	قم أيّا عازف المنون و غن
.
فاخبر الشعر ما دهى قيثارك	لهفى ما أراك تبعث لحننا
و عفت فى غنائها أو تارك (34)	سوءة لليد التى عطلتها

O singer of death, your silence is prolonged.
 Come on, play a tune... O singer.
 Come on composer of death, sing and let music spread
 Over the silence of the valley.
 Alas, you seem unable to play any tune.
 Relate to poetry what happened to your lyre.
 Cursed be the hand which ruined it,
 And deprived the strings of their songs.

III. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TWO LONG POEMS:

‘Alā Ṭarīq Iram and Shāṭi’ al-A‘rāf

Examining the two long poems ‘Alā Ṭarīq Iram by ‘Arīḍa and Shāṭi’ al-A‘rāf by Hamsharī, one may find that the two works have many elements in common. Both long poems reveal a poetic aspiration to discover the unknown. The unknown according to ‘Arīḍa was viewed as a "road through a desert", whereas in Hamsharī's work it was imagined to be a "shore beyond an ocean". These worlds of speculation in both poems are depicted as the realm of the ultimate glory, perfection and beauty. In ‘Arīḍa's words, "I yearn for the land of brightness and beauty". And in Hamsharī's words, "O my God! What am I seeing?! What a light in such darkness!"

Apparently, the two poets perceive of their desired worlds as a spiritual refuge which could not be attained but through the experience of death. ‘Arīḍa depicts death as an experience of "riding on the wing of hope", and abandoning the "world of limitations" and the bonds of the earthly body. Likewise, Hamsharī pictures the experience of death as a voyage, and himself as a sailor proceeding on board the "ship of death" towards the realm of mystery.

The other aspect common to both poems is the reference to a guide or a sign which represents the beginning of hope. This

sign would announce the first indications of the ultimate goals for both poets. In 'Arīḍa's poem the guiding sign is the appearance of the lightning, whereas in Hamsharī's poem the sign is the flags of the ship of death which were pointing to the shore, while the ship seemed to be steered by a mighty spirit. This spirit is eventually pictured as the goddess of poetry who becomes the prominent guide of the poet while exploring the mysteries of the shore of al-A^ḥrāf.

The terms "road", "departure" and "travelling" are frequently used in both poems as a means of exploring the unknown realm of death. In 'Arīḍa's work, the road is a road in a desert, and people are but successive caravans continuing their journey through the hardships and tribulations of travelling in this desert. Their hearts abound with longing to reach the desired imaginary goal. The image of the desert seems to be depicted meticulously with all its features. 'Arīḍa utilizes particular elements in drawing a vivid picture of the desert. These elements are: the caravans, luggage, camels, cameleers and the sounds of the bells around the camels' necks. He also mentions the sands, thirst and even the ruins and the remains of the preceding caravans and tribes. The employment of such elements within the framework of the poem succeeds in providing a realistically vivid background of a journey through a desert.

In Hamsharī's poem the means of his journey was the sea. The procession which he joined was simply a ship sailing across

the ocean. Therefore the hardships which encounter Hamsharī differ from those which encounter ʿArīḍa. As far as a traveller on board a ship is concerned, the toils will be reflected in the storms and the dreary and misleading darkness, whereas the hardships encountered in a desert would be the thirst, the midday heat and the deceptive mirage. In general, there is a considerable concentration on describing the toils and hardships of the journey in both poems. Likewise, depicting the struggle and the perpetual efforts needed to surmount difficulties seem to have received great attention. The attitude of bravery on the part of the traveller is apparently a prerequisite for reaching the perceived goal. This goal is defined by ʿArīḍa as "the beacon of Iram" and by Hamsharī as "the shore of al-Aʿrāf".

Besides these common essential elements which constitute the basic framework of the two long poems, one may notice the deliberate usage of particular metaphors. The terms of "darkness" and "light" and their analogues are suggestive expressions which abound with metaphorical indications. No doubt the term "darkness" and others corresponding to it such as "the veil of the night", "mist" and "haze" indicate loss, bewilderment and the mystery of the unknown. On the other hand, the various analogues of the term "light" suggest the good omen, or the first indication of reaching the desired destination. The metaphor of "light" used by ʿArīḍa in contexts such as: "the brilliance of beauty", "the source of radiance", "the beacon of

eternity", and "my remote light", corresponds to its use in verses by Hamsharī like the following: "what a light that overwhelms the horizon and spreads brilliantly throughout the expanses", "it is my mount which radiates light" and "what a light in such darkness?!".

Apart from elements which are common to the two poems, one may at the same time find differences, and especially at the end of the poems. For each poet seems to have tackled the end of his poem in a totally different manner. 'Arīḍa, one may notice, tries from the beginning to define his target which is the "beacon of Iram". At the end he seems to realize his dream and attain what he longed for by reaching the desired beacon. According to 'Arīḍa, this was the ultimate fulfilment and satisfaction of his spiritual quest. Going through Hamsharī's work, one can realize that the satisfactory refuge was offered to the poet by the goddess, and that was "the poets' paradise". But it seems that the pleasures and felicities which were available in that paradise were not the ultimate aim of the poet. His aspiration and curiosity were seemingly devoted to exploring more wonders and more about the unknown, such as the shore of al-A'raf. His adventurous spirit was apparently motivated at that stage of his trip to witness the conflict between life and death on that shore, and to observe the dominant will of death closely. Thus at the end of his poem, Hamsharī depicts himself as a miserable and frustrated explorer. To embody this state of despair, he uses the symbol of a singer with a broken lyre on which he could not play a single tune.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

- (1) Badā'i^c, p.208
- (2) Dīwān, II, p.37-8
- (3) Ibid, p.40- 44
- (4) Sūrat al-Fajr, vii, viii; See also: al-Hamawī, Yāqūt, Mu^cjam al-Buldān, ed: Reinaud, Herrn J.Ġ, Paris, 1899, p.212-216; The Encyclopaedia of Islam, II, London, 1927, p.519-20
- (5) Verses: xlvi, xlvii; The Encyclopaedia of Islam, I, London, 1960, p.603,4
- (6) Arwāḥ, p.178
- (7) No.5, 1953, Beirut, p.9
- (8) Ibid, p.8
- (9) Ibid, p.9
- (10) Arwāḥ, p.179
- (11) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (12) Ibid, p.180
- (13) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (14) Ibid, p.182,3,4
- (15) Ibid, p. 192
- (16) Ibid, p.196
- (17) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (18) Ibid, p.197
- (19) Verses: xlvi, xlvii
- (20) "Shāṭi' al-A^crāf", Majallat Apollo, Feb, 1933, Cairo, p.645, (Shāṭi')

- (21) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (22) Ibid, p.627-8
- (23) Ibid, p.631
- (24) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (25) Ibid, p.632
- (26) Ibid, p.633
- (27) Ibid, p.634
- (28) Ibid, p.634-5
- (29) Ibid, p.639
- (30) Ibid, p.634-40
- (31) Ibid, p.641
- (32) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (33) Ibid, p.643
- (34) Ibid, p.644-5

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CHAPTER IV

THE DUALISM OF LIFE AND DEATH: DILEMMA AND SOLUTION

Gibrān (1883-1931), Naimy (b.1889) and Shābbī (1909-1934) were perhaps the first among the Arab literati in modern times to try to offer concrete suggestions to overcome the dilemma of the dualism of life and death. They could be considered as the first propagators of the theme of "the unity of existence" in modern Arabic. This theme is visualised and presented by these authors as an appropriate solution to the problem of the dualism of life and death.

One must, however, point out that "the unity of existence" is a philosophical concept which was first adopted and propagated by the Muslim Sūfīs, and found its fullest expression in their works. It is a philosophical and mystic theory which primarily "discards the aspect of dualism between God and creation and regards the whole of existence as one unity"(1). It also asserts that although "the universe consists of many things and diverse forces, it is a single entity with one essence"(2).

Gibrān's and Naimy's understanding of the "unity of exist-

ence", seems to have many affinities with Sūfī ideas and ideals (3), since most of their works reveal a basic conviction that the universe is one in all its phenomena, and that the different forms that creation takes and the diverse forces which govern the universe are but various manifestations of one essence. This belief in the unity of existence is expressed in a simple manner in Naimy's poem Ibtihālāt "Supplications", which shows a genuine endeavour to observe the various manifestations of life as expressions, one might say, of the over-soul or the Creator:

كحل اللهم عيني
 بشعاع من ضياك
 كي تــــراكم
 فى جميع الخلق : فى دود القبور
 فى نسور الجو ، فى موج البحار
 فى صهاريج البرارى ، فى الزهور
 فى الكلا ، فى التبر ، فى رمل القفار (4)

O God, have my eyes endowed with rays of your light,
 So that they may see you in all beings:
 In the worms of the graves,
 In the eagles of the sky, in the waves of the sea,
 In the wells of water in wilderness, in the flowers,
 In the green grass, in gold and in the sands of the deserts.

The important point to stress in discussing the theme of the unity of existence is the positive function it served in helping to dispel, in the poets' minds at least, the contradictions

of the dualism of life and death. The Sūfīs seem to have had a special concern to arrive at a solution of this problem. In Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, Ibn ʿArabī 560(1165)-638(1240) wrote about an aspect of the Sūfī theory of creation called Tajdīd al-Khalq bi ʿl-Anfās "The Renewing of Creation at Each Instant" or "at Each Breath"(5). This theory of creation states that:

There is no temporal interval between annihilation and re-manifestation, so that we do not perceive any interruption between two analogous and successive creations, and thus existence appears to us to be homogeneous.(6)

Perceiving the idea of constant cycles of existence or successive creation, Gibrān, Naimy and Shābbī seem to be prepared to express their modern understanding of the unity of existence in similar terms. Examining the works of these authors and poets, one may find that Gibrān and Naimy in particular seem to have devoted a lot of attention to the theme of the unity of existence, and that they use it extensively to explain the usual dilemmas of the dualisms of life. The theme appears in their works distinguished with an element of maturity, which results perhaps from their presentation of the theory as a sort of a fully integrated philosophy or explanation of life.

I. Shābbī:

Shābbī's understanding of the unity of existence seems to have gone through three stages of gradual assimilation and

comprehension. One cannot find a whole poem in Shābbī's verse which is devoted entirely to an exposition of this theme. Yet most of his works are not devoid of some element or other of an inherent belief in the unity of existence. In the first stage, Shābbī seems to have viewed man as a separate entity from the rest of existence. This stage could be described as the stage of "separation" between the spirit of man and the spirit of existence. It is the stage in which Shābbī thought of human life as being evanescent and totally at the mercy of "Time". The human being, he believed, will die and perish one day, whereas existence is perpetual. For this reason, Shābbī initially adopted an attitude of despair and pessimism, and one of rejection and condemnation of the dismal fate of man. In her article "Ab'ād 'l-Zamān wa al-Makān fī Shi'r 'l-Shābbī" "The Dimensions of Time and Place in Shābbī's Poetry", S.Kh. Jayyūsī called this particular understanding of Time in Shābbī's poetry al-Ru'yā al-Ufuqiyya "the horizontal observation"(7). The distinguishing mark of this stage, one may say, is the poet's complete surrender to the will of death. In one of his poems entitled Fī Zill Wādī 'l-Mawt "In the Shadow of the Valley of Death", Shābbī echoes the deep distress of an alienated soul unable to tolerate the dullness of life:

و تغشى نفسى الضباب فصاحت	فى ملال مرّ : الى أين أمشى ؟
قلت : سىرى مع الحياة ، فقالت :	ما جنينا ترى من السير أمس ؟
فتهافت كالهشيم على الأرض	و ناديت : أين يا قلب رفشى ؟
هاته ، علنى أخط ضريحى	فى سكون الدجى و أدفن نفسى (8)

Encircled by mist,
 My soul cried out in bitter weariness:
 Whither shall I go?
 I said: walk on with life.
 It replied: What did we reap from walking yesterday?
 I collapsed like a parched and withered plant and cried:
 Where, O heart, is my spade?
 Bring it, that I may dig my grave
 In the silence of darkness and bury myself.

In al-Ashwaq 'l-Ta'iha "The Vagrant Longings", the awareness of being an alien in the vastness of existence becomes more persistent. Shābbī draws an image of a lost and lonely wanderer who longs for some real attachment to the "core of life" "ṣamīm al-Hayāt". He seems to have realized that being a lonely spirit separated from the "core of life" might be the main cause of his alienation and suffering. Shābbī therefore persists in seeking signs of relief, and expecting guidance. This is a fragment of his appeal:

يا صميم الحياة انى وحيد مدلج ، تائه فأين شروقك
 يا صميم الحياة انى فؤاد ضائع ، ظامىء فأين رحيقك
 يا صميم الحياة قد وجم الناي و غام الغضا فأين بروقك (9)

O core of life, I am lonely, deluded and lost.
 So where is your sunrise?
 O core of life, I am a bewildered heart.. thirsty..
 So where is your exquisite wine?
 O core of life, the flute is silent,
 And the horizon is veiled,
 So where is your lightning?

These questions of Shābbī's about "sunrise" and "lightning"

seem to be uttered in a hopeless tone revealing an attitude of total pessimism.

The second stage of Shābbī's development was that of comparison between the temporariness of human life and the perpetuity of the cycles of nature. This stage could be described as the stage of learning from nature and trying to be in harmony with it. Resorting to nature seemed to be the gateway which enabled Shābbī to raise the siege of pessimism. He started to be aware of the simple fact that although human beings must die, they always entertain the desire to be eternal. Nature seemed to offer to Shābbī a way out of his despair and gloom. Its constant cycles of decay and renewal, its restoration of the essence of life in seeds and the fresh generation of new vegetation every season, all these phenomena seem to have had their effective impact in reshaping the mind and thought of Shābbī and replacing his total despair with an optimistic outlook. The woods, the rivers, the tranquility of the night and other aspects of nature become welcome resorts offering a deeper insight and understanding. Thus he develops a true relationship of unity with nature in the hope of deriving more security and moral strength. But before arriving at his concept of unity with nature, Shābbī went through a period of drawing contrasts between signs of weakness in himself, along with the futility of life, and the powerful signs of vitality and freshness in nature. In a poem entitled Nashīd al-Asā "The Song of Sorrow", Shābbī becomes aware of the difference between the fading will

of his soul, and the glowing life throughout the world of nature around him. Thus persistent questions begin to be raised:

ما للمياه نقية حولى و ينبوعى مشوب ؟
 ما لى وجمت و كل ما فى الغاب منترد طروب
 ما لى شقيت و كل ما فى الكون أخاذ عجيب ؛
 فى الأرض أقدام الربيع تلامس السهل الجديب
 و هناك أنوار النهار تطل من خلف الغروب
 ان الوجود الرحب والغابات والأفق الخضيب
 لم تخب أشواق الحياة بها فغادرها القطوب (10)

Why are the waters around me pure,
 Whereas my spring is turbid?
 Why am I silent,
 Whereas everything in the woods is singing and overjoyed?
 Why am I miserable,
 Whereas everything in creation is charming and wonderful:
 Everywhere on earth the feet of Spring
 Are touching the barren plains.
 And the lights keep appearing from behind the sunset.
 The wide universe, the woods and the rosy horizon
 Have never lost their longing for life,
 And gloom has departed from them.

"When I went to the woods for the first time bearing my distress", says Shābbī "I felt like a child possessed by awe and ecstasy". This statement appears in a poem entitled al-Ghāb "The Woods". It is another revelation of a nature lover expressing a mystical attachment to nature, personified here as the woods. Overwhelmed by the spirit of the woods, Shābbī realizes the contradictions between his own despair and dullness and the joyful manifestations in the woods. These are some echoes of his hymn to his desired refuge- the woods:

فى الغاب ، فى الغاب الحبيب وانه	حرم الطبيعة والجمال السامى
طهرت فى نار الجمال مشاعرى	و لقيت فى دنيا الخيال سلامى
و وجدت سحر الكون اسمى عنصرا	و اُجل من حزنى و من آلامى (11)

In the woods, the beloved woods,
The altar of nature and sublime beauty,
I purified my feelings in the flame of beauty
And found peace in the realm of fantasy.
I found that the charm of the universe
Is far beyond my sadness and my pains.

Shābbī's observation of the difference between the superiority of nature and the apparent limitations of the human being, could be regarded as a new tendency that preoccupied his thought, and prepared him to dwell upon wider concepts in tackling the theme of the unity of existence. While Shābbī now felt that man is destined to perish and is, moreover, weak and limited, he was at the same time confirmed in the idea that man can learn from nature the lessons of will and fulfilment. Union with nature and exultation in its perpetual cycles of regeneration could be the key which might accomodate the difference between man and the universe around him and bring them together. It is the solution which releases man from being alone and separate, and attaches him to a wider circle in creation. Moreover, being part of an all-embracing and permanent universe may successfully overcome the tragic aspect in man's life which is controlled by factors of decay. Such a line of thought would make man's role seem like a vital one in a limitless and permanent whole.

Incorporation in nature, one may say, is the third stage in

Shābbī's poetic development. This stage was the outcome of an obvious will to be lasting and eternal. An echo of fresh faith in life matched by a strong confidence in death began to spread throughout Shābbī's most mature poems- al-Ṣabāḥ al-Jadīd "The New Morrow", Nashīd al-Jabbār* "Hymn of the Mighty" and Irādat al-Ḥayāt "The Will of Life". The message of al-Ṣabāḥ al-Jadīd consists in the belief that the death of a human being by no means represents an end. It is merely a passage towards another phase of being which completes the former one. While welcoming his awaited death**, Shābbī seems to have praised the "charm of life", despite its sorrows, and expressed longings at the same time for the "dawn of death". He says in al-Ṣabāḥ al-Jadīd:

خالد لا يزول	ان سحر الحياة
من ظلام يحول	فعلام الشكاة
و تمرّ الفصول	ثم يأتي الصباح
ان تقضى ربيع	سوف يأتي ربيع
واسكنى يا شجون	اسكنى يا جراح
و زمان الجنون	مات عهد النواح
من وراء القرون (12)	وأطل الصباح

* The other title given to this poem, Hākadhā Ghannā Prometheus "Thus Sang Prometheus", clearly shows the extent to which Shābbī and many other contemporary Arab poets, particularly in the Apollo group, were influenced by the English romanticists.

** Shābbī, as is well known, died young at the age of twenty five, and his life has in many ways been compared to the life of the English poet, John Keats. Like Keats, he had premonitions of his death, which can be traced in some of his poems.

The charm of life is eternal, never vanishes.
So why do we complain of a darkness that would not last?
The morrow comes and the seasons pass.
(A fresh) Spring will come as soon as the (old one) passes.

Calm down O wounds, abate O sorrow,
The epoch of mourning and futile thoughts has died.
And the morrow is appearing from behind the centuries.

Commenting on al-Ṣabāḥ al-Jadīd, M.M.Badawī states that,

of course, Shābbī finally welcomed death as the only means to end his suffering. But what is interesting is that his address to death is by no means an expression of total defeat. Paradoxically enough, and as is abundantly clear from a study of his imagery, Shābbī now regards death as a means of attaining a fuller and more significant life.(13)

A similar echo of determination could be heard in Nashīd al-Jabbār, where Shābbī says enthusiastically: "I shall live despite sickness and foes". Badawī feels that,

Shābbī advocated a basically heroic attitude to life which, not ignoring the element of suffering, preaches the value of the struggle for its own sake, life being a value in itself.(14)

The poem Irādat al-Hayāt seems to be the culmination of Shābbī's understanding of the unity of existence. It represents a very advanced view of the integrated process of decay and revival, not only in the manifestations of nature, but also in the whole of creation. The message of the poem can

be gathered from the first lines in it, especially these two verses:

و من لم يعانقه شوق الحياة تبخر فى جوها و اندثر
كذلك قالت لى الكائنات و حدثنى روحها المستتر (15)

The one who is not overwhelmed by longing for life,
Will turn into nothingness and perish.
This is what the universe said to me,
And what its veiled spirit told me.

The most important characteristic of living, in Shābbī's view, consists in the will to be lasting and eternal. This will would not be maintained unless the living are equipped with a positive inclination to struggle and triumph over all the factors of decay. The victory which the living might obtain will be realized by the subsequent generations who are the witness, so to speak, to a perpetual life. This is the basic idea of the remarkable poem Irādat al-Hayāt. Before proceeding further in this discussion, it may be useful to cite a few more verses from this poem:

و قالت لى الغاب فى رقة محبة مثل خفق الوتر
يجىء الشتاء ، شتاء الضباب شتاء الثلوج شتاء المطر
فينطفئ السحر ، سحر الغصون و سحر الزهور و سحر الثمر
و تبقى البذور التى حملت ذخيرة عمر جميل غبىر
معانقة و هى تحت الضباب و تحت الثلوج و تحت المندر
لطيف الحياة الذى لا يمل و قلب الربيع الشذى الخضر
و ما هو الا كخفق الجناح حتى نما شوقها و انتصر
فصدعت الأرض من فوقها و أبصرت الكون عذب الصور
و جاء الربيع بأنعامه و أحلامه و صباه العطر
و قال لها : قد منحت الحياة و خلّدت فى نسلك المدخر (16)

The woods said in a soft and loving tone
 As if it was the sound of music:
 As Winter comes, the foggy Winter,
 The snowy and the rainy Winter,
 The charm of branches, of roses, of fruit will wither.
 But the seeds which preserve
 The treasure of the passing age will abide.
 Embracing, while being under the snow,
 The fog and the rain,
 The vision of life
 And the green heart of the scented Spring.

The seeds' longing grew and triumphed (over death)
 As quickly as the flap of a bird's wing.
 They cracked the earth
 And glanced at the sweet images of creation.
 Spring came with its melodies,
 Its dreams and its fragrant youth.
 And it said to the seeds:
 "You have been granted life and made eternal
 Through your abiding offspring".

