

Ontological and Psychological Conceptions of Death in Classical Arabic Poetry: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract: This study examines the multidimensional semantic realm of the theme of death in classical Arabic poetry, alongside the existential position of the human being in the face of death. In the verses analyzed, death is sometimes affirmed as a deliverance from worldly suffering, a sanctuary, and a gateway to mercy, while at other times it is addressed as an absolute inevitability, an equalizing force of destiny, and the futility of human endeavor. Particularly in the works of poets such as Ali b. Abi Ṭālib, al-Ma'arrī, Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Mutanabbī, and Abū Nuwās, life is depicted as a process fraught with exhaustion and pain, whereas death signifies liberation from this burden. Conversely, in other verses, death is presented as an ontological reality that renders all human power and precautions invalid. This study reveals that death is not merely a biological end but also a metaphysical phenomenon associated with moral accounting, the consciousness of destiny, and the conception of the afterlife. The common emphasis in these poems is the rational and physical helplessness of the human being in the face of death, as well as their existential fragility. Thus, within the classical Arabic poetic tradition, death acquires a dual significance: it is both a consolatory sanctuary and an unavoidable truth that exposes the limitations of humanity..

Keywords: : Classical Arabic Poetry, Death, Salvation, Absolute Inevitability, Equality.

Introduction

Death has always unsettled humanity; by preoccupying the mind with the inevitable end, it has awakened inquiries in the depths of the turbulent soul, seeking answers regarding the dialectic between life and death, the mystery of extinction, and the purpose of transience. The cultures, philosophies, and mythologies of nations have addressed the phenomenon of death at various levels, transmitting numerous conceptions concerning the nature of non-existence and permanence to subsequent generations. Beyond being a natural phenomenon denoting the cessation of biological life, death is an ontological and psychological reality that shapes human existence, the perception of time, and the quest for meaning. In disciplines such as philosophy, religion, psychology, and literature, death is treated as a fundamental phenomenon that renders human transience and the boundaries of life visible. Death (الموت) is defined both as the antithesis of life and as the decline of power within an entity. (Ibn Manzūr, 1414). In a lexicographical context, this concept points to a broad semantic field that encompasses states such as sleep, tranquility, and relaxation, as exemplified by the extinguishing of fire or the subsiding of the wind.

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The Pre-Islamic poet has long associated the phenomenon of death closely with the concept of time. To express this relationship, they employed specific concepts; among these, the two most prominent and prevalent terms—which have acquired a conceptual nature due to their frequent usage—are *dahr* (الدهر) and *zamān* (الزمان). *Dahr* signifies absolute time with no defined boundaries. Indeed, Labīd b. Rabi‘a characterized it as a "long, continuous, and uninterrupted span of time." In *Jāhili* thought, *dahr* was conceived as a sovereign, commanding, and mysterious force whose essence could not be fully grasped, yet which was held responsible for the death of individuals, the annihilation of communities, and the collapse and disappearance of states. Thus, the *Jāhili* poet attributed to *dahr* the quality of absolute power—a trait that, in religious understanding, belongs solely to God. Accordingly, *dahr* is the power that kills, destroys, and brings calamities upon humanity. (Muhammad, M. K., 2025).

There exists a strong yet implicit relationship between the anxiety of death observed in the poetry of *Jāhili* poets and the *aṭlāl* (ruins/vestiges) prologue that is prevalent in their verse. As is well known, the central theme of this prologue involves standing before the ruins of abandoned dwellings, mourning the erosion and destruction wrought by time, and praying for rain to fall upon those sites. In this context, standing before the ruins is remarkably akin to standing at a gravesite. Just as an individual stands by the grave of a loved one to weep and prays for rain as a gesture of mercy and blessing, this stance before the ruins carries a similar significance. In this respect, the *aṭlāl* prologue, in its initial manifestation, serves as a lament for the dwellings and the people who have abandoned them. For those people are, in a sense, like those who have joined the caravan of the dead. Ultimately, this prologue presents itself not merely as a lament for the dwellings and those who departed from them, but as a lament for all of humanity and for life itself. (Muhammad, M. K., 2025).