The poem abounds with hints and symbols of vitality with connotations beyond their literal context. Symbols such as "earth", "rain", "seeds", "light", are employed to signify the basic fundamentals of life, whereas expressions like "the coming of Winter", "snow", "the fading of flowers", "the falling of leaves" etc... are used as signs of death and decay. Beyond those manifestations of decay, there is a secret vital power which seems to know no decay. It is the rebirth of the living which is conveniently pictured in images such as: "seeds cracked the earth", "their longing grew and triumphed (over death)", "Spring came", "renewal of the bloom of youth" and "you have become eternal in the future crops you will produce".

There are three points worthy of pointing out while examining the poem Irādat al-Ḥayāt. First, Shābbī perceives that

nature should be glorified, not only for its own sake, as a resort of peace and felicity, but also because it is the right teacher of man. From nature man can learn how to love life and defeat the elements of weakness and futility in himself. Moreover, nature provides man with a plausible justification of the role of death as a step which prepares the way for new births. Accordingly, tendencies to rant against death or condemn fate in Shābbī's poetry started to become subjected to a broad scope of understanding and contentment. Second, Shābbī successfully applies the term "mother" to the earth to denote its goodness and fertility. The mother naturally provides life with offspring to preserve the continuity of generations. Likewise, the earth is but a large womb that is perpetually a source of regeneration. The essence of life and renewal, therefore, will abide in the bosom of the mother-earth. It is behind the whole fabric of life, and it continuously produces new life out of death and decay. In other words, the earth is the great conquerer of death and decay. The third interesting point which is brilliantly raised in Irādat al-Hayāt and which is worthy of consideration is the idea of regarding the secret power of the "seeds" as a means of continuity*. The circular courses in nature which are maintained by the "seeds" made Shābbī conscious of the fact that "Time" as an existential concept is not limited nor "horizontal". Upon reaching this

* The motif of the "seeds" is frequently used by Gibrān and Naimy. This indicates their direct influence on Shābbī's works.

mature stage of his development, as Jayyūsī points out,

Shābbī seemed to be capable of seeing "Time" as a circular and spiral expansion, in which phenomenal elements can be returned to their sources, and be viewed as a new beginning.(17)

This is the stage of Shābbī's "circular observation" al-Ru'yā '1-Dawriyya (18), in Jayyūsī's words, not only of Time but also of the whole of existence.

In his advanced stage, Shābbī could be regarded as a representative of his generation who was preoccupied by topics such as unity with nature, the appreciation of its cycles of continuity, learning from nature how to glorify life, as well as how to trust death. A full understanding of these concepts not only offers a reasonable solution to the problem of the pathetic fate of man, but also settles the dual aspects of life and death satisfactorily.

* * * *

II. Gibrān and Naimy:

It has been remarked that in examining the most mature works of Gibrān and Naimy, one can regard the two men as "two candles on one and the same beacon"(19). Another student of

Naimy, N.N. Naimy, also points out, when commenting on the life-long friendship of Gibrān and Naimy:

It is only those transcendental theosophico-mystical elements which they happened to hold in common before they ever met that made them, having once met, develop in mutual intellectual and spiritual growth, understanding and interpenetration until the end.(20)

While each of the two authors and poets retained his own style, Gibrān and Naimy seem to have worked hand in hand in developing their common literary content. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that, stripped of their distinctive literary garbs, the mature works of both of them become in certain aspects indistinguishable. This perhaps applies in particular to their understanding of the unity of existence, and the theosophical explanation of the problem of death. The constancy of existence according to these two authors is maintained by the circular processes of creation. As long as these processes are at work, the way of life and death will be one. Death will lose its particularity and become a part or a function of life. This is the fundamental precept on which Gibrān and Naimy built a system of thought which came to constitute a fully developed theory associated with their names. This theory, in Naimy's words, rests upon the view that

"one is the road of Life and Death....upon the rim of the wheel of Time. For motion in a circle can never reach an end, nor ever spend itself. And every motion in the world is a motion in a circle"(21).

Hence, "if growth be the child of decay, and decay be the child of growth; if Life be the

mother of Death, and Death be the mother of Life, then verily were they but one at every point of Time and Space"(22).

The perpetual processes of growth and decay, as Naimy reveals in the above quotations, not only make of death and life two integrated elements, but also impart a deep sense of trust and faith in the continuous renewal of creation. The falling leaves of Autumn, in a well-known poem of Naimy, are by no means an image of a complete decay, nor do they represent a dull symbol of death. The essence of these withering leaves will surely be restored in the bosom of the earth and revived again in fresh leaves in the coming season. The falling of the leaves in Autumn is therefore turned into a joyous scene which prompts the poet to praise them lovingly:

يا بهجة النظر	تناثرى تناثرى
و يا أرجوحة القمر	يا مرقص الشمس
قيثارة السحر	يا أرغن الليل ويا

و جددى العهد	عودى الى حضن الثرى
و كم نوت ورود	كم أزهرت من قبلك
و لا تلومى القندرا	فلا تخافى ما جرى
يلقاه فى اللحد	من قد أضاع جوهرا

عودى الى حضن الثرى (23)

Fall out, fall out, you delight of the eyes,
You, dancing ground of the sun
And swing of the moon.
O organ of the night, and flute of the dawn.

Go back to the bosom of the earth,
Renew the cycle of the ages.
How many roses before you have blossomed,
And how many have faded.
Fear not what has happened, and blame not fate.
Whoever has lost something of great value (or essence),
Will find it again in the grave.
Go back to the bosom of the earth.

Vegetation in particular seems to be the representative example in which the concept of renewal is realized. Employing motifs from nature seems to be the appropriate medium through which Gibrān and Naimy express their understanding of the unity of existence. An example of a rebirth originating from a former stage of decay was primarily derived from the simple image of the germinating seed. A fresh appearance of a plant will not come into being unless the seed undergoes a process of germination and death. This is the picture which emerges from the following imaginary conversation between two grains of corn in Naimy's work al-Marāhil:

"I don't know what is happening to me," said a grain of corn to another, "something that I have never felt before in my life. My heart is throbbing, my body is shivering, my head is aching and my chest is heaving. And even my skin seems to be tightened on me. Do you think this is what is called death?". Then the seed shivered and her voice was choked. When her neighbour turned towards her, she found that her skin had tightened and a tiny white-green plant had emerged. The neighbour shouted to her once and again. And as she did not hear an answer, she realized that her neighbour was no more. So she cried bitterly.

At that moment, the sun of March was whispering something in the ear of the breeze, and the earth was getting ready to welcome a new-born being.(24)

Gibrān is another protagonist of nature and its constantly fulfilled promises of the renewal of life. Nature, as Gibrān reveals, is the great conqueror of death. In his prominent work al-Mawākib "The Processions", he uses the woods as a basic motif in which his beliefs in the goodness of nature turn to reality. In the woods, death vanishes or becomes a mere illusion, as long as the gracious manifestations of life flourish continuously. Thus he conceives of the woods as a "Utopia in which immortality is realized, or an image of the infinite and the unbounded"(25). Moreover, the use of the woods in Gibrān's "Processions" appears, in Jayyūsī's words, as a

familiar Romantic symbol where a universal love exists and all of life's dualisms are conquered: body and soul, good and evil, life and death.(26)

Overleaping the borders of these dualities and stressing his beliefs in the unity of existence, Gibrān declares that:

لا ولا فيها القبور	ليس في الغابات موت
لم يمت معه السرور	فإذا نيمان ولّى
ينثنى طي الصدور	ان هول الموت وهم
كالذي عاش الدهور (27)	فالذي عاش ربيعاً

There is no death in nature, nor are there graves in it.
Should the month of April be spent, joy does not die with it.
Fear of death is a delusion within the breasts of men.
He who lives a single year is like one who lives for ever.

One may say that Gibrān's use of the woods and Naimy's images of the Autumn leaves and the grains of corn are but attempts at providing representative examples of the whole cycle of creation. These representative examples seem to point out that man is not an exception in the eyes of nature as long as he is a part of its web. Man, in other words, is equally a part of the processes of nature and subject to its perpetual cycle of decay and revival or rebirth. Thus, what applies to a falling leaf or a grain of corn applies to man. It may be said, in connection with the element of correspondence between man and the aspects of nature, in Naimy's and Gibrān's works, that these concepts can be regarded as preparatory steps towards forming an ultimate theory about the existential problem of man's position in creation. Their theory implies that man and creation are one unity. That is to say,

there is a kind of unity between man and nature. No separateness exists between them, nor contradiction.(28)

Gibrān and Naimy depict this sort of total incorporation of man in nature as a mutual love. The term "mother" is frequently used to refer to nature and to praise its repose and goodness (29). The mother never betrays her children, on the contrary, she grants them life, feeds them and protects them. This role is fulfilled constantly by the mother-nature or the mother-earth which, likewise, preserves the essence of man .

just as it preserves the essence of all forms of life. Moreover, nature often confirms the total unity between man and other living beings. What is seen as death and decay often bursts forth in bloom and flowers to confirm that the very decay is life and permanence, as Naimy chooses to put it:

عسانا اذا ما رأينا عظاما يفتق منها الريح الزهور
عرفنا بأن الغناء بقاء وأن الحياة قبور تدور (30)

Perchance, if we observe how the flowers of Spring
Emerge from dead bones,
We shall realize that death is life,
And life is but graves in rotation.

The death of a man in the eyes of nature, therefore, is as normal as the falling of a leaf or the fading of a flower. For the withering leaf will live again in new trees, and the fading flower will be embodied in new generations of flowers and fruit. Thus death in its real implication is merely another form of life or a change of appearances but not of essences. "Flowers may vanish" says Gibrān, "but seeds will remain. And this is the substance of eternity".

• • • ان الزهور تمضى ولكن البذور
تبقى وذا كنه الخلود (31)

And what applies to vegetation, as has been pointed out, applies also to man in as far as he is incorporated into

nature and conforms to its rules.

"Your body which the earth had given you" says Naimy meditating upon the tomb of a friend, "is now retrieved by the earth. The earth kept its promise. It fed you by its fruit, offered you the scent of its flowers and shaded you by its trees. And now the earth has taken back your body into its bosom to feed the grass, the flowers and the trees by it".(32)

Thus, retrieving life from that which is a dead and vice versa is, in Naimy's view, an assurance that death is not, as it seems, tantamount to total decay. Because if it is mere decay, then life ought to have come to an end. On the contrary, life is continuously renewed by death. Thus "death" as Naimy says, "is but the route to life" (33). All the elements in creation including man are combined and integrated into one. In other words, the whole of existence is but one unity. This is what seems to be expressed by a parable in one of Gibrān's works in which a tree addresses itself to man saying:

"My roots are in the deep red earth, and I shall give you of my fruit". And the man says to the tree: "How alike we are. My roots are also deep in the red earth. And the red earth gives you power to bestow upon me of your fruit".(34)

The unity of existence which Naimy and Gibrān endeavour to express in their poetry and prose basically rests upon discarding life's dualisms. Dual aspects in phenomenal manifestations

are only external appearances because the essences often incline to be one. This view applies to death and life. They are not two contradictory elements as much as they are both functions of one phenomenon. "Life and death are one" Gibrān has al-Mustafa say in The Prophet, "ever as the river and the sea are one"(35). Being one integrated phenomenon, death and life in their eternal embrace seem to conquer every doubt of their being in conflict or of being a source of fear or threat. The following words of Naimy, for example, reflect a deep faith in the goodness of the complete cycle of life and death. He states with complete confidence:

ألم يتبوا الموت والحياة من جبينك عرشا واحدا ؟
 أليس على عرشهما فى عناق حب سر مسمى ؟
 فماذا عسانا نشتى بعد و مما نـجـزع ؟ (36)

Is it not that death and life have made
 one throne of your brow?
Aren't they, on their throne,
Immersed in an eternal embrace of love?
What else may we desire then?
And what shall we fear?!

The throne on which life and death embrace symbolizes the culmination of fulfilment. It is an advanced stage of self-realization, when no fear exists nor threat. In the words of N. Naimy:

Self realization, therefore, lies in going out of one's spatio-temporal dimension, so that the self is broadened to the extent of including everyone and all things.(37)

* * * *

III. REINCARNATION:

THE CONFIRMATION OF THE UNITY OF EXISTENCE

Gibrān's and Naimy's belief in the unity of existence is seemingly enhanced by their view that no manifestation in creation works individually or can be isolated and seem independent. A comprehensive web of existence and renewal seems to govern every living being. Every man in his present life and condition is the product of previous states of existence. In the Arabic translation of some of his poems written in English, Naimy says:

أنا هو المنوال والخيط والحائك
وأنا أحوك نفسي من الأموات - الأحياء (38)

I am the loom, the wool and the weaver.
And I am weaving myself from the dead and the living.

Expatriating upon this view, in another context, Naimy goes on to say:

And as you die continually when living, so
do you live continually when dead; if not in
this body, then in a body of another form.
But you continue to live in a body until dis-
solved in God; which is to say, until you
overcome all change. (39)

Being alive in the present time is not an accomplishment of oneself as much as it is the reflection of a perpetual chain of former lives. Likewise, the living being is the embryo of further forms of existence. In other words, "you are the Tree of life. Your roots are everywhere. Your boughs and leaves are everywhere. Your fruits are in every mouth"(40). It is the unity of existence realized in nature and man together and on the same level.

This, in brief, is Gibrān's and Naimy's basic understanding of unity between man and creation. But how far does this understanding of the unity of existence contribute to developing the concept of death in the works of both writers and poets? It seems obvious that the main interest of Naimy and Gibrān was in observing the cycle of life in nature. They view creation as moving in a constant cycle. But a significant addition to this primary understanding appears in the works of Naimy where he says:

The drop of water which proceeds from the sea to accomplish its cycle and then return to where it proceeded from, this drop will acquire new attributes that it never had before. Likewise, man proceeds from the heart of existence and all the secrets of life are enfolded within him. And when he returns back to the heart of existence, all the secrets of life would have been revealed to him.(41)

This indicates that the circular motion in creation is by no means operating in a monotonous manner. It is not a repetition

of the same identical process. On the contrary the universe gradually develops and progresses by these successive cycles(42). That is to say, creation continuously proceeds towards its culmination and perfection (43).

This observation of the gradual development of creation which results from the cycle of motion can be primarily applied to man as far as he is part of creation and thoroughly incorporated in it. The more man goes through the continuous processes of death and rebirth, the more advanced and enlightened he will become. N. Naimy draws the following conclusion from his study of Gibrān's thought:

Therefore, every death is a rebirth into a higher state of being.... Thus in a continuous chain of birth and rebirth man persists in his Godward ascent, gaining at each step a broader consciousness of himself until he finally ends at the absolute.(44)

Gibrān himself has al-Muṣṭafā say in The Prophet:

It is a flame spirit in you, ever gathering more of itself.(45)

The continuous chain of birth and rebirth then is but the route to cultivating the inner self until it reaches the stage of total enlightenment. This, one might say, is equivalent to the state of Nirvana in Buddha's teachings and the divine heaven in Christianity and Islam. Eastern philosophy seems to

be vividly echoed in Naimy's and Gibrān's thought, and especially the belief in reincarnation.(46)

و بى الموت و المئوى و بى البعث و النشر (47)

"I am death and burial, and resurrection and life" says Gibrān, who describes death in The Prophet as "a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me"(48). This doctrine of reincarnation seemed to satisfy the enquiring minds of Gibrān and Naimy, because it appeared to settle the problem of death for them. The fundamental principle of reincarnation rests upon the belief in successive rebirths which, on the one hand maintain the continuity of life, and on the other alter the nature of death from being a process of destruction, to being a process of development and construction. Thus reincarnation, in its basic implication, discards the temporariness of man's existence as much as it discards the limitation of his physical and spiritual being. Moreover, this doctrine is almost the embodiment of man's dream of eternal life. Thus Gibrān says:

يا نفس لولا مطمعى بالخلد ما كنت أعى
لحنا تغنيه الدهور (49)

If I did not aspire to attain eternal life,
I would not be aware of the songs of Time.

The desirable eternity, accordingly, may be achieved through reincarnation which enables man, stage by stage, to approach

his ultimate self-realization or Nirvana. The conception of Nirvana seems to be understood by Gibrān as an image of a dawn which "will last for ever". Thus he confidently convinces himself that:

يا نفس ما العيش سوى ليل اذا جن انتهى
 بالفجر و الفجر يدوم
 و فى ظما قلبى دليل على وجود السبيل
 فى جرة الموت الرحوم (50)

One's life is but a dark night that proceeds towards dawn.
 And dawn will abide eternally.
 The thirst in my heart is proof of the existence of water
 In the realm of merciful death.

One may say that Nirvana, as it has been viewed by Naimy and Gibrān, is conceived as the analogue of the concept of salvation or total enlightenment which consists in ultimate knowledge and ultimate unity with God. Ultimate knowledge as it has been defined by Naimy is

not knowing the rules which govern the behaviour of matter and human beings. It is the knowledge which sets us free from every tie and which enables our awareness of it to be as broad as that of our mother Life.(51)

In other words, man is almost equipped with the potential to become "aware of the past, the present and the future and to be free from the limitations of Time and Place"(52). When man approaches this sublime state of his consciousness, he shall

then experience the real meaning of freedom. Because "knowledge, the thorough and ultimate knowledge, is freedom, and freedom is knowledge"(53). As man advances through the gradual processes of death and life towards broader awareness and knowledge, he at the same time advances towards knowing God, approaching His status and even being incorporated into His essence. This is expressed succinctly by Gibrān where he says: "The eternal law makes of all accidents a stepping-stone (lit. ladder) leading to the absolute essence"(54). This stage of approaching the "Infinite" will be the stage of total enlightenment which man has been prepared to go through by his Creator. Thus Naimy pictures God as addressing man in the following words:

I shall make you die and live and then die and live again until you achieve the complete knowledge of yourself and of Me. Then you will be beyond the limits of Time and Place and beyond aging and decay.(55)

This is a profound view suggesting that man, while passing through the expanses of Time in his successive rebirths, will gradually grow and develop until he reaches the summit of self-realization, that is to say approaching divinity. In Naimy's words:

Man's only glory lies in his gradual ascent from the human in him to the divine; from the perishable to the unperishable; from the un-beautiful to the beautiful; from delusion to truth; from Life's appearances to Life's inner unity.(56)

Being overwhelmed by the belief in man's ascent towards divinity, Gibrān does not find it strange to address God with this prayer:

My God, my aim and my fulfilment; I am thy yesterday and thou my tomorrow. I am thy root in the earth and thou art my flower in the sky, and together we grow before the face of the sun.(57)

This is a revelation of an aspiring soul which is looking forward to its ascent to Godhood. This also echoes Naimy's view that "man is a divine atom which is on its way to its divine source"(58). This, to quote N. Naimy, means that

every man is a God in embryo.... and that the ultimate end of human existence is for every man to actualize the God in himself; to accomplish the hazardous ascent....from the human in him to the divine; whence lies his final salvation.(59)

Salvation, as it has been perceived by Gibrān and Naimy, cannot be realized in one cycle of human life. For reaching the ultimate state of enlightenment is far beyond the limitations of a single lifetime on earth. "The passage to ultimate knowledge is very long and toilsome, it needs a very long time to be attained stage by stage"(60).

Reincarnation, in this respect, offers man the opportunity for renewal and development while going through the several stages of his life in Time and Space. In this manner reincarnation also softens the awesome face of death and makes of

death "an obedient servant of life and not a mortal enemy"(61). "I found in reincarnation the satisfactory solution" says Naimy in an interview, "which offers the human being several chances to attain salvation"(62). The problem of death accordingly seems to be observed from a new angle by both Gibrān and Naimy. Their observation concentrates on seeing death as a contributor to the continuity of life and not as a mere destructive process. With such a stage of understanding, death seems to lose its negative role and becomes a mere function of life. This developed view is expressed vividly in the following verses by Naimy from one of his short poems entitled Aghmid Jufūnaka Tubşir "Close Your Eyes and You Will See":

و اللحد يغفر فاه	و عندما الموت يدنو
في اللحد مهد الحياه (63)	اغمض جفونك تبصر

When death approaches and the tomb is uncovered,
Close your eyes and you will see
That the tomb is the cradle of life.

One may finally add that the doctrine of reincarnation in the works of Gibrān and Naimy contributes to confirming their bright outlook and their view of death as a mere function of life. Their optimism is embodied in the image of "man who rises from the dead to be on the same level with the eternal creation and the Infinite "God".(64)

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

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- (40) Ibid, p.69
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- (43) Gibrān al-Faylasūf, p.280
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CHAPTER V

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CONCEPT OF DEATH IN THE FIFTIES AND THE SIXTIES

I. THE CHANGE IN THE LITERARY MODE AND ITS EFFECT ON THE CONCEPTS OF POETRY

By the late forties and the beginning of the fifties, Arabic romanticism was almost on the wane. M.M. Badawī considers world war II to be the turning point that signalled the waning of Arabic romanticism. This is because

the second world war proved to be a significant landmark in the history not only of Arabic poetry, but of the whole of Arabic literature, just as much as it was a turning point in much of the social and political life of the Middle East.(1)

Besides, this period witnessed the workings of influences both from the East as well as the West on the Arab literati calling for commitment and social realism in literary works (2). Concepts which preoccupied the new generation of writers and poets are primarily based on a particular understanding of the

position of the writer or poet within his community and the role he must undertake in society. This role was not to be concerned with the problems of the individual, but to be more involved with the problems of the community or nation as a whole. The new principles of social realism appeared to alter the views and ideals of romanticism which in the late forties became a target of bitter attacks and criticism (3). Unlike social realism which depends on objectivity and is deeply concerned with the collective experiences of the masses, romanticism

was criticized on the ground of being escapist, immature, wanting in reality, devoid of a hard core of sense, too vague and lacking precision, sentimental, false, sugary, too easy, and verbose.(4)

Moreover, romanticism, as Badawī again points out, was seen as being "a literature of ivory towers, or even of being 'adolescent' literature"(5).