Although the Arab poets led a predominantly Bedouin lifestyle and remained removed from formal philosophical schools or systematic currents of thought, they nevertheless rank among the greatest philosophers in their grasp of the nature of worldly life. None of them fell short in depicting the reality of earthly existence, its transience, and the inherent impossibility of human permanence on earth. Indeed, the verses cited above clearly articulate the philosophical perspective of Arab poets regarding life and death.

With the advent of the Islamic period, the perspective on the theme of death underwent a transformation, and it began to be expressed through various dimensions within the framework of the fundamental sources of Islam: the Holy Qur’an and the Hadith. In the Qur’an, death is portrayed as a final, inescapable reality—subject entirely to the absolute decree of Divine power—from which no human, despite all efforts at self-preservation, can flee. It functions as a transitional process where the soul, maintaining its vitality, is presented before the Divine Presence to be held accountable; furthermore, it reveals the helplessness of the transient being before the Creator, while affirming the ephemeral nature of worldly life and the sovereignty of the Eternal alone. In the *Hadith* literature, this truth is presented as an experience and a realm of trial that transcends the physical boundaries of worldly life. While worldly existence is perceived as a brief and transitory adventure, death is grounded as the conclusion of this process and the starting point of a final, sublime journey of existence (Temir and Sezer, 2025).

Arabic poetry is not merely a product of aesthetic language; it is also a mirror of the ontological, sociological, and faith-centered world of the Arab geography. Within this vast corpus, the theme of "death" serves as one of the most frequently employed motifs through which poets articulate their existential anxieties, their expectations regarding the world, and, ultimately, the human stance in the face of destiny. While every civilization throughout human history has defined death through its own unique language, classical Arabic literature addresses death not merely as an "end," but as an

awakening and a common ground of absolute equality. Particularly in literary texts, death is associated with multilayered meanings—going beyond the cessation of life to encompass destiny, moral responsibility, consciousness of accountability, separation, consolation, and salvation. In this respect, death is a universal experience that reshapes the individual's perspective on worldly life, time, and existence. Within classical Arabic poetry, death has thus emerged as a significant thematic element, functioning both as an unavoidable truth that exposes human ontological helplessness and as a metaphysical transition symbolizing liberation from worldly tribulations.

In this study, examples from the poems of renowned poets of the *Jāhili*, *Ṣaḍr al-Islām*, Umayyad, and Abbasid periods are presented. In the first chapter, the theme of death as a sanctuary and a form of liberation is examined; the second chapter focuses on death as an absolute inevitability; and the third chapter analyzes it as a manifestation of helplessness. These poetic examples have been discussed thematically, translated, and subjected to a comprehensive evaluation.

Death as a Deliverance, Consolation, and Sanctuary

The verses in this category invert the daunting perception of death. They characterize life as a realm of incessant tribulation, torment, and calamity, while positioning death as an instantaneous relief—an eternal slumber and a "final gateway to mercy"—that offers protection from these worldly sufferings, the burdens of aging, and the malevolence of time. One of the poets who best reflects this sentiment is al-Sharīf al-Raḍī. Navigating the delicate line between the human quest for life and the heavy burdens imposed by existence, these verses treat the process of life's completion not as an escape, but as a trial. By exposing the irony behind the human effort to cling to life out of a fear of death, the poet lays bare, with stark clarity, that the act of breathing itself can be a protracted and arduous ordeal (Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1961):

أَرَى النَّاسَ يَهْوُونَ الْخَلَاصَ مِنَ الرَّذَى // وَتَكْمِلُهُ الْمَخْلُوقُ طُولَ عَذَاءٍ
وَيَسْتَفْجِحُونَ الْقَتْلَ وَالْقَتْلَ رَاحَةً // وَأَتَعَبُ مَيِّتٍ مَنْ يَمُوتُ بِدَاءٍ

I see people desiring salvation from destruction (death), while the completion of the created (being) is a length of hardship.

And they consider killing ugly, while killing is a rest, and the most tired of the dead is the one who dies by a disease.

Viewing the ultimate tranquility brought by death as a grace, and the ceaseless ease—or rather, the burdens—of life as a weight, al-Ma'arrī yearns for liberation from the heavy burden of existence. While exposing that ancient contradiction in the human struggle for life, he interrogates existence by emphasizing that a brief farewell is superior to a never-ending and exhausting life. Furthermore, by defining the transient comforts of life as an illusion and death as a final mercy, he strikes us with the stark realization that the human journey in this world is, in essence, nothing more than perpetual weariness (al-Ma'arrī. 1924):

مَوْتُ يَسِيرٍ مَعَهُ رَحْمَةٌ // خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْيُسْرِ وَطُولِ الْبَقَاءِ
وَقَدْ بَلَوْنَا الْعَيْشَ أَطْوَارَهُ // فَمَا وَجَدْنَا فِيهِ غَيْرَ الشَّقَاءِ

A easy death with which there is mercy, better than ease and length of survival.

And we have tested life (and) its stages, but we did not find in it anything other than misery.

In another poem, al-Ma'arrī reinterprets life as perpetual weariness, death as eternal tranquility, and sleep as a fleeting farewell. By blurring the boundaries between being and non-being, he emphasizes that sleep is a temporary death, while death is a long slumber from which there is no

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awakening; thus, he points to death as the ultimate sanctuary for liberation from the burden of existence (al-Ma'arrī. 1924).

وَالْمَوْتُ نَوْمٌ طَوِيلٌ مَّالَهُ أَمَدٌ // وَالنَّوْمُ مَوْتُ قَصِيرٌ فَهُوَ مُنْجَابٌ

And death is a long sleep for which there is no term/end, While sleep is a short death, thus it is cleared away/dispelled.

Having endured the arduous trials of worldly life, al-Ma'arrī defines existence as a sequence of incessant exhaustion and inevitable calamities. While viewing death not as an end but as a sanctuary liberated from the sufferings of the world and a state of eternal tranquility, he argues that humanity can only be secured from the evils of life through the peace found beneath the earth. In this profound existential inquiry, he establishes a metaphysical bridge between sleep and death, suggesting that true serenity is only attainable upon the conclusion of this transient life (al-Ma'arrī. 1924)

لَا يَرْهَبُ الْمَوْتَ مَنْ كَانَ إِمْرًا فَطِنًا // فَإِنَّ فِي الْعَيْشِ أَرْزَاءَ وَأَحْدَاثًا

وَلَيْسَ يَأْمَنُ قَوْمٌ شَرَّ ذَهْرِهِمْ // حَتَّى يُجْلُوا بِبَطْنِ الْأَرْضِ أَجْدَاثًا

He who is a wise and prudent man does not fear death; for indeed, in life there are calamities and distressing events.

No people can ever feel safe from the evil of their time, until they descend into the belly of the earth as corpses.

Having endured the arduous trials of worldly life, al-Ḥuṭay'ah reveals that the endeavor to cling to life with passion is, in essence, a sequence of incessant exhaustion and inevitable calamities. While viewing death not as an end but as a sanctuary liberated from the sufferings of the world, he argues that humanity can only be secured from the malevolence of time through the peace found beneath the earth. In this existential inquiry, by building bridges between desires, slumber, and ultimate serenity, he depicts with profound wisdom the tragic contradiction between human longing for life and the suffering experienced therein (al-Ḥuṭay'ah, 1993).

يَصْنَبُ إِلَى الْحَيَاةِ وَيَشْتَهِيهَا // وَفِي طُولِ الْحَيَاةِ لَهُ عَنَاءٌ

He yearns for life and desires it, while in the length of life, there is hardship/suffering for him.

Absolute Inevitability: The Flow of Time, Transience, and Equality

The verses in this category emphasize that death is an absolute law of nature, equalizing all humanity on a single plane, regardless of socio-economic status, power, or age. The transience of worldly possessions, palaces, kingdoms, and accumulated wealth; the innate human journey toward death; and the erosive nature of time—which consumes humanity moment by moment—are at the heart of this section.