The political and social circumstances of the Arab world during the forties and the fifties of this century were in many ways preparing for a drastic change in the content and purport of literature as a whole. In 1948 there was the Palestine tragedy which

made many a poet feel ashamed to turn his back upon the world of men with its incalculable suffering and its corrupt politics and seek refuge in a world of beauty and dreams.(6)

The Egyptian Revolution followed in 1952. Its ideals and slogans became widely spread throughout the Arab world and helped to create a widespread demand for change and the establishment of a new political and social order. On the literary scene, the call for "committed literature" became ever more persistent (7), and that at a time when some avant-garde poets were at work trying to introduce a new movement of "Free Verse"(8). This movement was not only aiming at liberating Arabic poetry from the monotony of the traditional ode, distinguished by monorhyme and the fixed number of feet in every verse, but was also expressing a new outlook on the nature and function of poetry, and adopting a particular "attitude to life and existence, and proffering new visions of the future"(9).

The change in the literary mode, which affected the new generation of poets, brought about new views of man, life and poetry which one can trace in the most mature works of the avant-garde poets of this period, such as Sayyāb and Bayātī in Iraq, ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr and Ḥijāzī in Egypt, Faytūrī in Sudan, Ḥawī in Lebanon, Adūnīs in Syria, and the Palestinian poets Darwīsh and Zayyād. Like many poetic concepts of this period, the concept of death is utilised and developed in new ways which reflect the preoccupations of the age. While tackling the concept of death in their works, the avant-garde poets mentioned above seem to be totally aware of the new role of the poet in their time- the time in which all the romantic

fantasies, dreams, total subjectivity and feelings of despondency became, so to speak, old-fashioned products.

During the hey-day of romanticism, the image of the poet was of someone who was

placed above his community and regarded as being a thing of the spirit, a magician, a mighty philosopher, a 'seer' and a prophet all in one.(10)

Contrary to this image, the committed poet is now

identified with his own people,.... he is the hero who in his personal salvation seeks the salvation of his people.... The poet thinks of himself as Noah or Christ the Redeemer, Sindbad the explorer. He is no longer the passive sufferer, but the active saviour, the one who performs a heroic act of self-sacrifice to save his people.(11)

Bearing in mind these two contrary images of the poet in the romantic and contemporary views, one may say that the concept of death was very much shaped in accordance with the above-mentioned orientation and views of the protagonists of each movement.

The romantic poet, it might be said, scorned the actual reality of life which almost always appears below the demands of his fantasies and the perfect world of his desires. Thus death, from a romantic point of view, was the desirable access to the imaginary world of perfection and total repose. In

death the human soul finds its salvation, when it is released from the earthly ties and tribulations, and attains the final spiritual refuge of ultimate felicity and fulfilment. Moreover, the romantic poet saw death as the glorious occasion of man's ascent from his humble earthly existence towards Godhood.

This romantic view of death, one may note, is not only devoid of a concrete and plausible philosophy, but also appears extremely idealistic. Besides, the romantic poet seems to dedicate all his intellectual insights in order to seek his own salvation on a spiritual level, after he has turned his back on the world of "misery" and "imperfection" which he sees as tantamount to his own undoing. In this respect, the death to which the romantic poet aspires, is the death which betrays an attitude of withdrawal from the actual reality of life- invariably seen as "imperfect". This withdrawal portrays an element of failure or incapability. It makes of the romantic poet the "escapist" rather than the "reformer" of imperfections and injustices.

In his attempt to go beyond preoccupation with his own individuality and his own intellectual or psychological crises, the committed poet endeavours primarily to return to his people or his community and to derive his inspiration from their problems and crises rather than his own. He, therefore, tends to see his personal experiences as part of what his own people are experiencing. The death which concerns the poet at this stage is not the death which saves him from his personal

suffering and despondency, nor the death which realizes his own salvation on a spiritual level. It is to be seen instead as the death or the elimination of the causes of suffering of the whole of his society or nation. More than that, it is the death through which a new life blossoms and a new civilization is rebuilt. The increasing awareness of a collective responsibility seems to urge the poet to reshape his thoughts and insights in accordance with the crises which the whole nation is going through and the hopes it aspires to realize. No wonder, therefore, that among the main themes which dominate the literary scene during the fifties and the sixties was the theme of the death and resurrection of Arab civilization. One may say that this theme permeates the works of the contemporary poets, and signals what can be described as a drastic and important change in the concept of death in modern Arabic poetry. The poet is now concerned with the salvation of his people and nation; and when he searches for the appropriate motif which he can employ to serve this purpose, he seems to be intuitively guided to utilize the ancient myths which symbolized the constant triumph of life over death. These ancient myths of death and resurrection represent, in the first place, man's old dream of eternal life, and constitute the subtle symbols he used to embody such a dream. One may add that the presentation of the mythical symbols in their original contexts stemmed primarily from the collective subconscious of successive generations (12). This is perhaps a relevant

point, especially if one bears in mind the collective dimension of the concept of death in the mind of the contemporary poets. Equipped with ardent enthusiasm and faith in the future, these poets believed that despite the signs of weakness and the numerous shortcomings throughout the Arab world, the spirit of the Arab nation will certainly resist the elements of decay, and bring about a bright new revival (13). Here, as M.M. Badawī puts it, the poet is himself a personification of "the hero who seeks the salvation of his people"(14). While expressing his anticipations and hopes of the new revival, he seems to put a total trust in his dreams. This trust is expressed through the motifs he uses, namely the haunting symbols of the myths of death and resurrection, since all these myths confirm the inevitability of resurrection after death. One must point out, however, that the main issue which preoccupied the minds of most avant-garde poets in the fifties and sixties was the issue of the death of the nation or its decline and the realistic response it requires, and not the death of the individual or the death which wears a philosophical or an existential make-up. Such an issue, it seemed, would not be successfully presented unless it was expressed and brought home with concrete motifs derived from the deeprooted lores and experiences of human history. The efforts of the avant-garde poets in the fifties and sixties succeeded in discovering and utilizing the ancient myths of death and resurrection which effectively fitted their purposes. In examining this subject one has,

perhaps, to resort at the outset to some aspects of the works of Sayyāb, Bayātī, Ḥawī and Adūnīs. These poets in particular seem to have had a mature understanding of the theme of death and resurrection and its utilization in ancient mythology. The mythical symbols which they use in their most representative poetry seem on the whole to form the basis of subsequent developments.

One must add in this context, that the resort to the subject of death and resurrection was not confined to the group of poets mentioned above. It found expression also in the works of the Palestinian resistance poets. These poets representing defiance and struggle before a fatal foe, and within complicated political circumstances, seem to have been able to embody and communicate a vivid and effective view of the "fruitful" death. It is the death in which the subtle concepts of sacrifice and redemption are realized. And through redemption a more vital and powerful life may blossom forth. The Palestinian resistance poets, in this context, often show a preference for utilizing the symbol of Christ the Saviour and the Redeemer which they find most appropriate to their situation. The Palestinian poet personifies the Redeemer on his cross, and in this way he tries to convey the message of his struggle and his heroic death. It is the death which hopefully anticipates the freedom of the homeland and the salvation of the Palestinian people*.

* A more detailed discussion of the concept of death among the Palestinian poets constitutes the theme of chapter VII of this thesis pp. 262-98 below.

In the course of the next section more light will be shed on the utilization of the myths of death and resurrection and the development it brought about in the Arabic poetry written in the period between the fifties and the seventies of this century.

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II. THE TAMMŪZIYYŪN POETS, AND THE MYTH OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The term Tammūziyyūn is frequently used by contemporary Arab critics and writers to identify the Arab avant-garde poets of the period between the fifties and the seventies, such as Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (b.1926), Khalīl Ḥawī (1925-1982) and Adūnīs (ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd) (b.1930) (15). In their quest for new motifs which might express the spirit of the age, these poets seem to have been prepared to discover the significance of ancient mythology and the richness of the literary potential it seemed to provide. Their concern was primarily to utilize ancient mythology in their poetic works and profit from its profound symbols. Among the most suitable myths, which seem to have strongly expressed the immediate circumstances of the Arab social and political life and met its requirements, is the myth of resurrection that is invariably personified by mythical gods raised from the dead to confirm the triumph of life over death.

Sayyāb is considered to be the pioneer of the theme of death and resurrection in Arabic since he used it in his well-known poem Unshūdat al-Maṭar "The Song of Rain" in the mid-

fifties*(16). Influenced by the haunting symbols of rain and fertility in Sayyāb's poem, Arab poets repeatedly drew the analogy between the aridity of Arab life after the 1948 disaster in Palestine, and other subsequent political failures, and the aridity of the land in the fertility myths, granted life through the blood of the Babylonian sun-god, Tammūz or the Phoenician Adonis.

In their comments on the utilization of the myth of fertility in modern Arabic poetry, most Arab critics and writers tend to emphasize the fact that this motif was acquired mainly from Western poetry. T.S. Eliot is repeatedly said to be the prime influence on the Arab poets during the fifties and sixties**, particularly in his poem *The Wasteland* (17). In Jayyūsī's words:

Arab poets found in Eliot's implicit use of the fertility myth an expression of ultimate love and an emphasis on the potential of self-sacrifice. It was the idea of the cycle of sacrificial death that leads to rebirth which attracted them most.(18)

* Unshūdat al-Maṭar, the poem, was first published in al-Ādāb magazine, No.6, June, 1954, p.18-19

** Although T.S. Eliot was already well-known in the West as a poet and critic in the twenties of this century, it was not until the fifties that his poetry came to be widely read in the Arab world. See on this,

Dāwūd, Anas, al-Uṣṭūra fī al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Hadīth, Cairo 1975, p.175-178

Other scholars, however, try not to overrate the influence of T.S. Eliot. There were, they point out, other circumstances either political or social which primarily stem from Arab life, and which urgently drove the poets to adopt the motif of the myth of death and resurrection (19). These were the undying hope of a better and dignified life despite the signs of cultural stagnation and political disunity. In a study about Sayyāb's poetry published in Studies in Modern Arabic Literature, M. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm does not altogether deny the influence of Eliot, but interestingly infers that Sayyāb's work is not a close imitation of Eliot's. He says:

The fact is, however, that Sayyāb re-created the image of the wasteland in his own terms, or perhaps better, in terms of the needs of his own society. Eliot saw the West as a society in decline. Sayyāb was working in a society full of problems but full of hope.(20)

ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm, likewise, does not agree with the view which implies that mythological imagery was imported from alien sources. In fact most of the mythological motifs in Arabic poetry are

based on early Babylonian and Syrian culture which still subsists in the consciousness of the Arabs of Iraq and Syria in the same way that the myth of Osiris subsists in the minds of Egyptians.(21)

The myth of the two gods of fertility, Tammūz or

Adonis or Ba^cal* and his beloved or wife ^cIshtār, seemed to possess a special attraction for the Tammūziyyūn poets. This is because these two mythological figures signify the perpetuity of life and its constant triumph over death. Tammūz is the god who is pictured as descending to the underworld to join the dead for a period of six months every year. During his disappearance, ^cIshtār, the female beloved, keeps searching for him and awaits his resurrection. When Tammūz is restored to her by the turn of the season, and the reunion between the two lovers is realized, Spring returns to grant the earth new life and fresh vegetation. The two figures of Tammūz and ^cIshtār were often viewed by the Tammūziyyūn poets as vital symbols of the powerful will of life which always triumphs over death and maintains a cycle of constant rebirth. The concept of resurrection or rebirth seems not only to permeate the thought and works of these poets, but to have become also the prevailing poetic motif of the age. But one can, perhaps, detect the motives and reasons which brought this about in the poetry written during the fifties up to the early seventies. It was the growing concern about the signs of continued deterioration all over the Arab world on the political and

* The worship of Adonis was practised by the Semitic people of Babylonia and Syria, and the Greeks borrowed it from them as early as the seventh century before Christ. The true name of the deity was Tammuz: the appellation of Adonis is merely the Semitic Adon, "lord", a title of honour by which the worshippers addressed him. But the Greeks through a misunderstanding converted the title of honour into a proper name.

Ba^cal was another name of Tammuz in Semitic mythology.

social levels in place of the great hopes for renewal and rapid development immediately after the second world war. In trying to overcome this state of despondency or despair, the Tammūziyyūn poets sought to portray bright visions of a promising future, in which the dreams of a new revival or rebirth might blossom.

While examining the main aspects of the theme of death and resurrection among the Tammūziyyūn poets, one cannot escape noticing an element of conflict or contradiction which these poets seem to have experienced. This seems to have been the result of the wide gap or chasm between the actual reality of the political and social state of their societies or nation, and the possibility of recovery which seemed a mere hope or dream.

It is appropriate, while examining the concepts of death and resurrection in the works of the Tammūziyyūn poets, to begin with Sayyāb's poetry. Death was a predominant issue both in Sayyāb's life and in his works. The ordeal to which Sayyāb was exposed, while sustaining his fatal illness and awaiting imminent death, was in many respects an experience which left its mark on his poetry. It was also an experience which deeply affected his thinking and moulded his poetic insight*.

The most mature stage of Sayyāb's development is particularly distinguished by the use of mythological symbols. This applies to the stage in which he wrote the poems that appear

* The features of Sayyāb's ordeal and struggle with death will be examined exclusively at length in the course of the next chapter pp. 223-261 below.

in the collection entitled Unshūdat al Maṭar "The Song of Rain" which was first published in 1960*. At this time his awareness of the problems of his country, and the abysmal political and social circumstances in which it was immersed, made him choose mythological symbols as the most appropriate tools for expressing such issues. Sayyāb himself said in a newspaper interview**:

My first motive in using myths and making symbols out of them was political. When I wanted to resist the royal Sa'īdī regime with poetry, I used myths to veil my intentions.... I also used them for the same purpose in the regime of Qāsim..... When I wanted to depict the failure of the original aims of the July (Tammūz) revolution, I replaced the Babylonian name of Tammūz by the Greek name of Adonis who is his counterpart.(22)

Sayyāb, one may say, conceived of the deteriorated state of his country as a state of death, and he started to search for suitable motifs that might symbolize new horizons of hope. The myth of death and resurrection which Sayyāb often utilized in Unshūdat al-Maṭar, seemed to offer unbounded possibilities of hope. Yet, Sayyāb's faith in the possibility of revival and resurrection on the national level seems to have

* Publisher: Dār Majallat Shi'ṛ, Beirut.

** Sawt al-Jamāhīr, Baghdad, October 26, 1963

varied from one poem to another. For although the mythological figures of fertility like 'Ishtār and Tammūz are, so to speak, major personae in his poetry, they are sometimes pictured as not having the ability to change the state of sterility. This is what can be seen in Madīna bilā Matar* "A City Without Rain" and Madīnat al-Sindibād** "Sindbad's City", to take only two examples. In Madīna bilā Matar, a deep feeling of despair overwhelms the poet, and is felt through the images he utilizes. Tammūz emerges to grant Babylon new life, but the rain is not forthcoming. There is nothing to be heard in the empty expanses but the whistle of the wind and the moaning of the diseased. Likewise, 'Ishtār becomes a barren and empty-handed goddess who cannot offer gifts to the hungry wanderers:

صحا تموز ، عاد لبابل الخضراء يرعاها
و توشك أن تدق طبول بابل ، ثم يغشاها
صفير الريح في أبراجها وأنين مرضاها .
و في غرفات عشتار
تظل مجامر الفخار خاوية بلا نار
.
و نحن نهيم كالغرباء من دار الى دار
لنسأل عن هداياها
جيا ع نحن . . وا أسفاه . . فارغتان كفاها (23)

* Dīwān, pp.486 - 491.

** Dīwān, pp.463 - 473.

Tammūz awoke, he came back to attend to Babylon.
 Babylon's drums were on the point to be beaten.
 But the whistle of the wind in the towers
 And the moaning of the diseased overwhelmed Babylon.
 And in Ishtār's rooms
 The clay barziers remain without fire,

 Whereas we, like aliens,
 Keep wandering from house to house.
 Asking for her gifts.
 We are the hungry.... but alas!
 She is empty-handed.

In the poem Unshūdat al-Matar, Sayyāb was seemingly fluctuating between hope and despair. But the tone of hope is loudly raised at the end of the poem. No mythological motifs are used in this poem, yet the construction of the myth of death and resurrection and the shadows of its legendary figures are implicitly hinted at throughout the poem. The two main elements on which this poem is built are the barren motherland, which awaits the rain, (corresponding to the image of Ishtār), and the power of fertility embodied in the rain (the corresponding picture of Tammūz). The opening verses of the poem introduce a subtle portrayal of the motherland personified as a beloved woman. Full of warmth and joy, she anticipates the imminent rain which soon begins to fall. Yet the rain arouses a mysterious feeling in the poet which is a mixture of awe and deep sadness. This is because of the paradox of the pouring rain in Iraq, and the famine which persists from year to year in the country. The state of corruption and exploitation will continue as long as the oppressors have the upper-hand.

Sayyāb persists in picturing the paradoxical situation, where the rain, the symbol of fertility and life, seems to leave nothing but signs of aridity in Iraq:

مطر
مطر
و في العراق جوع
و ينثر الغلال فيه موسم الحصاد
لتشبع الغربان و الجراد
.....
و يهطل المطر
و كل عام - حين يعشب الثرى - نجوع
ما مرّ عام و العراق ليس فيه جوع (24)

Rain
Rain
And famine in Iraq.
The harvest time scatters corn
(But only) to feed ravens and locusts.
.....
The rain falls
And every year, when the earth grows green,
We suffer hunger.
Not a year has passed without famine in Iraq.

This state of persisting sterility despite the rainfall is but an embodiment of the actual fact. A fact which Sayyāb tries to overcome in order to be able to foresee the dream of revival, a dream in which the rain becomes more vital and the earth more promising. It is only the faith in the future that seems to conquer the aspects of death and sterility in Iraq and grant her new revival. Sayyāb ends his poem by conveying a

note of hope in the ultimate triumph of life:

مطر
مطر
مطر
في كل قطرة من المطر
حمراء أو صفراء من أجنة الزهر
و كل دمة من الجوع والعراة
.
فهي ابتسام في انتظار مبسم جديد
أو حمة توردت على قم الوليد
في عالم الغد الفتى ، واهب الحياة
مطر
مطر
مطر
سيعشب العراق بالمطر (25)

Rain.. Rain..
In every drop of rain
A red or yellow flower bud
Every tear drop of the hungry and naked
.
Is a smile awaiting new lips
Or a roseate nipple in the mouth of a newborn
In the youthful world of tomorrow, giver of life.
Rain. Rain.
Iraq will grow green with the rainfall!(26)

* * * *

Like Sayyāb, Ḥāwī extensively utilizes the same theme. When examining Ḥāwī's poetry, one can see that the issue of the waning civilization of the Arabs and the hope of its revival was one of his main or primary preoccupations. It is, one may add, the pivot around which most of his poetry revolves. As Rītā ʿAwad points out, he almost always

depicts the resurrection of (the Arab) civilization which he experienced only as a poetic vision, and not as an actual fact. But this vision seems to be frustrated when he is faced by the many aspects of decadence and its vicious circles.(27)

Ḥāwī's two collections, Nahr al-Ramād "The River of Ash"(1957) and Bayādir al-Jūʿ "The Threshing Floors of Hunger" (1965), are but close depictions of scenes of desolation which the poet sees as permeating every aspect of life in the Arab world; whereas the collection entitled al-Nāy wa al-Rīḥ "The Flute and the Wind" which appeared in 1961 represents a wave of hope which the poet seems to have entertained at that time. One can perhaps agree with Rītā ʿAwad and S.Kh. Jayyūsī, that the collection of al-Nāy wa al-Rīḥ abounds with symbols which almost embody the tremor of resurrection, a vision which seemed to haunt Ḥāwī at the time (28). The last poem in the collection al-Nāy wa al-Rīḥ, entitled al-Sindibād fī Riḥlatihi 'l-Thāmina "Sindbad in His Eighth Journey", conveys a sense of ecstatic revelation by a poet who foresees an imminent revival blossoming forth:

واليوم . . . الرؤيا تغني في دمي
 برعشة البرق و صحو الصباح
 بفطرة الطير التي تشتت
 ما في نية الغابات والرياح
 تحس ما في رحم الفصل
 تراه قبل أن يولد في الفصول (29)

Today... the vision sings in my blood
 With a tremor of lightning
 And the brightness of the morning,
 With the instinct of a bird which senses
 The intention of the woods and the winds.
 It (the vision) senses what is in the womb of the season.
 It foresees it before it is born in the course of the seasons.

In the collection Nahr al-Ramād, the tone of despair had prevailed. Signs of stagnation and of ever-present death were deeply felt and closely depicted in Ḥawī's poem ʿAsr al-Jalīd "The Age of Ice"*. It is the phase in which neither the earth nor the people could resist the chill of death which, as the poet asserts, penetrates into the "earth's veins" and the "People's limbs":

عندما ماتت عروق الأرض
 في عصر الجليد
 مات فينا كل عرق
 يبست أعضاؤنا لحما قديد
 عبثا كنا نصدّ الريح
 والليل الحزينا
 وندارى رعشة
 مقطوعة الأنفاس فينا
 رعشة الموت الأكيد (30)

* Nahr al-Ramād, pp.87 - 98.

When the veins of the earth had died
 In the age of ice,
 Every vein within us died.
 Our limbs dried out like jerked meat.
 In vain we were warding off the wind
 And the sad night,
 Trying to avoid breathless shiver in our (chest),
 The shiver of definite death.

While suffering this state of "definite death" of the nation and the whole generation, Hāwī tries to find an escape from the siege of despair. He resorts to the god of fertility Ba^cal or Tammūz, as a symbol of perpetual life that might rescue the earth from sterility. The hope of being saved from death and barrenness urges the poet to perform this ritual prayer before the god of fertility:

يا اله الخصب ، يا بعلا يفتح
 التربة العاقر
 يا شمس الحصيد
 يا الها ينفخ القبر
 و يا فصحا مجيد
 أنت يا تموز يا شمس الحصيد
 نجنا ، نج عروق الأرض
 من عقم دهاها و دهاننا (31)

O god of fertility, O Ba^cal who
 Tears open the barren land.
 O sun of the harvest.
 O god who shakes open the grave.
 O glorious resurrection.
 O Tammūz, O sun of the harvest,
 Save us, rescue the veins of the earth
 From the sterility that overtook us and her.

Bayātī, in keeping with the new trend, extensively employed the myth of Tammūz and ʿIshtār, the two figures whose reunion grants the earth a new revival every year. In fact Bayātī entitles one of his poems Qaṣāʾid Hubb Ilā ʿIshtār "Love Poems to ʿIshtār", and that in his collection al-Kitāba ʿAlā ʾl-Tīn "Writing on Mud" (1970). It is a poem which "symbolizes the death of revolution, of the earth and of civilization; but at the same time sustains the human faith in inevitable resurrection"(32). The tragedy of death, as Bayātī understands it, is embodied in the waning of the revolutionary fervour throughout the Arab world, and in the state of surrender to the powers of corruption and tyranny. This state of stagnation and surrender permits the exploiters and the oppressors to misuse their power, and, in the process, to turn the nation into a wasteland. In trying to find an exit from the vicious circle of despair, Bayātī searches for "ʿIshtār-the revolution", in the hope that she will end up the phase of sterility and revive the wasteland again. "Thus Babylon might conquer the aspects of old age and imminent death, and regain its youth"(33). The dream of resurrection which Bayātī's poem Qaṣāʾid Hubb Ilā ʿIshtār suggests seems to have been realized by the reunion between Tammūz and ʿIshtār, and by the power of love between them which enables

the seed of life to be planted in the womb of ʿIshtār, the beloved, the mother and the earth. Thus she bears and gives birth to new life.(34)

‘Ishtār in Bayātī's poem becomes the main focus. She is the beloved female and the source of fertility. Being aware of the eminent role of the fertile female in the myth of Tammūz and ‘Ishtār, Bayātī introduces some alteration in the sequence of events in the myth. According to the ancient account, Tammūz is the lover who used to disappear every year in Autumn and descend to the underworld. During his disappearance ‘Ishtār searches for him, until she finds him and their reunion is realized. But in Bayātī's poem Qaṣā'id Hubb Ilā ‘Ishtār, this sequence seems to be inverted. The disappearing figure is ‘Ishtār and not Tammūz, and it is the latter who is depicted in the image of the desperate searcher who is torn by yearning and nostalgia for the hidden beloved. Thus Bayātī has Tammūz recite this hymn before the vision of ‘Ishtār:

مثل ماء النهر من تحت جسور العالم المشحون
 بالحدق ، تلمست الضفاف المظلمة
 وتمزقت و ناديتك باسم الكلمة
 باحسا عن وجهك الحلو الصغير
 في عصور القتل والارهاب والسحر و موت الآلهة

 فمتى تنهل كالنجمة عشتار و تأتى ؟ (35)

Like a water of a river
 Flowing underneath the bridges of the spiteful world,
 I seek the dark banks.
 Torn (by nostalgia),
 I called upon you by the name of the Word.
 I search for your sweet and cute face

In the age of killing, of terror,
Of black magic and the death of the gods.

So, when shall 'Ishtār alight like a star and come?

As soon as 'Ishtār appears, Tammūz seems to glow with new excitement and emerge full of faith in her, a woman who always conquers death and is constantly resurrected:

طفلة أنت وأنثى واعدة
ولدت من زبد البحر و من نار الشمس الخالدة
كلما ماتت بعصر ، بعثت
قامت من الموت وعادت للظهور
أنت عنقاء الحضارات
وانثى سارق النيران في كل العصور (36)

You are a child, and a promising woman
Who was born from the foam of the sea,
From the blaze of the eternal suns.
Whenever she dies in any age, she is resurrected
Raised from the dead, and appears again.
You are the phoenix of civilizations
And the female (woman) of the robber of fire* in every age.

When Tammūz and 'Ishtār experience the glory of intimacy and love, miracles begin. The desolation turns to prosperity, and the wasteland begins to blossom:

* The robber of fire: Prometheus who stole the god's fire and offered it to man, in order to let him know the secret of immortality.

مدن الله على الأرض بنيناها
و تعبدنا بمحراب النهار
أيها الحب الذي يعمر بالحب القفار
قادمًا أقرع أبوابك أقبلت من الأرض الخراب
آه لن تسقط أزهارى على عتبة دار
دون أن تمنح محبوبى الثمار (37)

We built the cities of God on earth.
We prayed in the altar of the daylight.
O love which makes the deserts thrive with prosperity
I came from the wasteland knocking at your doors.
Ah... my flowers will not fall on the threshold of a house,
Before they grant my beloved fruit.

* * * *

Besides the figures of ancient Babylonian mythology mentioned above, other mythological symbols of death and resurrection begin to appear in Adūnīs's* poetry also. Adūnīs shows a special interest in the phoenix and, more recently, in the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn in particular. The phoenix, as the Brand's Dictionary of Faith and Folklore tells us, is a legendary bird which

when it perceives age coming on, it goes and collects twigs, and precious spice of good odour; as leaves it takes them, and spreads itself upon them; by the sun's ray it takes

* Adūnīs is the pen-name of ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd. His deliberate choice of this pen-name already shows his basic involvement with the spirit of the myth of Tammūz or Adonis.
See: Jayyūsī, Trends, II, p.734

the pure fire (of the heaven); voluntarily it spreads its wings over them; these it burns of its own will, and is reduced to powder. By the fire of the spice, by the good ointment of the heat and humour the powder takes sweetness, and such is its nature, as the writing says, on the third day it comes to life again.(38)

The use of the phoenix in Adūnīs's poetry perhaps reflects personal circumstances. Adūnīs's father died in a fire accident, and he is said to have had a very close relationship with his father (39). These personal circumstances might have guided Adūnīs to discover the myth of the phoenix and to utilize it so extensively in his poetry. The father's death, according to the poet, was not an end, or as Rītā 'Awad puts it,

the fire which burnt him killed only the human image to create an immortal god instead. Thus the father's essence is seen to conform to the law of revival, just like the sun which always shines after every darkness.(40)

Adūnīs says in this connection:

ترمّد الساعد الذى طالما
شدّ بصدري للسموات
.....
لم يغن بالنار ولكنه
عاد بها للمنشأ الأول
للزمن المقبل (41)

The forearm which used to embrace my chest
And lift it towards the sky
Has turned to ashes.

It never perished by fire,
But returned to the origin,
To the coming age.

The motif of the phoenix in Adūnīs's poetry is not, however, confined to the expression of personal experiences. It is also employed to express wider national concepts. Commenting on this Jayyūsī says:

In his experience of contemporary Arab existence, Adūnīs saw in the chaos, the anxiety, the despair, the disillusionment of a whole generation, good cause for a sacrificial death that brings redemption, so that life can regain its force and focus.(42)

Adūnīs resorts to the myth of the phoenix in another poem entitled al-Ba'ṭh wa 'l-Ramād* "Resurrection and Ashes" in which he tries to foresee collective dreams of revival, despite the signs of fragmentation. The phoenix which the poet implores now is but the embodiment of a collective hope- the hope that might rescue the nation from the aspects of decadence and stagnation, and prepare it for a fresh renascence. Thus life may begin again in the desolate land:

فينيق ، أنت من يرى سوادنا
يحيى كيف نمحي
فينيق ، مت فدى لنا

* Al-Āthār al-Kāmila, I, p.249 to 272

فينيق ، ولتبدأ بك الحرائق
لتبدأ الشقائق
لتبدأ الحياة
يا أنت ، يا رماد يا صلاة (43)

O phoenix, you are the one who sees our people,
Feels how we perish.
O phoenix, die to redeem us.
O phoenix, let the fires start by you.
Let red anemones blossom.
Let life begin.
O you, O ashes, O prayer.

The other figure, this time from Arab history, who attracts Adūnīs is al-Ḥusayn. Al-Ḥusayn, one must assert, is not a mythological figure. He is the son of Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad and Alī b. Abī Ṭālib the cousin of the Prophet. As is well known, al-Ḥusayn chose to defend his belief that the Prophet's successors Āl al-Bayt, or members of his family were the legitimate caliphs of the Muslims. Equipped with this faith, al-Ḥusayn confronted the Umayyad army in the battle of Karbalā' 61 A.H (680 A.D), despite his knowledge that his battle front was not equivalent in power to his enemy's. The battle of Karbalā' became a well-known incident in Muslim history, because most of Āl al-Bayt were tragically killed in that battle, including al-Ḥusayn himself (44). This is the factual side of the event. But there were other legendary accounts which were afterwards added to the main event. These accounts appear especially in the legacy of the Shi'ites who sympathetically recorded the biography of al-Ḥusayn and

the events of the massacre of Karbalā'.

In Shi'ite sources al-Ḥusayn is almost pictured as a man of miracles, a symbol of everlasting life and a source of fertility. Al-Ḥusayn, as we understand from his biographers, is said to have had the ability to turn a faded palm tree to a green one full of fresh dates (45), and to make a dry well abound with fresh water (46). He is pictured also as having had other miraculous abilities. It is said, for example, that while preparing for the battle of Karbalā', al-Ḥusayn's men suffered desperate thirst, for they were denied access to any water sources by the Umayyads. Realizing his men's ordeal, al-Ḥusayn called them one by one and put his thumb in every mouth to satisfy the thirsty with fresh water (47). It is said also that when al-Ḥusayn was beheaded in Karbalā', his head had remained conscious. It was talking and reciting the Quran (sūrat al-Kahf) (48). Moreover, al-Ḥusayn, according to Shi'ite belief, is not dead; he is with the Prophet Muḥammad enjoying the delights of God's presence (49).

Bearing in mind all these accounts which were related about al-Ḥusayn, one can perceive that this figure can be poetically employed as a powerful symbol of renewal and resurrection. Adūnīs in particular seems to be prepared to adopt this symbol in his poetry. His upbringing in an Alawite family perhaps affected his way of thinking and moulded his poetic insight (50). The poem of al-Ra's wa al-Nahr* "The Head and the River", which

* Al-Āthār al-Kāmila, II, p.363 to 403

appears in Adūnīs's collection al-Masrah wa al-Marāyā "The Stage and the Mirrors"(1968), can be regarded as the most representative example in which the motif of al-Ḥusayn is successfully presented, although it is not made totally explicit that the head is that of al-Ḥusayn. Examining the main elements of the poem, one may discover that Adūnīs was perhaps conscious of the correspondence between the tragic event of Karbalā' and the Arab disastrous defeat of 1967 against Israel. This defeat is perhaps perceived as the parallel of al-Ḥusayn's tragedy. Thus the past tragedy and the present disaster, as Rītā 'Awad points out, are being moulded into one picture (51). And because al-Ḥusayn, despite his killing, is still capable of imparting the subtle significance of his sacrificial death, the calamity of 1967 should not be seen as the grave of all hopes.

While examining Adūnīs's poem al-Ra's wa al-Nahr, one should not, however, disregard the element of water which almost dominates the poem's scenes, and appears as of equal importance, as a motif, as al-Ḥusayn's head. The poet chooses to let the head float on the river and respond to its powerful current, apparently to emphasize the strong affinity between the water which is the source of fertility and al-Ḥusayn's sacrifice which is accomplished voluntarily to redeem noble or righteous beliefs. The death of al-Ḥusayn then, implies an implicit meaning of everlasting life. Thus the poet lets a voice rise from the water, and reiterate that al-Ḥusayn, by dying, triumphed over death and is granted immortality:

صوت من الماء ، يقول الصوت
مات لكى ينهى عهد الموت (52)

A voice rises from the water, and says:
He died to put an end to death.

Adūnīs, at the end of his poem al-Ra's wa al-Nahr, makes the rain fall; and this is to be taken as a good omen for a new revival. The rain, another image of water, signifies a perpetual faith in the coming life which will hopefully blossom out of decay.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V

- (1) An Anthology, p.xvii
- (2) Ibid, p.xvii, xviii; Trends, II, p.576-7; Madāris, p.334-6
- (3) Badawī, M.M, "Convention and Revolt in Modern Arabic Poetry", Modern Arabic Literature and the West, London, 1985, p.120-1, (Convention and Revolt).
- (4) Ibid, p.120
- (5) An Anthology, p.xviii
- (6) Ibid
- (7) Trends, II, p.574
- (8) Qadāyā, p.56-7; See also the Introduction to Dīwān Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb, Beirut, Dār al-ʿAwda, 1971, p.H-W
- (9) ʿAwad, Rītā, Ustūrat al-Mawt wa al-Inbiʿāth fī al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Hadīth, Beirut, 1978, p.91, (Ustūra)
- (10) "Convention and Revolt", p.116
- (11) Ibid, p.123-4
- (12) Ustūra, p.66
- (13) Ibid, p.181
- (14) "Convention and Revolt", p.123
- (15) Trends, II, p.732
- (16) Ibid, p.724; Jayyūsī, S.Kh, "al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāsir Tāwuruḥu wa Mustaqbaluḥu", Majallat ʿĀlam al-Fikr, IV, No.2, Kuwait, 1973, p.52, (al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī)
- (17) Dāwūd, Anas, al-Ustūra fī al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-Hadīth, Cairo, 1975, p.209,270, (Dāwūd); Critical Introduction, p.255; Boullāṭa, I.J, Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb: The Man and His Poetry, Ph.D thesis, London University, SOAS, 1969, p.256-7, (Boullāṭa); "al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī", p.25

- (18) Trends, II, p.724
- (19) Zeidān, J, "Myth and Symbol in the Poetry of Adūnīs and Yūsuf al-Khāl", Journal of Arabic Literature, X, 1979 p.70
- (20) Studies in Modern Arabic Literature, ed.Ostle, R.C, "al-Sayyāb, A Study of His Poetry", Warminster, 1975, p.70
- (21) Ibid, p.71
- (22) Translated by:Boullāṭa, Īssā, "The Poetic Technique of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb", Journal of Arabic Literature, II, 1971, p.113
- (23) Dīwān, p.486
- (24) Ibid, p.478-9
- (25) Ibid, p.479-480
- (26) As translated by M.M. Badawī, Critical Introduction, p.254
- (27) Ustūra, p.113
- (28) Ibid, p.113; Jayyūsī, S.Kh, "Qaṣīdat al-Nāy wa al-Rīh", Dīwān Khalīl Hāwī, Dār al-ʿAwda, Beirut, 1972, p.391
- (29) Dīwān, p.261-2
- (30) Ibid, p.87-8
- (31) Ibid, p.89-90
- (32) Ustūra, p.160
- (33) Ibid, p.169
- (34) Ibid, p.160
- (35) Al-Kitāba ʿAlā al-Tīn, beirut, 1970, p.30,1
- (36) Ibid, p.42-3
- (37) Ibid, p.47-8
- (38) Brand's Dictionary of Faith and Folklore, II, London, 1905, art: Phoenix; See also: Gray, Louis Herbert, The Mythology of All Races, ed: Moore, G.F, XII, Boston, 1918

- (39) Ustūra, p.134-5; Trends, II, p.736
- (40) Ustūra, p.135
- (41) Al-Āthār al-Kāmila, Dār al-ʿAwda, Beirut, I, 1971, p.117
- (42) Trends, II, p.735
- (43) Al-Āthār al-Kāmila, p.264-5
- (44) Muqarram, A.M, Maqtal al-Husayn, Beirut, 1979, p.271-285;
Mālikī, F, al-Thawra al-Husayniyya, Najaf, 1973,
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- (45) Tabarī, Abū Jaʿfar, Dalāʾil al-Imāma, Najaf, 1949, p.76-7,
(Dalāʾil)
- (46) Shāfiʿī, Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī, ed: Maḥmūdī, M.B, Tarjamat
Rayḥānat Rasūl al-Llāh al-Husayn, Beirut, 1978, p.155
- (47) Dalāʾil, p.78
- (48) Ibid, p.78; Isfarāynī, Abū Ishāq, Nūr al-ʿAyn fī Mashhad
al-Husayn, Cairo, 1948, p.59, (Nūr al-ʿAyn)
- (49) Nūr al-ʿAyn, p.81-2
- (50) Ustūra, p.140; Trends, II, p.735
- (51) Ustūra, p.142
- (52) Al-Āthār al-Kāmila, II, p.384
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CHAPTER VI

SAYYĀB'S EXPERIENCE OF DEATH

I. THE ORDEAL AND THE STRUGGLE

Among the modern Arab poets, Sayyāb underwent a special and subtle experience with death. His fatal illness, which exposed him to a considerable degree of physical and spiritual anguish, made of him a victim of suffering and not a mere observer. Death, as far as Sayyāb's disposition was concerned, was dealt with as an introspective and highly personal issue rather than an issue of an existential nature analysed and discussed with a degree of aloofness.

There are, however, other circumstances in Sayyab's upbringing and intellectual formation which had their particular effects in restricting his treatment of death on the whole to a personal and subjective treatment. In Sayyāb's childhood, youth and manhood there were numerous unfortunate circumstances which deeply affected his life and provoked within him feelings of anxiety and restlessness. The death of his mother when he was six years old deprived him of the main source of compassion and care at that early age. However, this lack of

love became greater and more pressing during his adolescence and youth. All his relationships with women, we are told, failed to give him the emotional stability he always sought. He is described as "the emotionally starved young man who seems to be constantly suffering from unrequited love"(1). It has become a commonplace among Arab writers to tell us, in trying to justify Sayyāb's unfulfilled love of women, that he was not good-looking (2). The image of the beloved woman, to which Sayyāb always longed, seems to have always evaded him. The woman of his dreams never became a reality, and continued to be a remote vision, an unfulfilled longing or perhaps a mirage. This deprivation from feminine love, with which Sayyāb was destined to live, marked his late works with certain particular characteristics. He almost turned, as his late poetry shows, to a neurotic patient haunted by a vision of his mother calling him from her grave, or else aroused by passion for the women whom he loved.

As Sayyāb's political orientation had its share in affecting his mind and spirit, a brief survey of his political views is perhaps imperative. Sayyāb became a member of the communist party in Iraq in 1946 (3). After about eight years as a member of the party, he seems to have felt uneasy about being a communist and was prepared to abandon the party and accept less dogmatic views which were starting to seem more convenient for him if one does not say more expedient (4). His inter-

est was growing in Arabic nationalism, a wave which was gaining momentum during the fifties of this century. His enthusiasm and sympathy with the nationalists seem to have provoked the indignation of his old comrades, and that was the beginning of political rows and attacks which seem to have deeply hurt the poet (5). In talking about Sayyāb's political activities, one becomes aware of the fact that while committing himself to one or the other of the political movements, he was exposed to various aggressive tirades from the camps which did not share his views or approve of them. The Iraqi authorities at the time did not brook any signs of political opposition. As far as Sayyāb's political activity was concerned, it was no surprise that he became a target of severe persecution which took the form of jailing or dismissal from employment, which often drove him to seek refuge in other countries.

One must bear in mind that the difficult circumstances of Sayyāb's life, deprivation in childhood, a total lack of emotional fulfilment, and political persecutions, all these circumstances seem to have affected him both morally and physically, and this, according to his biographers, culminated in his fatal illness (6). Sayyāb's illness was identified by doctors as being a degenerative disease of the nervous system manifesting itself by a gradual deterioration leading to total paralysis (7). In his last years, while sustaining physical illness and spiritual anguish, Sayyāb became aware

of the painful fact that he was on the threshold of death, but he did not face the prospect of his death with the feeling of resignation to his fate. To his horror, Sayyāb began to realize, while approaching his end, that his life was merely a chain of deprivation and agony, and that there was nothing but disease and death awaiting him. Fear of death, one may remark, appears as the distinctive characteristic of Sayyāb's late works, especially his two collections Manzil al-Aqnān "The House of Slaves" and Shanāshīl Ibnat 'l-Chalabī "The Shanāshīl* of Chalabī's Daughter". The constant agony of the disease which Sayyāb could not escape, seems to have always reminded him of the crawling shadow of death which was according to medical reports, inevitable at a particular period of time (8). His fear of death was apparently overwhelming to such an extent that it gradually developed into neurotic symptoms and hallucinations (9), such as imagining death as a "thief" or "devil" or a "predatory hawk"(10) waiting in ambush for his frail body. Although aware of imminent death, Sayyāb seems not to have resigned himself fully to his fate. His response to death, however, differed in many ways from that of Shābbī, who, as his biographers point out (11), went through similar circumstances of a fatal illness. Yet, Shābbī resigned himself to his fate, and was haunted by roman-

* Shanāshīl are bay windows on the upper floors of the houses of wealthy landlords, decorated with coloured glass and other forms of ornamentation.

tic visions of the glorious realm of death, which he imagined as a gateway to ultimate emancipation*. Shābbī, one may say, managed to develop a kind of intimacy with his expected fate, and therefore succeeded to some extent in extenuating the horror. Love of death in Shābbī's case was substituted for fear, and he surrendered himself to anguish with the resignation of someone who relished his very agony. But in Sayyāb's case, the romantic speculations about the glory of death were almost absent. On the contrary, Sayyāb avoided any metaphysical or ideal speculation about death, and tended to deal with his ordeal in a matter of fact way. This is, perhaps, an insight which seems to be confined to the common sordid view of death as physical decay rather than as a form of spiritual liberation.

Sayyāb's late poetry, one notices, shows two outstanding tendencies. First, the hope of recovering and leading a healthy life, and second, the desire at times of ending his anguish and joining the dead in their "nether" or "underworld". The first tendency is manifested in Sayyāb's endeavour to find refuge in his ordeal in God's power. But it is often clear that his resort to God betrays doubts of His mercy. This is because Sayyāb sees God as an arrogant power that never responds to the appeal of humble and frail beings, but, on the contrary, finds pleasure in humiliating people and venting

* See for example his poem al-Ṣabāḥ al-Jadīd in Aghānī, pp.159-161, and pp.112-113 above.

anger on them. The poet, in a sort of hysterical manner, condemns this power for its "carelessness" and addresses God with furious cries like the following, cited from his poem Amām Bāb 'l-llāh "Before the Door of God":

منطرحا أمام بابك الكبير
أصرخ في الظلام أستجير
.....
أتسمع النداء ؟ يا بوركت تسمع .
و هل تجيبان سمعت ؟
صائد الرجال
و ساحق النساء أنت ، يا مفجع
يا مهلك العباد بالرجوم والزلازل
يا موحش المنازل . (12)

Porostrate before your grand door
Crying in the darkness, appealing for aid.
.....
Do you hear the call? O Blessed, do you hear?
And do you respond if you hear?
O hunter of men
Crusher of women, you O creator of grief
O destroyer of people with meteors and earthquakes
The cause of desolation in (people's)homes.