The following verses offer a sagacious perspective that criticizes the excessive reactions humans exhibit in the face of death and serves as a reminder of the transience of life. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib criticizes those who wail and lament over the loss of a loved one, arguing that they fail to grasp the reality that death is an inevitable truth. While emphasizing the significance of Divine decree and the virtue of patience, he calls for a submissive acceptance of this bitter reality, reminding his audience that even the prophets were not exempted from this ultimate end. His comparison of our fleeting daily endeavors with the reality of death and destruction is profoundly thought-provoking. The warning in the final verses shatters the human delusion of attachment to this world, counseling that one must be prepared for the absolute end. This poem embodies a dignified stance that views death not as an end, but as an integral part of life ('Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, 2002).

عَجِبْتُ لِجَارِعِ بَاكِ مُصَابٍ // بِأَهْلٍ أَوْ حَمِيمٍ ذِي أَكْتَابٍ
يَسْأَلُ الْجَنِّبَ يَدْعُو الْوَيْلَ جَهْلًا // كَأَنَّ الْمَوْتَ بِالشَّيْءِ الْعُجَابِ
وَسَلَوَى اللَّهِ فِيهِ الْخَلْقَ حَتَّى // نَبِيُّ اللَّهِ مِنْهُ لَمْ يُحَابِ
لَكُمْ مَلَكٌ يُنَادِي كُلَّ يَوْمٍ // لِدُّوا لِلْمَوْتِ وَابْنُوا لِلْخَرَابِ

I wondered at a panicked, weeping person afflicted with a calamity due to family or a close, sorrowful friend.

He tears the collar of his garment, calling out for woe in ignorance as if death were a wondrous/strange thing.

And Allah's consolation to the creation in this matter is that even the prophet of Allah was not favored (exempted) from it.

There is an angel calling out to you every day: // "Give birth for death, and build for ruin!"

In these verses, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī criticizes human worldly ambition and insatiable desires with a striking realism. By reminding us that every structure built is ultimately destined for ruin, and every asset accumulated is doomed to perish, he draws attention to the futility of human endeavors. The fact that even birth serves as the inception of a path leading directly to death underscores the transience of life and the inevitability of the absolute end. This powerful juxtaposition, which explores the pointlessness of clinging to the material world, invites the reader to a profound self-reflection. In the eyes of the poet, accepting that worldly life is, in essence, a process of departure stands out as the ultimate wisdom (ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, 2000).

بِنَاءٌ لِلْخَرَابِ وَجَمْعٌ مَالٍ // لِيَنْفَى وَالْوَالِدُ لِلْمَمَاتِ

Building is for ruin, and gathering wealth is for it to vanish; and likewise, procreation is for death.

Life is a succession of time slipping through our fingers; death is the absolute truth that brings this succession to its conclusion. In his renowned Muʿallaqa, Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd illuminates—from a perspective of ancient wisdom—the immutable decree of destiny in the face of human transience and worldly ambition. These verses, which synthesize the exhaustion of wealth and lifespan with the equalizing justice of death, serve as a mirror reflecting the terminal fate of the ephemeral. By interrogating the human conception of the world, these lines open a portal of profound contemplation for those who seek to comprehend the fragility of existence (Al-Zawzanī, 2002).

لَعَمْرُكَ إِنَّ الْمَوْتَ مَا أَخْطَأَ الْفَتَى // لَكَ الطُّولُ الْمُرْخَى وَتُبْنَاهُ فِي الْيَدِ
أَرَى الْمَوْتَ أَغْدَادَ النَّفُوسِ وَلَا أَرَى // بَعِيداً غَدًا مَا أَقْرَبَ الْيَوْمَ فِي غَدِ
أَرَى الدَّهْرَ كَنْزاً نَافِصاً كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ // وَمَا تَنْقُصُ الْأَيَّامُ وَالْدَّهْرُ يَنْفَدِ
أَرَى الْمَوْتَ يَعْثَامَ الْكَرِيمِ وَيَصْطَفِي // عَقِيلَةَ مَالِ الْفَاحِشِ الْمُنْتَشِدِ
أَرَى قَبْرَ نَحَامٍ بِخَيْلٍ بِمَالِهِ // كَقَبْرِ غَوِيٍّ فِي الْبَطَالَةِ مُفْسِدِ

By your life, death missing a young man for now is just like a loosened tether whose loop is still held firmly in the hand.