This furious tone becomes a bit more mellow and humble in Sifr Ayyūb "The Book of Job", in which Sayyāb tries to resort to patience and retain faith in God's miraculous healing, by looking at himself as a personification of Job and by reciting prayers of obedience and humility:

لك الحمد مهما استبطل البلاء
ومهما استبدّ الألم .
لك الحمد ان الرزايا عطاء
وان المصيبات بعض الكرم . (13)

Praise be to Thee, however long is the trial
And however great the pain
Praise be to Thee, misfortunes are gifts,
And calamities are an aspect of largesse. (14)

These glimpses of faith, however, cannot, one may remark,
conceal Sayyāb's doubt about the existence of God and His
providence. I. Hāwī says about Sayyāb in this connection:

In the darkness which totally surrounds him,
he is obviously in doubt about God. Although
he implores God help for relief from suffering,
his faith is not flowing vigorously. He
does not surrender to God's care nor feel its
sure and ultimate existence. Sayyāb seems to
have conceived of God as nothingness and
hollowness. (15)

Two factors, one may say, stand behind Sayyāb's lack of faith
in God's providence. One of them is his unfortunate life that
culminated in fatal disease which affected both his body and
spirit. God's providence, however, is never perceived by
Sayyāb as a source of relief or consolation while he was going
through his agonizing experience. Miraculous healing is
what Sayyāb was waiting for; and as this miracle was un-
attainable, his faith gradually vanished. The other factor

which stands behind this lack of faith was perhaps Sayyāb's uncertainty about the purpose of life (16). Life, according to him, is but a clamorous road heading to ultimate "darkness" and "nothingness". The expressions of "darkness" and "nothingness", which are used by Sayyāb to denote the eventuality of life, convey a distressing feeling of disappointment and despair, which seems to have overwhelmed the poet while meditating his fate. He says:

ماذا لو ان الموت ليس بعده من صحوة
فهو ظلام ، عدم ما فيه من حس و لا شعور
أكل هذا الأُس ، تلك الشقوة
.....
أكلها لهذه النهاية ؟
ترى الحمام للحياة غاية ؟ (17)

I wonder if there may be no awakening after death.
If it is (death) but darkness, nothingness, without
signs of life or feeling.
Is all this joy, that misery
Is everything destined to this end?
I wonder if death is the purpose of life?

The other question which preoccupied Sayyāb's mind at times, revolves around the nature of death. Will death be a world of more suffering and more dreadful visions? This is what Sayyāb seems to have predicted. In al-Waṣiyya "The Last Words of a Dying Man", horrifying images of death keep haunting the poet's imagination. He describes how one day he will wake up

from sleep to find himself wrapped in a coffin with Azrael, the angel of death, guiding him with the other dead to a "barren island covered with ice". The severe cold wind blows through his bones, and darkness will overwhelm everything and dominate over all beings (18). In Rahala 'l-Nahār "The Day Has Gone", a poem which abounds with farewell shadows, Sayyāb sees his approaching death as a journey from which he will never return. Again, while trying to foresee his destination, the poet is overwhelmingly preoccupied by dreadful fantasies which are apparently motivated by fear of death. Interestingly, Sayyāb's depiction of the awesome world of death reflects the ability of a very alert imagination. His images emerge fully detailed, with a considerable degree of clarity and vividness. Meditating on his destination, the poet portrays a "black castle" in which he imagines that he will be fettered by the "gods of the sea". This castle is, presumably, found in the "island of blood and shells". The horizon appears as a "jungle of heavy clouds and thunder" in which the trees never bear anything other than "the fruits of death"(19). Expressions of imprisonment and enslavement, one may notice, have always a close affinity with death in Sayyāb's poetry. He, for example, pictures himself in Asīr al-Qarāsīnā "The Captive of the Pirates" as a bound prisoner in the hands of savage pirates (20); whereas in a late poem entitled Fī 'l-Mustashfā "In the Hospital", he sees his imminent death as a threatening thief knocking down the wall of his room in order

to seize his life (21). In this respect death is perceived by Sayyāb as a tightened siege, or a state of ultimate imprisonment in which he will be caught and suffocated. One may notice how much this perception of death contradicts the views of Shābbī, 'Arīḍa and other romanticists about the ultimate emancipation which might be attained by death.

"Salvation" is another expression which is always associated with the death desired by those romanticists. They almost see death as the opportunity which enables the spirit to get rid of its earthly bonds and to proceed to the elevated realm of ultimate fulfilment and realization. In Sayyāb's case, neither emancipation nor salvation seem to have appeared as concrete concepts worthy of consideration. He is apparently too much preoccupied with the physical aspects of death and not its metaphysical aspects, with the blunt perceptions of an earthly death and not the fascinations of a glorious release and emancipation. Death, as far as Sayyāb's imagination is concerned, is not more than a grave being dug and a corpse being laid where rats and worms multiply:

تعدو
في قبره الجرذان و هو غاف
نام من الديدان في لحاف (22)

The rats run in his grave while he is asleep,
Whereas the worms are the blanket with which he is covered.

As this picture of bodily decay flashes into his mind, his imagination continues to draw the overall features of a sordid physical death. Here he is hearing "the clinking of the stone spade crawling towards his limbs"

رنين المعول الحجري يزحف نحو أطرافي . (23)

He also foresees that his grave is prepared, and that there is little time to hesitate or to be frightened. It is the moment of obviation:

ويا مرضي ، قناع الموت أنت ، وهل ترى لو أسفر الموت
أخاف ؟ ألا دع التكشيرة الصفراء والثقبين ،
حيث امتصت العينين
جفاقل من جيوش الدود يجثم حولها الصمت
تلوح لناظري . ودع الدماء تسحّ من أنفي من الثقبين . (24)

O my illness, you are the mask of death.
Am I going to be frightened if death appears?
O (death) let the yellow grimace,
The two holes where the eyes decay,
The army of worms around which silence crouches
(Let all these) appear to my sight.
And let blood flow from my nostrils.

Inasmuch as the fear of death dominates most of Sayyāb's images, the desire to be healed and alive never subsides. Despite his despair, he still has hopes and dreams. His hopes, which are shown in his poem Sifr Ayyūb , are compared to

"a laden cloud bearing the promises of seasons of vegetation, fruit and harvest"(25). Optimistic fantasies sometimes prevail in the poet's verses, fantasies of a miraculous recovery from paralysis, of being surprised by a sudden cure which might enable him to walk again without a staff:

يا رب لو جدت على عبدك بالرقاد
لعله يحلم انه يسير دونما عصا و لا عماد
و يذرع الدروب في السحر
حتى تلوح غابة النخيل
تنوء بالثمر
يدخلها فيختفي تحت نواشب الشجر
و يقطف الجنى .
علّق في رمانة عصاه و انشنى
ياكل أو يجمع الزهر
حتى اذا ما انطلقا
و راح يطوى الطرقا
أحس أو ذكر
بأنه بلا عصا سار و ما شعر . (26)

O God, if only you would grant your slave some sleep.
That he may dream that he is able to walk without a stick
or a support,
That he passes the roads at dawn,
Until the grove of palm trees appears laden with fruit.
That he enters (the grove), hidden by the tops (lit.locks)
of the trees, and picks the fruit.
And hanging his walking stick on a pomegranate tree,
He continues eating and collecting flowers.
Until when he proceeds and starts walking along the road,
He feels and remembers that he walked without a stick,
And without being aware of it.

This is a dream of a crippled person in a moment of pure fantasy. It is a moment in which his soul expresses its longing to divorce the handicapped body and emerge to embrace joy and health. It is the imaginative realization of the miracle.

The images of the palm grove and the pomegranate tree in this dream are very vigorous symbols. They are the symbols of the desired powerful life which grants health and vitality.(27)

Mythical figures who represent unbounded power are also utilized by Sayyāb to express dreams of health and fitness. Heraclius, who wrestled with death and obtained victory over it, is one of these figures, while another is Tammūz the god of fertility who grants the earth every season fresh life (28). But Sayyāb wonders whether he was truly prepared to fight for his life like these two powerful figures, and if so, with what weapons:

أى سلاح ؟ آه أى ساعد ؟
 أية أزهار تمدّ لها
 لتأكل الموت ؟ وأى ناصر مساعد ؟
 سللت من قصائدى
 سيفاً

 بالشعر
 رميت وجه الموت ألف مرة . (29)

With what weapon (shall I encounter death)?

With what arm?
 Which flowers will stretch their mouths to eat death?
 Which supporter will help?
 I draw a sword out of compositions.

 With poetry. . .
 I thrust at the face of death a thousand times.

Poetry might make its creator immortal by preserving his fame, but it never protects him from death. That was Sayyāb's conclusion which drives him again to the pit of despair. He seems to have realized that what possesses him during ecstatic moments of revelation is merely glimpses of hope, and hope is the other face of despair. No sooner does it emerge, than it vanishes again. Sayyāb, one may say, was totally aware of his destiny which was hastily approaching. After all, there was seemingly nothing to be waited for, except more suffering and more pain, which are constantly sustained on the "bed of sickness". It is the bed which turned to be a "prison" for the frail body, a "coffin" and "an exile to nothingness"(30). In this respect, prolonging the days of anguish is a futility. "Let death come, however dreadful it will be", cries Sayyāb furiously, and an outpouring of rage follows:

لو كان الدرب الى القبر
 يمتدّ أمامي . . .
 لسميت اليه
 و شققت الى سقر دربي و دحوت الأبواب السوداء
 و صرخت بوجه موكلها
 لم تترك بابك مسدودا ؟

و لتدع شياطين النار
تقتص من الجسد الهارى
و لتأت مقورك تفترس العينين و تنتهش القلب
.....
و لتطعم جسمي للنار . (31)

If the road to the grave
Extended before me,
I would walk to it
And I would find my way to hell,
And open the black doors violently
And I would shout in the face of its attendant:
Why do you keep your doors closed?
Call the devils of hell
Let them prey on the lacerated body.
Let your hawks snap the eyes and tear the heart.
.....
Feed the fire on my body.

This horrifying eventuality seems to be much more acceptable to Sayyāb than being a remnant of "a broken ship floating on the water"(32). Thus his last appeal to God was this prayer, cited from his poem Fī Ghābat 'l-Zalām "In the Jungle of Darkness":

هات الردى ، أريد أن أنام
بين قبور أهلي المبعثرة
وراء ليل المقبرة
رصاص الرحمة يا الله . (33)

Let death come, I want to sleep
Among the scattered graves of my people,
Beyond the darkness of the graveyard.
The bullet of mercy, O God!

There are obvious associations in Sayyāb's poetry between death and meanings of terror, desolation, decline and nothingness. These associations might be justified if one considers the constant physical pains which the poet could not escape, and which were often accompanied by hallucinations and a near-neurotic behaviour (34). This morbid state always draws the patient to experience horrifying dreams and illusions. Being a victim of such an illness, Sayyāb was perhaps deprived of mental calmness and spiritual tranquility, and therefore confined his meditation to the physical borders that could not go beyond bodily pains and distressing nightmares (35).

Among the dominant aspirations, which haunted Sayyāb in his last years, was the persisting longing to realize a sort of reunion with his dead mother and his beloved women through death. Such a reunion according to Sayyāb, was the ultimate stage in love. No wonder, therefore, that old memories and visions of loved women were almost always present in Sayyāb's imagination to kindle constant longing and passion. It is a commonplace among the readers of the poetry Sayyāb wrote before his death to remark, that while the poet was haunted by the shadow of imminent death, he was at the same time experiencing strong passion and heightened sexuality. Yet according to medical reports he was almost impotent towards the last stage of his illness (36). One student of his poetry says that ,

desire in Sayyāb in his last days was another great assertion of life, overcoming in its intensity the debility of his exhausted body and embodying a need for fusion that might reinforce in him the lingering reality of life.(37)

Wafīqa, a girl whom Sayyāb loved when he was a youth and who died a few years later, becomes a distinguished figure in his late poetry. In his last years he began to write elegies addressed to her which are a vivid depiction of sincere yearning for a missed beloved. The poems addressed to Wafīqa seem like desperate calls to an adored woman, who embodied in Sayyāb's mind the symbol of a love that was able to overcome death and oblivion. The road of death which extended before Sayyāb was seen as the road on which Wafīqa was standing waiting for his arrival. The threshold of death, therefore, was but the step which would enable him to approach Wafīqa's "blue window", the image of brightness and ethereal aspirations. And as Sayyāb stands within a stone's throw of the beloved, where he can see the shadows of her window gleaming through his pouring tears, intense passion begins to stir within him and evoke longings within his soul. Her presence is ultimately overwhelming. Thus Sayyāb says with awe:

أطلي فشاكك الأزرق
سماء تجوع
تبينته من خلال الدموع
كأنني بي ارتجف الزورق (38)

Look out (Wafīqa), your blue window
Is a sky (sustaining) hunger.
I observe it through tears
As if my boat had been shaken.

Feeling his aloneness and alienation on the bed of sickness,
Sayyāb conceives of himself as a vagrant bird coming from his
last journey towards Wafīqa's window in search of the final
refuge and retirement:

كأني طائر بحر غريب
طوى البحر عند المغيب
و طاف بشباكك الأزرق
يريد التجاء إليه (39)

I am like a vagrant sea bird
Who crosses the sea at sunset,
And hovers around your window
Looking for refuge.

But what might the longing for Wafīqa mean to Sayyāb, and
what solace does he find in a dead beloved? He says:

شفاك عندي أذا الشفاء
و بيتك عندي أحب البيوت
و ماضيك من حاضري أجمل
هو المستحيل الذي يذهل
.
ففي خاطري منه ظل ظليل
و في حاضري منه مستقبل (40)

Your lips are the sweetest lips for me.
And your home is the most lovable home.
Your past is more beautiful than my present.
It is the impossible which (causes) astonishment.
I still retain memories of a lush shade from it.
It is a future for my present.

Reunion with Wafīqa in the world beyond seems to be the main desire of Sayyāb. He longs for a spiritual and sensual reunion, an attachment that seems to represent to him the consummation of ultimate desire. The word "home" is a convenient metaphorical expression which evokes pictures of settlement and security, whereas the references to the past reflect the poet's desire to retreat to a preceding epoch (childhood and youth) when he experienced glimpses of care and love. There is, it would seem, no relief or rest for him except in the past to which the poet looks forward with hope as a coming future. Death, in Sayyāb's mind, began to take on the significance of a retreat to an anterior state, or a regression to the past in which were symbols of love, security, fulfilment and pure simplicity, all of which Sayyāb desperately lacked, especially in his late years. This longing to go back might be interpreted as a desire on the part of the poet to return to the stage of the womb: the symbol of motherly love, warmth and security. It is, likewise, a desire to retire to the earth of his village Jaykūr and its small river Buwaib, where he experienced peace and simplicity of life in his early youth. Nostalgia for the past simple life becomes very pressing, and many a time seems

reflected in a strong desire to become part of Jaykūr's earth and Buwaib's water. No wonder that Sayyāb in a poem entitled Nidā'ī-Mawt "Death's Call", seems to be haunted by voices of his dead ancestors calling him from their graves:

يمدون أعناقهم من ألوف القبور يصيحون بي :
أن تعال (41)

They raise their (heads) from thousands of graves
Shouting to me: come on.

But among these voices there is a distinct voice. It is the voice of his dead mother saying:

بني احتضني فبرد الردى في عروقي
فدق عظامي بما قد كسوت ذراعيك و الصدر ، و احم الجراح
..... ولا تحرفن الخطى عن طريقي . (42)

My son, embrace me, the coldness of death is in my veins.
Warm my bones with the flesh of your arms and chest,
Cover my wounds.
Do not step aside out of my way.

These words of his dead mother evoke in him an immediate response:

فيا قبرها افتح ذراعيك
اني لآت بلا ضجة ، دون آه . (43)

O her grave, open your arms,
I am coming without clamour, without Ah.

The response to the mother's voice becomes more persisting in Sayyab's poem Fī'l-Layl "At Night". Being overwhelmed by the feelings of aloneness and gloom in a desolate room in the hospital, he seems to be haunted again by the same voice calling him from the graveyard, and he was prepared to heed its call and proceed in the darkness of the night:

و لبست ثيابي في الوهم
و سریت : ستلقاني أمي
في تلك المقبرة الشكلى
ستقول : أتقتحم الليلا
من دون رفيق ؟
جوعان ؟ أأكل من زادی
.
ألا ترمي
أشوابك و البس من كفني
لم يبيل على مر الزمن
.
. تعامل و نم عندى
أعددت فراشا في لحدى
لك يا أغلى من أشواقى
.
سأخذ دربي في الوهم
و أسير فتلقاني أمي . (44)

Under delusion, I put my clothes on
 And walked at night, my mother will meet me.
 At that bereaved graveyard.
 She will say: How do you brave it
 And walk in the darkness without a friend?
 Are you hungry? Do you like to eat from my provisions?

 Take off your clothes and clothe yourself with my shrouds.
 They have not rotted despite the passage of time.
 Come and sleep beside me:
 I prepared a bed in my grave
 For you, who is dearer than all my longings.

 Under delusion, I'll follow my way
 And proceed, my mother will meet me.

The mother grave in Sayyāb's consciousness is not a limited place of retirement but the boundless land of the whole of Jaykūr. The mother and the land of Jaykūr coalesce into one image which evokes in Sayyāb's mind a sincere reflection of love, warmth and attachment. Sometimes the distinctive differences between the mother as a human being and Jaykūr as the poet's homeland absolutely vanish. Both become a single realm of warmth and affection to which Sayyāb devotes his purest revelation:

أفناء جيكور أهواها
 كأنها انسحرت من قبرها البالي
 من قبر أمي التي صارت أضالعا للتعبى و عيناها
 من أرض جيكور . . . ترعاني وأرها (45)

I love Jaykūr's shades.
 As if they flow out of the grave,
 The grave of my mother whose weary bones and eyes

Have become part of the earth of Jaykūr.
She cares for me, and I care for her.

The river Buwaib, a small river in the poet's village, is effectively used to evoke various suggestions. A subtle affinity is seen by the poet as subsisting between death and water. Thus water is identified with death, and imparts to death a special meaningfulness. In trying to interpret Sayyāb's profound yearning to die in the river Buwaib, the poet and writer Adūnīs (ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd) gives the following comment on Sayyāb's poem al-Nahr wa 'l-Mawt "The River and Death", usually considered as one of the best in Sayyāb's works:

In the poem al-Nahr wa 'l-Mawt, Sayyāb portrays his longing for death and for having as close an affinity with the earth as the river. The human being thus becomes like the river or like water, alive and born or reborn out of itself. The human being becomes a part of the living processes of the world. Dying life turns into a living death. There is nothing left except water, a perpetual birth.(46)

Sayyāb, in this context, longs to die in the river Buwaib in the hope of attaining a meaningful eventuality. In al-Nahr wa 'l-Mawt, remarks S.Kh. Jayyūsī,

the poet aimed at changing the chemistry of death, of drowning in one's own blood (I wish to drown in my blood, to the very depths) into life, where stars and moon alike illuminate waters and trees green with fertility and life.(47)

The poet's depiction of his incorporation with Buwaib appears as a joyous dream; a dream which culminates in "discovering the hidden gate of death" which guides to a world of total fascination. Meditating on this dream, Sayyāb pictures himself as a child who becomes full of excitement and joy while exploring the new world of death. He says:

و أنت يا بويب
أودّ لو غرقت فيك ألقط المحار
أشيد منه دار
و أغتذى فيك مع الجزر الى البحر
فالموت عالم غريب يغتن الصغار
و بابه الخفي كان فيك يا بويب . (48)

O you Buwaib
I wish to drown in you, to collect shells.
And build a house of them.
To proceed with the high tide to the sea.
for death is an amazing world that fascinates children.
Its hidden gate is within you, O Buwaib.

Death is now conceived of by the poet as a transcendental transition to a privileged state. It is a state which the poet pictures as an achievement of a "victory":

أجرا س موتي في عروقي ترعش الرنين
فيدلهم في دمي حنين
.....
أود لو غرقت في دمي الى القرار
لأبعث الحياة . ان موتي انتصار . (49)

The bells of my death resound within my veins.
And yearning gushes in my blood.

I wish to drown in my blood to the very depths,
To resurrect life. My death is a victory.

However, this optimistic tone seems to have been characteristic of Sayyab's early poetry before he was struck by illness. Death was regarded in his early poems, and especially in the collection Unshūdat al-Matar, which represents the most mature stage in his poetic career (50), as a symbol of great anticipations. It was the death which has a strong affinity with redemption and sacrifice, and which abounds with optimism. I. Ḥawī compares this seemingly mature stage of Sayyāb's understanding of the role of death with his late treatment of it in his illness. He says:

While Sayyāb is going through these two stages, his awareness of time becomes very special. In the first stage this awareness seems to be optimistic. It is the time that bears the powerful revolt with which new life is born ; and this is the purifying time which brings forth fertility, justice and freedom; whereas the awareness of time in the last stage is characterized with opposite features. It becomes a time of mourning and extinction. It is the womb which gives birth to nihilism; the time which separates lovers and winds up intimacy, which guides a person swiftly and senselessly to the pit of death.(51)

Inasmuch as the poems in Sayyāb's collection Unshūdat al-Matar praise the sacrificial death that brings forth fruitful life, the late poems end with total lack of faith in any positive

purpose in life. All the vigorous hopes which Sayyāb entertained for victory over decadent and corrupt social and political conditions seem to shrink and vanish. His experience with illness seems, so to speak, to bring him very close to the bold reality of death, and therefore keeps him away from optimistic visions and ideal dreams of the fruitful death. No wonder, therefore, that the general atmosphere of his last poems is one of gloom and despair. Sayyāb is now facing his fate, he is a lone traveller on the way to death. Thus he begins to identify personal needs and introspective desires which are altogether confined to motherly compassion, love and spiritual fulfilment. These desires, however, appear as realistic, and do not go beyond the borders of Sayyāb's actual knowledge and comprehension. The journey to death in Sayyāb's late poetry leads towards what is known and familiar, to a world with a particular identity. It is a departure towards the old faces which he loved, towards the familiar land of Jaykūr in which he experienced simplicity and peace, and towards the beloved river Buwaib with which he feels he likes his flesh and bones to be totally integrated. These sincere wishes, however, reflect the unconscious longing for a happiness which might compensate the poet for the barrenness and suffering which he had gone through; and which might in the end console him during his last days. These simple and sincere longings find expression in the following few verses which sound like the last revelation of a dying poet:

جيكور لمي عظامي وانفضي كفني
من طينه واغسلني بالجدول الجارى
قلبي الذى كان شباكا على النار .
.
أفيا جيكور أهواها
كأنها انسرحت من قبرها البالي ،
من قبر أمي التي صارت أضالعها التعبى وعيناها
من أرض جيكور . . . ترعاني وأرهاها . (52)

O Jaykūr, embrace my bones
And shake my shrouds out of the mud.
Wash my heart in the flowing river.
(The heart) which was (like) a window
(overlooking)(burning) fires.
.

I love Jaykūr's shades.
As if they flow out of the grave of my mother
Whose weary bones and eyes are now part of the
earth of Jaykūr.
She cares for me, and I care for her.

* * * * *

II. IMAGERY OF DEATH IN SAYYĀB'S POETRY

Sayyāb's imagery of death can perhaps be summed up under two basic characteristics. First, the poet is realistic in his approach, and tends to relate himself to sensual perceptions; he therefore conceives of death as part of what he calls al-‘Ālam al-Asfal or the "underworld". The poems composed by him to his beloved Wafīqa and his mother reflect a subtle and profound preoccupation with that "underworld", the world of the actual grave. Wafīqa's grave is portrayed by Sayyāb as a "window" in one poem devoted to her, and as a "garden" in another. Yet in both of these the images of the window and the garden are part of the "underworld" he depicts:

هو الموت والعالم الأسفل (53)

It is death and the underworld.

And:

وشباك الأزرق
على ظلمة مطبق (54)

Your blue window is shut on (total) darkness.

And:

لوفيقة
في ظلام العالم السفلي حقل
فيه مما يزرع الموتى حديقة (55)

In the darkness of the lower world
There is a field which belongs to Wafīqa.
In it, the dead have planted a garden.

This preoccupation with what is hidden in the underworld is also shown in the persisting curiosity which urges the poet to indulge himself in wading in the depths of the river Buwaib*. Jaykūr is also pictured as a large womb which tempts Sayyāb to go backwards to a former stage of existence and be part of this earthly womb. Darkness, bodily corruption and other expressions of earthly bondage are frequently used to reveal feelings of desolation and despair, and to evoke shades of gloom, coldness and awe.

Second, although Sayyāb was haunted by images of the actual grave and physical decay, he at times shows an unmistakable inclination to imagine death as a fascinating world of tempting visions. Despite this aesthetic depiction, however, Sayyāb still conceives of death as a phenomenon which is primarily related to the lower world. It is, seemingly, a pressing interest in the lower world and an overwhelming desire to explore the wonders of a concealed realm which is still tempting even though it exists beneath the earth (56).

* This is depicted in the poem al-Nahr wa'l-Mawt, see Dīwān, p.455

These two major aspects of Sayyāb's imagery of death alternate in their appearance in the same poem. Shubbāk Wafīqa "Wafīqa's Window" and Hadā'iq Wafīqa "Wafīqa's Gardens" are two representative poems in this respect in which images of gloom and fascination are portrayed in rotation. Vivid and joyous images appear at the beginning of Shubbāk Wafīqa. The title is chosen to suggest aesthetic and profound indications of loftiness, boundless space and brightness, which are all expressions of joy and ecstasy. The "grave-window" of the dead beloved seems to be turned into a radiant source of transcendental ecstasy. But it also has another attribute. It has a soul that has the ability to emerge from the dead and experience resurrection. The metaphor of a "tree" is also used to denote the "grave-window" of the beloved. This metaphor appears among the most suggestive images, because it symbolizes the continuous life. It is a "tree" that "breathes at dawn" and bears "apples", whereas Buwaib waters it and preserves its vitality, and the sun grants it life:

شباك وفيقة يا شجرة
تتنفس في الغيش الصافي
الأعين عندك منتظرة
تترقب زهرة تفاح
وبويب نشيد
والريح تعيد
أنغام الماء على السعف . (57)

O Wafīqa's window, (you are) a tree
Which breathes in the awakening dawn.
The eyes are waiting before you
Anticipating an apple flower.
Buwaib is a song
And the wind repeats the water's tunes on the
palm leaves.

The window of the dead beloved besides has the characteristic of a living spirit, a spirit which aspires to fly towards light and brightness. This is depicted ⁱⁿ with verse by the poet:

شباك يضحك في الألق ؟
أم باب يفتح في السور ؟
فتفر بأجنحة العبق
روح تتلف للنور (58)

Is it a window which smiles in the brightness?
Or is it a door opening in the high wall?
And a spirit aspiring for the light,
Flies off with wings of fragrance.

Another interesting picture appears in the second part of the same poem in what amounts to an extended image. The first element in the image here is the window which opens to reveal Wafīqa's face. This picture evokes in Sayyāb's mind the picture of a shell opening to reveal 'Ishtār, the goddess of fertility:

إذا انشق عن وجهك الأسمر
كما انشق عن عشقوت المحار

و سارت من الرغو في مئزر
ففي الشاطئين اخضرار
وفي المرفأ المنلق
تصلي البحار (59)

When(the window) opens to reveal your face,
Like a shell which opens to reveal 'Ishtār
Who steps forth with foam clothing her body,
The banks grow green.
And at the closed port
The sea repeats its prayers.

Sayyāb is seen by most of his critics as a master of original metaphor. In Jayyūsī's words:

Sayyāb is a master of the metaphor. His treatment is usually sure and his images strike with immediate effect.... The pictures he paints leave a clear, vivid and often unforgettable impression.(60)

Wafīqa's death flashes in Sayyāb's mind as a vivid dream.

A bird , white like a lily,soars around her then takes off with her at dawn. Luxurious portraits of a fascinating world to which Wafīqa departs then follow. She opens her eyes after a short sleep to see magnificent scenery of a magical world. He says:

ترى هل جاءك الطائر الزنبقي
فخلقت في ذات فجر معه
وألقي نعاس الصباح النقي
على حسك المشتكي برقمه ؟

وفتحت عينيك عند الأصيل
علي مدرج أخضر
وكان انكسار الشعاع الدليل
إلى التل والمنزل المرمر . (61)

I wonder if the lily-coloured bird came to you,
And you took off with him at dawn.
If the pure slumber of the morning numbed (lit.covered)
your feelings by its veil?
You then opened your eyes at sunset to see
A green plain,
Whereas the broken rays of light became your guide
To the hill and the house built of marble (on top of it).

In Hadā'iq Wafīqa, one comes across similar visions of a magical world where a river constantly flows, and where fruit, vines and lush shade are always available. Likewise, there is a bed of moonlight on which Wafīqa lies (62).

Ironically, dreadful images of death are also employed by the poet in the same poems. Sayyāb in the course of his poems often inclines to shift or even move abruptly from a fascinating vision of death to another dreadful one. After portraying Wafīqa in the image of 'Ishtār, the goddess of fertility, who emerges from a shell to grant vegetation and love to the world, he moves abruptly to the depiction of horrifying picture of Wafīqa's corpse:

تمثلت عينيك يا حفرتين
تطلان سخرًا على العالم
على ضفة الموت بوابتين
تلوحان للقادم . (63)

I imagine your eyes as two holes
 Looking out with scorn on the world.
 They are two gates on the bank of death
 Signalling for the comer.

After providing this morbid picture of Wāfiqa's decaying body, he again goes back to visionary dreams in which death becomes a bird white like a lily taking off with the beloved towards a magnificent world. In Ḥadā'iq Wafīqa, Sayyāb again asserts that the gardens of the beloved dead exist in the "lower world" to which one may descend by stairs of "ice and darkness". This description is followed by images which all evoke awe and gloom such as شلال نور "black doves", الحمام الأسود "a dry (lit. extinguished) waterfall of light, شحوب منطفي", and دموع "tearful paleness", and

بين نهديك ارتعاش يا وفيقة
 فيه برد الموت باك

O Wafīqa, there is a shiver between your breasts
 In which the cold of death cries.

In Madīnat 'l-Sarāb "The City of Mirage", the tendency to escape the aesthetic outlook on Wafīqa's death is obvious. There is, seemingly, no space for fantasies and delusions since the beloved is but a corpse which surrenders to decay. His embraces for her then are in vain, as she actually lies behind the high barriers of death:

وأنت يا ضجيعتي كأنك الكواكب البعيدة
 كأن بيننا من الكرى جدار
 تضمك اليدان ، تعتصمان جثة بليدة

.
أستغيث : آه يا وفيقة
يا أقرب الوري التي أنت يا وفيقة
للدود والظلام
.
و أنت يا ضجيعتي مدينة نائية
مسدودة أبوابها و خلفها وقفت في انتظار . (64)

O my bedmate, you are like the remote planets.
As if a wall of slumber stands between us.
My arms embrace you, but tighten around a cold corpse.

.

I cry out to you, Wafīqa
The closest person to me, O Wafīqa,
But a prey to worms and darkness you are.

.

O my bedmate, you are a remote city.
Its doors are closed, yet I stand before them waiting.

The picture of the actual grave also occurs quite frequently
in the poems in which the poet's mother is mentioned. He
conceives of her final place of rest as a place in which there
are no windows or doors or any openings through which commun-
ication may be possible:

أمساء . . ليتك لم تغيبني خلف سور من حجار
لا باب فيه أدق و لا نوافذ في الجدار
كيف انطلقت على طريق لا يعود السائرون
من ظلمة صفراء فيه كأنها غسق البحار ؟ (65)

[illegible]

In Nasīm mina 'l-Qabr "A Breeze from the Grave", the images of decay prevail. While sensing the shadow of his own death crouching over his frail body, Sayyāb seems to be overwhelmed by a breeze coming from the graveyard carrying the breath of his dead mother which seems to repeat in a whisper:

تراب في شراييني
ودود حيث كان دمي ، و أعرافي
هباء من خيوط العنكبوت (66)

There is earth in my arteries,
And worms where my blood used to circulate.
My veins are spider's webs.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VI

- (1) Badawī, Critical Introduction, p.253
- (2) 'Abbās, Ihsān, Badr Shākir 'l-Sayyāb Dirāsa fī Hayātihi wa Shi'rihi, Beirut, 1972, p.25-6 and 43, ('Abbās); Ḥawī, Ilyā, Badr Shākir 'l-Sayyāb, Beirut, (n.d), I, p.17-8, (Ḥawī)
- (3) 'Abbās, p.243
- (4) Ibid, p.106,7
- (5) Ibid, p.341
- (6) Ibid, p.340,1 ; Ḥawī, I, p.16
- (7) Boullāṭa, p.177
- (8) 'Abbās, p.361
- (9) Ibid, p.362,3
- (10) See Sayyāb's Dīwān, p.676 and 692-3
- (11) Kerrū, 'l-Shābbī Hayātuhu, p.36,8 ; Naqqāsh, Rajā', Abū al-Qāsim 'l-Shābbī Shā'ir al-Ḥubb wa 'l-Thawra, Beirut, 1975, p.21
- (12) Dīwān, p.135-6
- (13) Ibid, p.248
- (14) Trans: Boullāṭa, p.188
- (15) Ḥawī, III, p.7
- (16) Madanī, Sāmī, "al-Sayyāb wa 'l-Mawt", al-Ādāb, No.4, 1965, p.45
- (17) Dīwān, p.220-21
- (18) Ibid, p.220
- (19) Ibid, p.229-30

- (20) Ibid, p.670
- (21) Ibid, p.676-7
- (22) Ibid, p.285
- (23) Ibid, p.702
- (24) Ibid, p.703
- (25) Ibid, p.274-5
- (26) Ibid, p.685-6
- (27) Hāwī, III, p.31-2
- (28) Dīwān, p.271
- (29) Ibid, p.272-3
- (30) Ibid, p.691
- (31) Ibid, p.692-3
- (32) Ibid, p.706
- (33) Ibid, Loc.cit
- (34) ‘Abbās, p.362-3
- (35) Ibid
- (36) Hāwī, III, p.58
- (37) Footnote of Trends, II, p.648
- (38) Dīwān, p.121
- (39) Ibid, p.122
- (40) Ibid, p.123
- (41) Ibid, p.236
- (42) Ibid, p.236-7
- (43) Ibid, p.237
- (44) Ibid, p.609-10
- (45) Ibid, p.190

- (46) Badr Shākir 'l-Sayyāb, Qasā'id, Beirut, 1967, p.13-14
- (47) Trends, II, p.726
- (48) Dīwān, p.455
- (49) Ibid, p.456
- (50) 'Abbās, p.408
- (51) Vol.III, p.132-3
- (52) Dīwān, p.189-190
- (53) Ibid, p.122
- (54) Ibid, p.123
- (55) Ibid, p.125
- (56) Jabrā, I. Jabrā, al-Nār wa 'l-Jawhar, Beirut, 1975, p.61,
(al-Nār)
- (57) Dīwān, p.117-8
- (58) Ibid, p.119
- (59) Ibid, p.121-2
- (60) Trends, II, p.689
- (61) Dīwān, p.123 4
- (62) Ibid, p.126
- (63) Ibid, p.122
- (64) Ibid, p.161-63
- (65) Ibid, p.616
- (66) Ibid, p.672

CHAPTER VII

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH IN PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE POETRY

In his book entitled Shay'un 'An al-Waṭan "Someting About The Homeland", the Palestinian poet and writer Maḥmūd Darwīsh (b.1941) says:

It is with love that we choose to defy all
(forms of) defiance, it is with contempt
that we resist (aggression), and as we fight
we face death with (total) contentment
rather than abandon our attempt to embrace
this homeland.(1)

These words of Darwīsh reflect his people's attitude towards the Israeli authorities in their occupied homeland. The Palestinian reaction, briefly, expresses itself in three forms, honourable self-defence, resistance, and redemptive self-sacrifice. The understanding of these three attitudes, one may say, is a prerequisite for the understanding of the recently emerged Palestinian literature*. This literature

*It would be understood at the outset from the title of this chapter that the Palestinian literature referred to is the literature written primarily in the forties and after the partition of Palestine.

could be regarded as a byproduct of the particular circumstances to which the Palestinian people have been subjected, the mutilation of their culture and identity, compulsory emigration, land and property confiscation, and other inhumane forms of discrimination during more than thirty years of Israeli occupation (2).

One must add, however, that the voice of the Palestinian resistance poetry is a loudly heard rejection of the political calamity of living in a land occupied by enemy forces, and by no means represents an exotic voice unrelated to worldwide liberation and resistance literary movements. The Palestinian resistance poetry can simply be viewed as a part of similar literature of liberation movements in various parts of the world. The particular dilemma of the Palestinian national culture is, at this point of history, a vivid illustration of the problem of other resistance movements throughout the world (3).

Poetry according to the Palestinian resistance poets, is but a means of struggle, or, is simply another aspect of the national defiance. This means that their poetry does not merely reflect the poets' opinions or thoughts as individuals, but is also dedicated to express a collective attitude of a people who are all deeply affected by a particular problem (4). The main characteristic of Palestinian poetry, one may say, is that it tends towards objectivity and commitment rather than the expression of subjective concerns of the individual

or personal psychological and intellectual crises. The experience reflected in Palestinian poetry is one conveying the suffering, struggle, despair, longing and hopes of an entire people. In brief, Palestinian literature is a sort of collective ideology.

Since the Palestinian resistance poetry is permeated by a spirit of defiance, one may deduce a link between the struggle involved in commando methods of self-defence and the concept of death as a satisfactory way to express "a profound yearning to fulfil a noble task"(5). What is worthy of note is that the concept of death in Palestinian poetry seems to be an expression of a collective will which abounds with active longing to face death with pride for the realization of human liberty. This is seen as an honourable way to try and fulfil national hopes and maintain an optimism concerning their future and realization. The concept of death in Palestinian poetry, as it will be treated throughout this chapter could be examined under five major aspects. First, Palestinian poetic works show a great concern about revealing the tragic aspect of death in their occupied homeland. That is to say they depict the various manifestations of destruction and death which are constantly committed against the innocent, and the unjust threats to the existence of the Palestinian people as a whole. The main sentiments expressed are consequently feelings of despair, misfortune, despondency and frustration. Second, death is conceived of as a sacrificial and heroic.

act which can help to sustain a strong faith in the promised future. It is in the light of this that one can understand the emergence of the picture of death as a much desired and enchanting end. Third, death is dealt with as a mystical experience, that is to say a desirable mystical journey towards the heart of the homeland. Fourth, Palestinian poetic works intuitively tend to form an intimate link between suffering which leads to death and salvation by resorting to Christian concepts and beliefs in the crucifixion and the subsequent resurrection. Fifth, and this is closely linked with the previous aspect, death is considered as the occasion of a renascence or rebirth.

To begin with the first aspect, one may say, that it is perhaps true that the tone of mourning and despair in Palestinian poetry began after the first failure of the revolt of 1948. Studies written about Palestinian literature generally agree that the poetic production of the period between 1948-1952 was almost a direct reflection of the deep frustration felt as a consequence of the Palestinian disaster (6). This poetic literature depicted a sense of shame accompanied by feelings of despondency and shadows of collective death which seemed to have permeated all aspects of life (7). The following stanza of Mu'īn Basaiso (1923-1983) could be considered as a representative example of the prevailing tone of general grief that permeated Palestinian poetry after 1948. This example expresses also the deep bitterness that was felt all over the land and among the people. Basaiso says:

البحر يحكي للنجوم حكاية الوطن السجين
والليل كالشاذ يطرق بالدموع وبالأنين
أبواب غزة وهي مغلقة على الشعب الحزين
فيحرك الأحياء ناموا فوق أنقاض السنين
و كأنهم قبر تدق عليه أيدي النابشين (8)

The sea is telling the story of the imprisoned
homeland to the stars.
And the night, like a moaning beggar in tears,
Is knocking at the locked gates of Gaza,
Behind which the sad people dwell.
It wakes up the living who had been sleeping
under the rubble of the years.
As if they were in a grave on which the gravediggers
were hammering.

In her poem Madīnatī 'l-Hazīna "My Sad City", Fadwā Tūqān
(b.1927) shows what could be described as a remarkable artistic
ability in her treatment of the sad events of "the Zion-
ist occupation" in 1967 (9). The poet does not attempt to
describe literally the appearance of a city subjected to a
disastrous occupation, but resorts instead to suggestive meta-
phors containing easily comprehended symbols of death and de-
struction. In her first stanza she pictures the defeat as a
shadow of death wandering all over the city with blood-stain-
ed feet and a mysterious silence'. F. Tūqān writes:

يوم رأينا الموت والخيانة
تراجع المد
وأغلقت نوافذ السماء
وأمسكت أنفاسها المدينة
.....
اختفت الأطفال والأغاني
لا ظل لا صدى

والحزن في مدينتي يدب عاريا
مخضب الخطى
والصمت في مدينتي
الصمت كالجبال رايض
كالليل غامض ، الصمت فاجع
محمل
بوطأة الموت وبالهزيمة . (10)

The day on which we witnessed death and betrayal
The high tide receded.
All apertures in the sky were shut.
And the city held its breath.

Children and songs disappeared.
No shade, no echo.
Sadness in my city was crawling naked
With blood in the wake of its steps.
And silence in my city,
Silence was crouching like mountains,
Mysterious like the night.
Silence was heart-rending,
Heavy laden with death and defeat.

In her second stanza, the poet depicts the Israeli occupation
as a plague threatening all aspects of life. She says:

يوم فشا الطاعون في مدينتي
خرجت للعراء
مفتوحة الصدر الى السماء
أهتف من قرارة الأخران بالرياح :
هبي و سوقي نحونا السحاب يا رياح
و أنزلي الأمطار
تطهر الهواء في مدينتي
و تغسل البيوت والجبال والأشجار . (11)

The day in which the plague spread in my city
I went out into the open space.
My chest bared towards the sky

Calling on the winds from the depth of my sadness:
 O winds, blow hard and drive the clouds towards us.
 Send a downpour of rain
 To purify the air of my city,
 To wash the houses, the mountains and the trees.

Proceeding to the third and fourth stanzas, one faces more explicit symbolic images where death is described as "a venomous serpent", "an evil whirlwind" and "a black flood".

Like F.Ṭūqān, Samīḥ al-Qāsim (b.1939) tries to convey quick glimpses of death and destruction which he witnessed in his homeland. But this presentation of scenes, almost in the manner news is cast on television, succeeds in reflecting the irony of calls for peace, while death and destruction reign everywhere. Qasim says:

ليغن غيرى للسلام
 ليغن غيرى للمداقة ، للأخوة ، للوئام
 ليغن غيرى . . للغراب
 جذلان ينشق بين أبياتي الخراب
 لليوم . . في أنقاض أبراج الحمام !

 ليغن غيرى للسلام

 وحقائب الأطفال أشلاء يتيمة
 لبثت لدى أنقاض مدرسة مهدمة حزينة
 ما زال في أنحائها . . ما زال يهزأ بالسكينة
 رجع من الدرس الأخير
 عن المحبة والسلام !! (12)

Let others sing for peace.
 Let others sing for friendship and brotherhood.
 Let others sing, while the raven

Croaks between the ruins of our houses, and
The owls* crouched on the remains of the doves' towers.

Let someone else sing for peace,

While children's school bags are in tatters,
Mingled with the rubble of a collapsed school,
In which an echo of the last lesson about love and peace
Still scoffs at the silence.