I see death counting and claiming every soul, and I do not see tomorrow as distant; how close indeed is today to tomorrow!

I see time as a treasure that diminishes every single night; and whatever the days decrease, time eventually exhausts it completely.

I see death picking out the generous noblemen, selecting them just as one chooses the most precious

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possession of a harsh, stingy miser.

I see the grave of a greedy miser stingy with his wealth just like the grave of a misguided profligate who wasted his life in vanity.

Attributed to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, these verses define death not as an ontological annihilation, but as an inescapable portal that all must traverse, thereby confronting humanity with the reality of transience. In questioning the nature of the "abode" beyond worldly life, the text emphasizes both the archaic human curiosity regarding the unknown and the necessity of spiritual preparation for the post-mortem state ('Abd al-Raḥīm, 2000).

المَوْتُ بَابٌ وَكُلُّ النَّاسِ دَاخِلُهُ // يَا لَيْتَ شِيعَرِي بَعْدَ الْبَابِ مَا الدَّارُ؟

Death is a door, and all mankind shall enter it; oh, would that I knew, what is the abode like after that door?

The experiences of past generations contain profound lessons and windows of insight that serve as a guide for humanity. Quss ibn Sā'idah, a renowned orator of the Jahiliyyah period, defines death as a one-way path with no return, describing with keen observation the inexorable drift of all—regardless of status, age, or stature—toward this inevitable end. By invoking the transience of the world and the universality of death, these verses invite the individual to deep contemplation, a questioning of the purpose of life, and the necessity of preparation while time remains (Al-Haythamī, 1994).

فِي الدَّاهِبِينَ الْأَوَّلِينَ // مِنْ الْقُرُونِ لَنَا بَصَائِرُ

لَمَّا رَأَيْتُ مَوَارِدًا // لِلْمَوْتِ لَيْسَ لَهَا مَصَادِرُ

وَرَأَيْتُ قَوْمِي نَحْوَهَا // يَمْضِي الْأَصَاغِرُ وَالْأَكْبَارُ

In those generations who have passed away before us, there are surely insightful lessons and illuminations for us.

When I perceived the watering places of death, which have entry points but no paths of return or exit.

And I saw my own people driving towards it, the young and the old, the small and the great alike passing away.

Al-Ḥuṭay'ah defines human existence in this world as a transient waypoint, underscoring the futility of individual endeavors and biological lifespan in the face of the destructive power of absolute time. In this context, the verses interrogate the human will to resist time, offering a pessimistic yet realistic ontology of the human condition through the inevitability of transience and the continuity of the temporal cycle (Al-Salmān, 1989).

لَعَمْرُكَ مَا رَأَيْتُ الْمَرْءَ تَبَقَى // طَرِيقَتُهُ وَإِنْ طَالَ الْبَقَاءُ

عَلَى رَيْبِ الْمَوْتِ تَدَاوَلَتْهُ // فَافْتَنَتْهُ وَلَيْسَ لَهَا فَنَاءُ

By your life, I have not seen that man's way remains even if the survival (lifespan) is prolonged.

Upon the vicissitudes of fate/death, they circulated him, thus they annihilated him, while there is no annihilation for them.

Regardless of the degree of power or security humanity perceives in this world, death—the inevitable end—remains an ever-present shadow. The entire grandeur of life, the magnificent dwellings constructed, and the wealth accumulated are, in essence, merely transient adornments. Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī underscores the futility of human vainglory regarding possessions, reminding us how the peace and prosperity experienced in a single moment are rapidly effaced by the relentless flow of time ('Abd al-Raḥīm, 2000).