Besides this general treatment of destruction, which can be easily traced in many works by Palestinian poets, one may observe the complementary attempt to present close-up images of particular incidents of death committed against certain innocent and defenceless Palestinian citizens. Some poets tend in such cases to mention the name of the victim, the date of the incident, the place and other circumstances, while others do not. But in both cases the particular incident is dealt with as one example characteristic of many others of similar cold-blooded murders in the occupied land. In a poem entitled Maqtal 'Awwād al-Imāra "The Killing of 'Awwād al-Imāra", Tawfīq Zayyād (b.1926) pictures the image of a naive peasant who was shot three times while he was carrying his day's provisions, shouldering his ax and looking out over the fields, dreaming of rain. Zayyād writes:

على الاسفلت مات اليوم عواد الامارة
رغيف الخبز في يده ، و فوق الكتف فأس

* Owls , since the most ancient times, are thought of as bad omens in Arab lore.

رصاصات ثلاث
جئن يصفرن
من صوب البنادق
وحتى اللعة البيضاء
من عين المسدس ما رآها
كان يحلم بالمطر . (13)

Today 'Awwād al-Imāra died on the asphalt ground
With a loaf of bread in his hand,
And an ax on his shoulder.
Three bullets came from the barns' side whistling.
He did not see even the bright flash of the gun,
For he was dreaming of rain.

Basaiso almost echoes Zayyād's sentiment about the inhuman aggressiveness, and the apparent worthlessness of Palestinian blood. As the situation reaches this level, a human being's blood, as Basaiso reveals, becomes "cheaper than the water of a stinking swamp", and "his flesh cheaper than the handkerchief of a prostitute". Basaiso writes:

أرخص من مياه ذلك المستنقع النتن
أرخص من زجاجة من العرق
دماؤنا
أرخص من منديل مومس
من قطعة الصابون
لحمنا
من كسرة من الحطب
أرخص من لجام بغلة
شرياننا (14)

Our blood is cheaper
Than the water of a stinking swamp.
Cheaper than a bottle of wine.

Our flesh is cheaper than a prostitute's
handkerchief.
Cheaper than a piece of soap.
Our arteries are cheaper than a stick of wood.
Cheaper than the bridle of a mule.

The famous Kafr Qāsim massacre committed in 1956 against fifty people, including women and children, returning from their fields in the evening not having heard that a curfew had been imposed (15), became a source of inspiration for most of the Palestinian poets. The poetic treatment by Darwīsh of the tragedy of Kafr Qāsim is considered remarkable. In the fourth stanza of his poem entitled al-Qatīl Raqm 18 "Victim No.18", Darwīsh sincerely depicts one of the massacre's victims, a simple young labourer who once believed that "the world is but a blue sky and a green grove of olive trees". But this peace and tranquility he experienced was abruptly disturbed when the Israeli military forces stopped the labourers' lorry and started to execute the workmen travelling in it. Darwīsh has the victim No.18 saying:

غابة الزيتون كانت مرة خضراء
كانت والسماء
غابة زرقاء . . . كانت يا حبيبي
ما الذى غيرها هذا السماء ؟
.
أوقفوا سيارة العمال في منعطف الدرب
و كانوا هادئين
و أدارونا الى الشرق . . . و كانوا هادئين . (16)

Once the olive grove was green
It was ... and the sky
A grove of blue. It was, my love.
What changed it that evening?

At the bend in the tarck they stopped
The lorry of workers:
So calm they were,
They turned us round towards the east
So calm they were.(17)

Again, the victimized young man seems to withdraw himself from
that immediate cruelty and reverts to the innocent dreams of
his beloved and her white handkerchiefs. But, painfully, those
handkerchiefs are now stained with blood:

كان قلبي مرة عصفورة زرقاء . . يا عش حبيبي
و مناديلك عندي كلها بيضاء ، كانت يا حبيبي
ما الذي لطمها هذا المساء
أنا لا أفهم شيئا يا حبيبي (18)

Once my heart was a blue bird,
O nest of my beloved.
The handkerchiefs I had of yours were all white,
They were, my love,
What stained them that evening?
I do not understand at all, my love.(19)

The young man had been killed, but the images of his love,
the wedding ring, the rendezvous are still hovering around him.
What could his soul say to his waiting beloved but this apology,
"blame me not if I am late". In the end the painful truth
is flashed through these words:

غابة الزيتون كانت دائما خضراء

كانت يا حبيبي
ان خمسين ضحية
جعلتها في الغروب
بركة حمراء . . . خمسين ضحية
يا حبيبي لا تلمني
قتلوني . . . قتلوني . . . قتلوني (20)

The olive grove was always green,
It was my love.
Fifty victims
Turned it at sunset into
A crimson pond. Fifty victims.
Beloved, do not blame me.
They killed me. They killed me.
They killed me.(21)

* * * * *

In the preface to his collection Damī 'Alā Kaffī "My Blood in the Palm of My Hand", Qāsim quotes the following words of Christ which appear in the Gospel of St. John:

ان لم تقع حبة الحنطة في الأرض وتمت فهي تبقى
وحدها . ولكن ان ماتت فهي تأتي بثمر كثير . (22)

Verily, Verily, I say unto you, except a
corn of wheat fall into the ground and
die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it
bringeth forth much fruit.(23)

These words allude to a significant aspect, namely that of the fruitful death which has received a great deal of attention in Palestinian poetry. It is a death through which the promised rebirth blossoms forth. Within this dimension, death

is portrayed as a dynamic act, a form of self-redemption and the ultimate in the defence of the values of the cultural and political identity of the Palestinians. Likewise, death is a sacrifice which must be accomplished by will and total commitment. One must add, however, that this attitude reflects, perhaps, an influence of martyr imagery in Islam, and hence portrays the relationship between martyrdom and immortality.

These verses of the Quran appear in sūrat Āl 'Imrān:

و لا تحسبن الذين قتلوا في سبيل الله أمواتا بل أحياء عند
ربهم يرزقون • فرحين بما آتاهم الله من فضله و يستبشرون
بالبالذين لم يلحقوا بهم إلا خوف عليهم و لا هم يحزنون • (24)

Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord. They rejoice in the bounty provided by God, and with regard to those left behind, who have not yet joined them (in their bliss). The (martyrs) glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve. (25)

And in sūrat al-Nisā':

و من يقاتل في سبيل الله فيقتل أو يغلِبْ نفسو نُؤْتِيه
أجرا عظيما • (26)

To him who fighteth in the cause of God,-
whether he is slain or gets victory- soon
shall we give him a reward of great (value). (27)

These verses of the Holy Quran imply that sacrificing one's soul to defend a belief or a noble task is not in vain, because

the martyr who embarks on such a deed will be awarded immortality in heaven. With the above belief in mind the martyr's deed is glorified. Having assimilated the Islamic concept of martyrdom, and being animated by vehement enthusiasm towards their national task, the Palestinian poets proceed to portray a unique understanding of "heroic death" as a dynamic force sustaining for ever its influential inspiration. The martyr, they believe, is not merely a passing soul but, on the contrary, he remains as a living symbol animating others with an undying glow of national zeal. The martyr or the slain warrior, therefore, seems to have turned into an eternal voice reiterating, as Basaiso writes:

أنا لم أمت أنا لم أزل أدعوك من خلف الجراح (28)

I did not die.
I still call you from behind my wounds.

In her description of the case of Muntahā Ḥūrānī, a school girl who participated in a demonstration and was killed by an Israeli patrol, F.Ṭūqān effectively portrays the positive impact of the girl's death. The murder of this innocent girl, as the poet depicts it, seems to animate a new spirit of enthusiasm and spread a fresh will for struggle among all the people and all over the city in which the girl was killed. It is profitable to cite a considerable part of this poem by F.Ṭūqān in order to have a close view of her profound images and vivid

treatment. The poem is entitled Jarīmat Qatl fī Yawmin Laysa kal Ayyām"A Crime on a Day Unlike Other Days":

تفتح مريولها في الصباح
شقائق حمرا و باقات ورد
و عادت الى الكتب المدرسية كل سطور الكفاح التي حذفوها
و عادت الى الصفحات خريطة أمس التي طمسوها
و رفرف مريولها راية في صفوف المدارس ، رفرف وامتد
ظلل في الضفة المشربة
شوارعها المغضبة
و أشجارها المثقلات ، رفرف مريولها في النوافذ -
فوق سطوح المنازل فوق رفوف الدكاكين -
ظلل في الشرفة المشربة
مساجدها و الكنائس ، ظللها قبة تلوقبة
.
و ما قتلوا " منتهى " و ما صلبوها
و لكنما خرجت " منتهى "
تعلق أقمار أفراسها في السماء الكبيرة
و تعلن أن المطاف القديم انتهى
و تعلن أن المطاف الجديد ابتدا . (29)

In the morning, her school apron
Sprouted red anemones and bunches of roses.
Phrases about the struggle in the textbooks,
Which had been censored
Were rewritten.
The map, which they effaced,
Returned to the pages.
Her school apron fluttered
Like a flag in the classrooms,
Flapped and spread.
It shaded the angry streets,
The fruit laden trees.
Her school apron fluttered out of the windows,
Above the houses' roofs,
Over the shops' awnings.

It shaded the mosques, the churches,
And the domes.

They did not kill Muntahā, nor crucify her.
She only went out to hang the moons of her joy
On the firmament.
To declare that the old days had come to an end.
To declare that the new age had begun.

Like F.Ṭūqān, Mayy Ṣāyigh in her poem Qaṣā'id Ḥubb Li-'Smin Muṭārad Yud'ā 'Ammatī"Love Poems to a Blacklisted Name Called, My Aunt" addresses her aunt, another Palestinian rebel killed in a strike, by saying:

يبقى قبرك مجرداً إلا من زهرة الصمود (30)

Your grave will remain bare
Except for the flower of undaunted fortitude.

In subsequent lines M.Ṣāyigh enters into an intimate conversation with her aunt as if she were still living and able to listen and react. Likewise, the poet expresses her beliefs that the role of this rebel did not end, and that she is now, despite her death, in possession of a perpetual glow and still, in a way, continuing the struggle against the enemy. The glory of a dead fighter, in Ṣāyigh's words, never vanishes, but on the contrary is transformed by death into an enchanting spirit spreading joy, opening all closed doors, generating fertility and hopes. She writes:

أتعلمين أن الأضراب نجح ، و انهم لن يستطيعوا
أن يمحوا الوشم المقاتل عن ذراعك

و لا أن يهدموا تاريخ ميلادك
و ستوهجين أبدا ، تقيدن المحتلين
و تجدينهم بسياط الشمس .

.

..... استقبال أقدامك المسحورة الزائرة
فيمطر صدرى بالفرح ، و تشرع في وجهي كل الأبواب

.

في كل الأبواب المهجورة يتقدم الشوق ، يغني العتابا و الميخا
فتنفتح الدروب و تخضر المساحات
تنبي المواسم عن موعد قدومنا . (31)

Do you know that the strike was a success?
And that they can not efface the slogan
Tattooed on your arm.
That they cannot demolish the date of your birth.
You will glow for ever, chaining the occupiers,
Lashing them with whips of the sun's light.

Your enchanting steps keep haunting me.
Joy springs within my heart; doors open before me.

Longing proceeds from the forlorn doors
Singing 'Atābā and Mījanā*.
The roads widen, the yards flourish,
Announcing our coming to the seasons.

Another eminent example of the motif of the never-ending impact of the "heroic death" is given by Darwīsh, who portrays the death of his friend 'Abdullah at the hands of the executioner. Despite his death, 'Abdullah, in Darwīsh's depiction of him, possesses a unique presence; he still goes out for a stroll every evening, slips through the windows and keeps sowing the seeds in the soil of the future. Darwīsh says:

عادة لا يخرج الموتى الى النزهة

* 'Atābā and Mījanā, are Palestinian folk songs.

لكن صديقي كان مفتونا بها
 كل مساء
 يتدلى جسمه كالغصن من كل الشقوق
 وأنا أفتح شباككي
 لكي يدخل عبدالله
 كي يجمعني بالأنبياء
 . . .
 عادة لا يعمل الموتى
 ولكن صديقي
 كان من عادته أن يضع الأعمار في الطين
 وأن يبذر في الأرض سماء
 وأنا أفتح شباككي ، لكي يدخل عبدالله حرا و طليقا (32)

The dead, generally,
 Do not come out for a stroll.
 But my friend
 Was enchanted by it.
 Every evening, his body would dangle,
 Like a branch, from every crevice.
 And I would open my window
 To let 'Abdullah in.
 That he might bring me together
 With the prophets.

The dead, generally,
 Do not work.
 But my friend
 Had the habit of putting moons in the mud.
 And of planting a sky in the ground.
 And I would open my window
 That 'Abdullah might enter
 Free and unfettered.(33)

In his book Shay'un 'An al-Watan, Darwish demonstrates this previous impression about the impact of the Fidā'ī*, who dedi-

* In Arabic the word Fidā'ī, which comes from the root fadā (to ransom), is applied to "one who offers his life for another, a name used of special devotees in several religious and political groups".

Encyclopaedia of Islam, (art.Fidā'ī)

In modern Arabic, the word as defined in al-Mu'jam al-Wasī, applies to the "one who sacrifices himself for the sake of God or the homeland".

cates his life to his country. In the following lines he tries to assess the significance of the Fida'ī's role and reflect the impact his accomplishment has on others. Darwīsh writes:

We love this unforgettable hero (the martyr) because he defends a noble cause. Death for him is a bridge or a state of consciousness or a harsh and beautiful transition through which he can realize his being and the being of others who are a part of him. He becomes a martyr. The death of the martyr is an ennobling and charming one, because it does not happen in vain. Every soldier who dies while defending his homeland or defending a noble cause undoubtedly justifies the enthusiasm he receives. Grief for him, then, will be free from regret.(34)

The above quotation vividly illustrates the notion of the "beautiful and ennobling death". But the idea of the "beloved death" in Palestinian poetry by no means reflects those delusions about the goodness and desirability of death, popular among the romantic poets. It is simply a profound longing expressing a love for their homeland and constituting a symbol of identity, even if this love be fulfilled through death. The famous poem al-Shahīd "The Martyr" of 'Abd 'l-Raḥīm Maḥmūd (1913-1948), a distinguished fighter and poet who died on the battlefield in 1948, is rightly regarded, in the words of S. Kh. Jayyūsī, as "a noble example of poetry alive and glowing with the clash of battle and the hovering shadow of magnificent death"(35). His fate, as he predicted in the following verses, appears almost as the reward of his patriotic devotion:

و القى بها في مهاوى الردى	سأحمل روحي على راحتي
و لكن أغذ اليه الخطى	لعمرك اني أرى مصرعي
و دون بلادي هو المبتغى (36)	أرى مقتلي دون حقي السليب

I will bear my soul on the palm of my hand,
And hurl it into the pit of death.
I see my fate, but quicken my steps towards it.
To fall defending my usurped rights,
Defending my country,
This, I see, is my desire.(37)

Commenting on 'Abd 'l-Raḥīm Maḥmūd's poem, Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā in his book al-Nār wa 'l-Jawhar says that:

A.Maḥmūd was extremely sensitive towards beauty and death. There is a mysterious connection between beauty and death, and this is what most poets perceive..... According to lovers, the sense of death might be extremely stimulating, for they willingly tend to fulfil their love for beauty through death. But this sense of love in the poets fighting for national causes, frequently, inclines them to challenge death and expect it in the course of the struggle for whatever cause they love. The shift from the "beloved woman" to the "beloved land" is simple and spontaneous, since the beauty of both animated similar images. This was what appealed to 'Abd'l-Raḥīm Maḥmūd; he contemplated beauty and his homeland and anticipated death.(38)

The relationship between love and death seems to be a great concern in Palestinian poetry, with regard to their substitution of the beloved homeland for the beloved woman. The nationally inspired lover hence often aspires for the realization of his love through death. In his poem Don Juān wa Kāhinat 'l-Nār "Don Juan and the Priestess of Fire", Qāsim demonstrates an

intense love for his beloved Palestine whom he calls "the priestess of fire". The love he expresses abounds with yearning, intoxication and persistent desire to release strong emotions by attempting to attain a death truly worthy of the intense spiritual state of the lover and the beloved. Qāsim says, representing Don Juan:

أوزع كل خلياتي الا كاهنة النار
 معها سأظل الى الدهر الآتي
 و معي ستظل الى يوم استشهادي
 فوق الأسوار
 جوعي قاتل
 و دمي . . خمر و سنابل
 فتعالي يا حبي الأغلى والأعلى
 يا كاهنة النار
 نبحث عن موت لا يثق . . . في ميدان لا ثق
 نبحث عن طعنة حب لا ثقة
 بالمحبة والعاشق
 نبحث عن ميتة حب
 في معركة كبرى . . . فوق الأسوار . (39)

I shall abandon all my beloveds
 Except the priestess of fire.
 I will remain with her for ever.
 And she will remain with me untill
 The day of my martyrdom.
 My hunger is severe.
 My blood is wine and ears of corn.
 Come on my dearest love,
 My sublime love
 O priestess of fire,
 Let's search for an appropriate death
 In an appropriate field.
 Let's search for an appropriate wound of love
 Worthy of the lover and the beloved.
 Let's search for a death of love
 In a great battle.

Beyond this elementary outline of death as a tragic experience as well as a beautifully heroic one, is a further aspect closely related to these two, and that is death as a mystical experience. Examining this aspect, one may perceive that the fall of a martyr by no means represents a final stage of his existence, but, hopefully, represents a beginning of a spiritual journey towards the heart of his country. It is an embrace of the motherland, a return to one's origin. The death of the warrior-devotee, according to this interpretation, does not represent an end, it is only a departure or a metaphysical entrance into the essence of the homeland. Qāsim in the following example draws a simple but very compressed image of a dead devotee who emerges towards a mystical unification with nature in his homeland, and experiences thorough incorporation in it. Qāsim says:

أسندوني اذا قتلت بصخرة
وارفعوا لي وجهي ازاء الرياح
واتركوني أفنى لأخر ذرة
في غيوم الدجي و عشب الصباح (40)

If I am killed, rest my body against a rock,
And direct my face towards the winds.
And let me completely pass away
Into the clouds of the night
And the dewy grass of the early morning.

The best commentary on these lines appears in the words of Nazīh Abū Niḍāl who says:

This kind of attachment to the land began to take shape within a form of mystical love and absorption. That is to say the lover becomes one with the beloved and inseparable from him.(41)

In his poem 'Ā'idon Ilā Yāfā "Returning to Jaffa", Darwīsh describes a departure of a martyr towards his birthplace with a view to the belief that this departure is a kind of a sincere reunion with an intimate and sublime homeland. Darwīsh says:

هو الآن يرحل عنا
و يمكن يا فافا
و يعرفها حجرا حجرا
و لا شيء يشبهه
و الأغاني تقلده
تقلد موعده الأخضر . (42)

Now he departs from us
And settles in Jaffa.
And he knows it stone by stone.
Nothing resembles him.
And songs imitate him,
Imitate his green rendezvous.(43)

Another mystical reunion with Jerusalem is pictured as having been achieved by the martyr Wā'il Z'aitir whose death has been effectively depicted in these words of F.Ṭūqān:

... أسند
رأسك الشامخة اليوم الى " القبة "
فالمخرة في القدس احتوتك الآن
حين الموت أعطاك الحياة . (44)

Now, rest your proud head
Against the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.
It embraces you
As death granted you life.

Reaching such a lofty spiritual state through devotion could be, as Qāsim says, the appropriate occasion for the devotee to attain the transformation (e.g. a political or military victory) which would effectively realize his dreams. This achievement he characterizes with the image of "the bird of thunder". He writes:

طائر الرعد
لا بد أن يأتي
فلقد بلغناها
بلغنا قمة الموت (45)

The bird of thunder
Must come.
For we have already reached
The summit of death.

Since the "summit of death" implies such glory, it normally turns into a manifestation of life, a festival and a wedding. Thus Darwīsh says:

خبثي الدمعة للميسد
فلن نبكي سوى من فرح
ولنسقم الموت في الساحة
عرسا و حياة ! (46)

Save your tears for the festival.
We will not cry except out of joy.
Come, let's call death on the battlefield
A wedding ... a life!

From this point which associates death with joy, one may proceed to the idea that enduring suffering bravely leads to salvation. The symbol of Christ as one who "sought the cross" emerges as the main source of inspiration for the Palestinian poets who, while experiencing their adverse fate, believe as Darwīsh writes:

... لو أن السيد المملوب لم يكبر على عرش الطيب
ظل طفلاً ضائع الجرح ... جبان (47)

If the crucified Lord hadn't come of age
On the throne of the cross
He'd have remained a child whose wound was forfeit
A coward.

D.Johnson-Davies remarks in his introduction to his translations from Darwīsh's poetry - The Music of Human Flesh, that:

Resorting to Christian imagery is perhaps more understandable in a Palestinian poet for whom the plight of his country is naturally expressed in symbols of Christian suffering.(48)

One may notice the similarities between Christ and the Palestinian fighter, the Fidā'ī, for both of them reach the peak of devotion and fulfilment through death."The miracle of both,

Christ and the Fidā'ī", as N.Abū Niḍāl puts it, "consists in realizing salvation for others"(49). Darwīsh says:

فأذا احترقت على صليب عبادة
أصبحت قديما
بزي مقاتل (50)

If I should burn on the cross of my devotion
I would become a saint
In the uniform of a fighter.

According to this understanding, death turns into something creative, something that can be made a source of strength, guidance and ever-present resistance. In his poem Sawtun min 'l-Ghāba "An Echo From the Wood", Darwīsh depicts himself, like his country, and like all the neglected prophet rebels, crucified on a cross. But the hope of being saved from this ordeal never leaves him. He writes:

من غابة الزيتون
جاء المدي
و كنت مملوياً على النار
أقول للغربان لا تنهشي
فربما أرجع للدار
وربما تشتي السما
ربما . . .
تطفي هذا اللهب الضاري . (51)

From the olive grove
The echo came,
As I was crucified on the flames,

Saying to the ravens: "do not snap"
 For I may return to my home.
 And the sky may rain.
 It may extinguish
 This flaming wood.

In Qāla 'l-Mughannī "The Singer Said", Darwīsh views his cross as a platform from which he can declare his undaunted fortitude, whereas the nails are pictured as musical strings on which he plays joyfully, celebrating his sacrifice. He says:

المغني على صليب الألم
 جرحه ساطع كنجم
 قال للناس حوله
 كل شيء . . . سوى الندم :
 هكذا مت واقفا
 واقفا مت كالشجر
 هكذا يصبح الصليب
 منبرا . . . أو عصا نغم
 و مساميره وتر
 هكذا ينزل المطر
 هكذا يكبر الشجر (52)

The singer's wound on the cross of pain
 Shines like a star.
 He reveals everything to people around him
 Except regret:
 I died standing up on my feet,
 Standing like trees.
 Thus the cross becomes a rostrum
 Or a tuning fork.
 And its nails become musical strings.
 This is how the rain falls
 This is how the trees flourish.

In the verses of Aḥmad Daḥbūr and M.Ṣāyigh, the same strong

connection between the cross and the anticipated flourishing of fields and sweet basil can be clearly noticed. In Dahbūr's words:

تخبرني الأجراس هذا الليل
عن مقاتل يعرفه الصغار
في يديه مساران
تكبر الحقول حوله ، ووجهه منارة (53)

This night the bells tell me
About a fighter whom all the children know.
There are two nails in his hands.
The fields spread around him.
And his face is like a lighthouse.

And in Ṣāyigh's words:

صدت في كفي مساميرى
أسندت الى ظلك ظهري
ونما الريحان على أخشاب صليبي (54)

The nails rust in my hands.
I rest my back on your shade.
and the sweet basil grows on my cross.

The luxuriant green life around the cross seems to allude to the idea that death is the occasion of a renascence. This idea perhaps forms the final aspect of all the ideas outlined so far. That is to say, the martyr glorifies the land which grants life to the living, and he expresses his love by sacrificing himself willingly in order to bring hope and fertility

to the land. Thus the martyr remains a unique symbol of hope whose death is associated, in the works of many Palestinian poets, with renascence. In her poem Marthiyyat 'l-Shuhadā' "An Elegy to the Martyrs", S.Kh Jayyūsī addresses the land of Palestine saying:

واذكري
أن عصر البعث أسمى أعصر
.....
فيه آلاف الأيادي الخيرات
وهبتك الخيران جمدتها تلج الممات
.....
عقدوا عزمهم فامتألت بيض المقابر
بالشباب الغض ، بالآمال خضرا والعطور
بالحياة الحرة المعطاء فاضت من أخاديد القبور . (55)

Remember
That the loftiest among your ages
Is the age of rebirth,
In which thousands of good hands
Grant you goodness just as they are
Chilled by death.

When they (martyrs) decided to die
The white graves filled up
With the bloom of youth,
With green hopes, with fragrance.
And life, vigorous and generous,
Welled out of the graves.

F.Ṭūqān expresses almost the same idea by saying that the martyr's death could be the new force that might revive the dead land and prepare it for a resurrection. she says addressing the spirit of the martyr Wā'il Z'aitir:

أنت يا
موقظ الدنيا التي
مفنت لها و قشرا
عطبت لحما و عظما ، أنت يا
باعت الهزة في الدنيا السموات
.....
أيها الرافض للموت هزمت الموت حين
اليوم مت . (56)

You, who awakens the world
Which had completely died.
You, who had shaken the world
.....
You, who refused death,
You have now defeated death
By dying.

A remarkable example in this vein is one by Basaiso, who uses the image of his body merely as a symbol of fertility in the soil of the future. "My body is soil" he says, "it is high time for ploughing, it is high time for sowing the seeds". To observe the whole picture, it is appropriate to provide his entire image. Basaiso says:

سيعودون فما زالوا هنا
أنت في قائمة القتلى ، وفي قائمة القتلى أنا
ما الذي تنتظرين ؟
قد تركت الباب مفتوحا لهم
جسدى الأرض
وهذا الوقت وقت الحرث
هذا وقت القاء البذور
.....
جسدى مشتل أنهار ، و هذى ليلة الطوفان . (57)

They will come back, they are still here.
 You and I are on the killed list.
 What are you waiting for?
 I left the door open for them.
 My body is the soil.
 It is high time for ploughing.
 It is high time for sowing the seeds.

 My body abounds with rivers,
 And this is the night of the flood.

While dealing with the idea of rebirth through death, the Palestinian poets often resort to the cycle of vegetation in nature which serves the purpose of their subject. Thus the relevant terms such as, soil, seeds, ploughing, fertility, rain, growth, flourishing..etc , seem to be frequently used, taking into consideration the direct link between these elements and the concept of "land" as a beloved "homeland" and as a source of fertility. Palestine, likewise, is portrayed by many Palestinian poets as the image of the beloved woman who deserves to be worshipped and redeemed. This image tended to be widened to include another quality of the fertile woman, namely her ability to bear embryos and to give birth. The land of Palestine, according to this view, is but a large womb that will, hopefully, bear seeds and abound with fruit as long as it bears fighters with a fresh will to continue the struggle. F.Ṭuqān says in this connection:

هذه الأرض امرأة
 في الأخابد وفي الأرحام
 سرالخصب واحد
 قوة السرالتي تنبت نخلا

و سنابل

تنبت الشعب المقاتل (58)

This land is a woman.
 The secret of fertility in the furrows
 And in the wombs
 Is one and the same.
 The secret force that makes palm trees
 And ears of corn grow,
 Is the same force which produces fighters.

An Imaginary conversation by Darwīsh with both a mulberry leaf and a victimized soul, in a poem entitled Hiwār fī Tishrīn "A Conversation in Autumn", drove him to grasp the very essence of correspondence between these two elements. Both of them, the leaf and the victim, will be revived by rain, the symbol of hope, despite the storm, the symbol of evil. In the first stanza the poet has this brief conversation with a mulberry leaf:

أحاور ورقة توت :
 ومن سوء حظ العواصف أن المطر
 يعيدك حياة
 وإن ضحيتها لا تموت

 سأدفع مهر العواصف
 مزيدا من الحب للوردة الشاكلة . (59)

I converse with a mulberry leaf:
 It is unfortunate for the storms
 That the rain revives you,
 That their victim never dies.

 I will reward the storms

By granting the bereaved flower
More love.

In the last stanza, Darwīsh converses with the soul of a
victim:

أحاور روح الضحية :
ومن سوء حظ العواصف أن المطر
يعيدك حياة
ومن حسن حظك أنك أنت الضحية
هلا . . . يا هلا . . . بالمطر . (60)

I converse with the soul of a victim:
It is unfortunate for the storms
That the rain resurrects you.
And it is fortunate for you that
You are the victim.
Welcome... welcome... rain!

The previous example seemingly tends to confirm the element of resemblance between the perpetual cycle of nature and man's dream of immortality through resurrection. The imagery of death and resurrection in Palestinian poetic works, however, is often characterized with simplicity and tends to employ easily comprehended symbols and metaphors. The mythological aspects in these works, therefore, must not be overstressed. The Palestinian crisis is, obviously, a political and social problem which directly affects the whole of the Palestinian people, and by no means represents individuals as much as it represents collective attitudes. The awareness of the general public as the audience addressed in the poetic process,

perhaps, prevents the Palestinian poets from evolving complicated symbolic usages or an intricate mythology of their own. Furthermore, the experience of the struggle and of resistance tends to face the poet-fighter with an immediate situation of overt violence which needs to be responded to with similar and spontaneous immediacy, and in an intelligible poetic medium. Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā says in this connection:

The main characteristic of the resistance poetry consists in depicting the act of resistance as a living and forceful act which emerges from the events of daily life. They (the Palestinian poets) assess their experience as a visual and sensual one, and dispense with the need to go beyond the immediate into abstractions they can do without.(61)

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FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VII

- (1) Darwīsh, Maḥmūd, Shay'un 'An al-Waṭan, Beirut, 1971, p.8, (Shay'un)
- (2) For a lengthy display of this situation see:
Ḥadāwī, Sāmī, Bitter Harvest, Palestine Between 1914-1967, Newyork, 1967, p.203-217, (Bitter Harvest); Ferguson, Pamela, The Palestine Problem, London, 1973, p.92-3
- (3) To trace the echoes of Palestinian solidarity with other liberation movements in other parts of the world see for example: Darwīsh, Maḥmūd, Dīwān, Beirut, 1978, I, his poems "An al-Umniyāt" p.77-9, "Lorca", p.114-8; al-Qāsim, Samīḥ, Dīwān, Beirut, 1973, his poem "Biṭāqāt ilā Mayādīn al-Ma'raka" p.328-331
- (4) Khūrī, Ilyās, "Ālam 'l-Dalālāt fī 'l-Shi'r al-Filistīnī", Majallat Shu'un Filistīniyya, No.41-42, Jan-Feb, 1975, Beirut, p.367
- (5) Trends, I, p.297
- (6) Muṣṭafā, Khālīd, al-Shi'r al-Filistīnī al-Ḥadīth, Baghdad, 1978, p.64-70; Naqqāsh, Rajā , Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Shā'ir al-Ard al-Muḥtalla, Cairo, (n.d), p.96-7
- (7) Muḥammad, Khālīd Sulaymān, The Influence of the Political Situation in Palestine on Arabic Poetry, Ph.D thesis, London University, SOAS, 1982, p.261-3
- (8) Basaiso, Mu'īn, Dīwān, Beirut, 1979, p.53
- (9) Dīwān, Beirut, 1978, p.481
- (10) Ibid, p.481-2
- (11) Ibid, p.483
- (12) Dīwān, p.84-7
- (13) Zayyād, Tawfīq, Dīwān, Beirut, 1971, p.244-5
- (14) Dīwān, p.246

- (15) Jurays, Ṣabrī, al-‘Arab fī Isrā’īl, Dirāsāt Filistīniyya, II, 1967; Beirut, p.11-44; Bitter Harvest, p.205-211
- (16) Dīwān, I, p.342-3
- (17) Trans: Johnson-Davies, D, The Music of Human Flesh: Poems of the Palestinian Struggle, London, 1980, p.25, (Music)
- (18) Darwīsh, Dīwān, I, p.343
- (19) Music, p.25
- (20) Dīwān, I, p.344-5
- (21) Music, p.26
- (22) Forward to Samīḥ al-Qāsim's dīwān Damī ‘Alā Kaffī, al-Majmū‘a al-Kāmīla, Beirut, 1978, p.445
- (23) St. John's Gospel, Chap.XII:24
- (24) Al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, surat Āl ‘Imrān, cviix, clxx
- (25) The Holy Quran, Trans: ‘Alī, A.Yūsuf, New Delhi, (n.d), p.167
- (26) Verse : lxxiv
- (27) The Holy Quran, p.202
- (28) Dīwān, p.51
- (29) Dīwān, p.562-3
- (30) Ṣāyigh, Mayy, Qaṣā’id Ḥubb Li-’Smin Muṭarad, Beirut, 1974, p.8, (Qaṣā’id Ḥubb)
- (31) Ibid, p.9-10
- (32) Dīwān, I, p.417-9
- (33) Music, p.31-2
- (34) Shay’un, p.153
- (35) Trends, I, p.297
- (36) Maḥmūd, ‘Abd ’l-Raḥīm, Dīwān, ed: al-Sawāfirī, Kāmīl, Beirut, 1974, p.120-2
- (37) Trans from: Trends, I, p.297

- (38) al-Nār, p.161
 - (39) Dīwān, p.432-3
 - (40) Dīwān, p.698
 - (41) Jadal 'l-Shi'r wa 'l-Thawra, Beirut, 1979, p.73
 - (42) Dīwān, II, p.77
 - (43) Music, p.51
 - (44) Dīwān, p.609-10
 - (45) Dīwān, p.439
 - (46) Dīwān, I, p.555
 - (47) Ibid, p.558-9
 - (48) Music, p.xiv
 - (49) al-Shi'r al-Filistīnī al-Muqātil, Beirut, 1974, p.71
 - (50) Dīwān, I, p.379
 - (51) Ibid, p.180-1
 - (52) Ibid, p.145-6
 - (53) Daḥbūr, Aḥmad, Tā'ir al-Wiḥdāt, Beirut, 1979, p.48
 - (54) Qasā'id Hubb, p.78
 - (55) Jayyūsī, S.Kh, al-'Awda min 'l-Nab' al-Hālim, Beirut, 1960, p.100 and 102
 - (56) Dīwān, p.610
 - (57) Dīwān, p.612
 - (58) Dīwān, p.543
 - (59) Dīwān, I, p.336
 - (60) Ibid, p.338
 - (61) al-Nār, p.162
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CONCLUSION

Like many concepts in modern Arabic poetry, the concept of death underwent significant transformations from the turn of the twentieth century up to the seventies. During this period many literary trends and movements from the West and the East left their influences on Arabic poetry, and new critical theories were enthusiastically studied. The need was felt early in the twentieth century for a transformation of form in Arabic poetry to free it from the limitations imposed on it over the centuries by the monorhyme and monometre requirements. The transformation in form was apt to bring about a transformation of the poets' views of the very function of poetry. The evolution of all poetic concepts seemed inevitable. Poetry was viewed as one of the main agents helping to bring about a revival of Arab culture and civilization, and as an agent of change, poetry, it seemed, and quite logically, could not remain unaffected by the rapid changes which the poets desired to see in every other sphere of life.

Although it is not easy to find exact dates of demarcation between a literary period and another, one may say that the concept of death in modern Arabic poetry goes through three major stages of development during this century. The first stage corresponds to the late decades of the nineteenth cen-

tury and the early decades of the twentieth. During this period the revival of the Arabic classical and medieval literary heritage was in progress. It was an era which witnessed the acquaintance of writers and poets with the best examples of the Arabic literary heritage, when these were being edited and published and made more readily available to the general reader. The poets at the turn of the century, much under the influence of the Arabic classical and medieval literature, and generally referred to as the neo-classicists of modern Arabic literature, were quick to adopt both the framework and the ways of expression of their ancestors. This adoption of the literary values and principles of the classical literary heritage betrays a considerable degree of deference to the genius of the past. Consequently, the neo-classicists compositions appeared like persistent efforts aimed at attaining the standards of classical and medieval poetry, and emulating what were considered as examples of excellence in this poetry.

Surveying the theme of death in the classical and medieval heritage, the neo-classicists found out that death was primarily treated in the genre of the elegy. The elegy became also a separate category of poetry in the works of the neo-classicists, and death was dealt with or written about only within the framework of the elegy. The efforts of the neo-classicists in the treatment of death barely exceeded a mere attempt at emulation of the works of their predecessors.

In trying to assess the elegy works of the neo-classicists,

one seems to search in vain for the elements of genuineness and personal experience which might reflect the mode of thinking of the age in which they lived. "Personal experience", it has been rightly said, "is the basis of all real literature"(1). This remark one might say applies to the classical elegy, if one bears in mind the spirit of the age and the range of thought it set out to express or convey. The poetry of the Arab classicists, as Professor Gibb puts it, "expressed their own passions and emotions, and portrayed their lives as individuals and as a society forcefully and truthfully"(2). The ideas expressed in the classical elegy, however naive, were a genuine reflection of the way of life in a particular age and milieu.

In their emulation of the classical elegy, the neo-classicists seem to have overlooked the importance of the elements of genuineness and personal self-expression which constitute the basic pillars of all poetic creativity. They also seem to have been totally unaware that poetry owes its greatness in the first place to the impressionability and spontaneity of the poet, and not to an exercise in imitation of given patterns and stereotyped modes of expression. For, to quote W.H. Hudson, "what we call genius is only another name for freshness and originality of nature, with its resulting freshness and originality of outlook upon the world, of insight, and of thought"(3). The emulation which the neo-classicists undertook was so strikingly meticulous, that it drove them to mere literary artifice. Hence we find that the neo-classical elegy,

apart from appearing in the same framework and garb as its classical prototype, communicates to us practically pre-Islamic imagery, thought, and even life style and customs. It is important, then, while comparing the genuine experiences of the classicists and the artificial craft of the neo-classicists, to distinguish between what Carlyle calls the "genuine voices" and the mere "echoes", between the men who speak for themselves and those who speak only on the report of others (4). The lack of sincerity, of personal experience, of exposing the age's mode and fashion, is almost striking among the neo-classicists especially in the theme of the elegy. Plato's pronouncement here, has indeed a very true ring about it:

The foundation of all good and lasting work in literature is entire sincerity to oneself, to one's own experience of life, and to the truth of things as one is privileged to see it.(5)

Sincerity and truth, one may assert, are the distinct mark of creativity in every age, and it is this property which endows poetry with perpetual freshness and originality.

It appears that this element of originality, however, was distinctly lacking in the neo-classical elegy, and that the theme of death in the writings of the neo-classicists remained, so to speak, frozen in the same classical mould from which it sprung. The neo-classical elegy was merely a repetitive process, practically an identical imitation of classical

models, and a ready-made framework in which preceding poetic concepts and criteria were restated and preserved.

The second stage in the development of the concept of death can be said to be the contribution of romanticism in Arabic literature, a movement which flourished between the twenties and the forties of this century. In this period, death was no longer treated within the mere exclusive framework of the elegy. This is because conventional poetic criteria and the old theories of prosody were exposed to severe criticism and attempts at moulding or reshaping them so as to be in harmony with the new literary trends and outlooks in the West which were already leaving a noticeable impact on cultural developments in the Arab world in general. The Arab romanticists were no doubt influenced by Western poetry, but one can at this stage trace as well important indigenous influences, and particularly in relation to the concept of death. The major indigenous influence which had an impact on romantic poetry in this connection was the mystical poetry of the Muslim Sūfīs, from whom the romanticists primarily learnt the longing of the soul to attain perfection, to achieve total absorption in the over-soul in the state of fanā', or reunion with the Infinite after departing the world of the senses and the earthly body*.

* This assertion about Sūfī thought being an indigenous influence, can be made despite the fact that the Islamic Sūfī concepts and ideals reflect a close kinship both with Eastern =

Besides Sūfī influence there was, as already indicated, the influence of the European romantic poets who imparted the notion of the return to nature to the Arab romanticists. Observing the continuous cycle of life and death in nature, Arab romanticists like Gibrān, Naimy and Shābbī started to view death as a function of life. They believed that death is a prerequisite of life, and that the goodness of death consists in the fact that it invariably maintains the continuity or perpetuity of existence.

One should not, however, overlook the impact of Eastern philosophy on the minds and thoughts of Gibrān and Naimy. The doctrine of reincarnation held a vital attraction to these two authors, and they seem to have found in it a solution to the mystery of death. They were mainly fascinated by the idea that the soul, through successive stages of life and death, can gradually cultivate its essence until it reaches the stage of total enlightenment, or the status of Godhood.

However much this understanding of death among the romanticists appears fanciful or ideal, it is the product of a period dominated by romantic sentiment. It is the period in which the individual began to regard himself as the pillar of existence, and discovered the urgent need to express his own feelings,

philosophies and religious creeds such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas from Greek philosophy. It could no doubt at the same time be claimed that some kinship is easy to trace between the Arab romanticists view of the over-soul, and similar views expressed by Western romanticists and transcendentalists. But while the latter influences are discussed in the chapter on the romanticists (p.155 to 184 above), Platonist and Eastern influences on the Sūfī movement in Islam are outside the scope of this thesis.

dreams, fantasies, and above all to seek his own salvation in order to escape the world of imperfection. No wonder that death according to the romantic poets is regarded as an escape from the misery of existence to a lofty and ideal realm of perfection in which the soul finds its sublime spiritual refuge. In brief, this understanding of death among the romanticists betrays an attitude of unmistakable withdrawal from the problems of everyday life towards the soft bed of dreams and fantasies. In the world of dreams and fantasies, the romantic poet escapes his pains and misery and sets out instead on his own glorious road to salvation, of which death seems to be the culmination.

Inasmuch as the concept of self-salvation dominated the poetic production of the romanticists when dealing with the concept of death, the concern about the destiny of the whole of society or nation dominated the outlook of the Tammūziyyūn poets whose works represent the third stage in the development of the concept of death examined in this thesis. With the appearance of the Tammūziyyūn poets between the fifties and the seventies of this century, the consciousness of individuality which was a characteristic mark of the romantic period, started to be subordinated to an increasing awareness of the problems of the Arab nation which was seen as being afflicted by political and social strains and stresses, and threatened by aspects of disunity and disintegration instead of aspects of revival and progress. The role of the poet in this critical

period was identified with the role of a seer, who does not lament over the condition of stagnation, but tries to foresee a new rebirth or revival blossoming out of the decadence. The subject of the death and revival of the Arab civilization gained prominence and was invariably treated throughout the works of the avant-garde poets of the period. The most useful motif which lent itself admirably to such a subject was ancient mythology, and especially the myth of death and resurrection. Employing the various symbols and representations of this myth, such as Tammūz,⁶ Ishtār, the phoenix, Christ.. etc was an embodiment of an optimistic hope in the future, which it was hoped, would follow an inevitable rebirth or revival. This optimistic outlook finds its expression in the myth of death and resurrection, or the inevitability of resurrection after death.

This notion of the "fruitful death" or the death which prepares the way for a dignified rebirth also became the characteristic motif of the Palestinian resistance poetry. The symbol of Christ the Redeemer who sacrifices his life to realize the salvation of others, was perhaps the most highly admired and most forcefully expressed by the Palestinian poets.

This stage of mythological symbolism could be considered as the last stage in the development of the concept of death in modern Arabic poetry. It has found expression in various ways outlined in the course of this work, and although this work is an examination of Arabic poetry up to the seventies, what has been written in the last fifteen years cannot be said to

represent new ground or to transcend in any marked way what the Tammūziyyūn poets have achieved.

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSION

- (1) Hudson, W.H, An Introduction to the Study of Literature, London, 1930, p.17, (Study)
 - (2) Arabic Literature, Oxford, 1963, p.25
 - (3) Study, p.17
 - (4) As quoted by W.H. Hudson, Ibid, p.18
 - (5) As Quoted by Hudson, See Ibid, p.19
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