كُنْ كَيْفَ شِئْتَ فَقَصْرُكَ الْمَوْتُ // لَا مَرْحَلٌ عَنْهُ وَلَا قُوْتُ
بَيْنَنَا عَنْ بَيْتٍ وَبَهْجَتُهُ // زَالَ الْغِنَى وَتَقَوَّضَ الْبَيْتُ

*Be however you wish, for your ultimate destination is death; there is no departing from it, nor any escape.
While a house enjoys its wealth and splendor; suddenly the wealth vanishes and the house crumbles away.*

The Futility of Human Endeavor in the Face of Inevitable Death

The verses in this category examine the rational helplessness of the human being in the face of death and *qadar* (divine decree), the tragic ironies of life—such as the demise of the virtuous while the corrupt endure—the profound remorse experienced at the approach of death, and the reality that death is not an end, but the inception of the ultimate trial of justice and reckoning. Ali b. al-Jahm, a prominent poet of the Abbasid era, draws attention in these verses to both the inherent weaknesses of the human internal state and the divine governance presiding over life. The presence of an agency that records one's deeds from the right and the left serves as a reminder that no moment of life occurs in a void. Yet, the irony remains: regardless of how acutely the human heart and intellect analyze events, when the definitive and potent decree of destiny arrives, all capacity for understanding and perception can be instantly obscured. That is, no matter how cautious or conscious an individual may be, in the face of the absolute determination of destiny, one is compelled to relinquish all prior knowledge and foresight (Alī ibn al-Jahm, 1949).

انْظُرْ فَعَنْ يُمْنِكَ وَيُخْكَ غَالِمٌ // يُخْصِي عَلَيْكَ وَعَنْ يَسَارِكَ كَاتِبٌ
وَأَرَى الْبَصِيرَ بِقَلْبِهِ وَبِفَهْمِهِ // يَغْمَى إِذَا حُمَّ الْقَضَاءُ الْغَالِبُ

*Look, for on your right - woe to you - is a knower counting against you, and on your left is a writer (scribe).
And I see the one who is perceptive with his heart and with his understanding becomes blind when the prevailing decree (fate/death) is destined.*

In another poem, Ali b. al-Jahm centers his discourse on the ontological impotence of the individual, who is besieged by worldly frailties, in the face of impending death and the subsequent day of reckoning. The tension between the burden of sins arising from human agency and the individual's helplessness before divine justice constitutes the focal point of the poem. The poet depicts the moment of the ultimate reckoning—neglected during the pursuit of worldly desires—as a 'breaking point.' Within this framework, the poem invites the individual to an audit of their actions, while simultaneously reconstructing—on the plane of moral self-criticism—the profound existential void between the confession of human frailty and the need for divine grace. In the final verses, while positioning the confrontation with one's own actions as the ultimate responsibility of life, he defines the awakening from worldly heedlessness as a stage of purification in the process of preparing for the eschatological reckoning (Alī ibn al-Jahm, 1949).

أَرَفَ الرَّجِيلُ وَلَيْسَ لِي مِنْ رَادٍ // غَيْرُ الذُّنُوبِ لِسُقُوتِي وَنَكَادِي
يَا غَفْلَتِي عَمَّا جَنَيْتُ وَخَيْرَتِي // يَوْمًا يُنَادَى لِلْجَسَابِ مُنَادٍ
غَلَبْتُ عَلَى شَقَاوَتِي وَمَطَامِعِي // حَتَّى قَنَيْتُ وَمَا بَلَغْتُ مُرَادِي
يَا غَافِلًا عَمَّا يَرَادُ بِهِ عَدَا // فِي مَوْقِفٍ صَغْبٍ عَلَى الْوُرَادِ
اقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كُلَّ مَا قَدَّمْتَهُ // يُخْصِي عَلَيْكَ بِصِتْحَةِ الْمِيعَادِ
كَيْفَ النَّجَاةُ لِعَبْدٍ سُوءٍ عَاجِزٍ // وَعَلَى الْجَزَائِمِ قَادِرٍ مُعْتَادِ
يَا غَافِلًا مِنْ قَبْلِ مَوْتِكَ فَاتَّعِظْ // وَالنَّاسُ لِيَوْمِ الْجَمْعِ نَوْبٌ جَدَادِ

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The departure time has drawn near, yet I have no provisions for the journey, except for my sins, owing to my misery and wretchedness.

Oh, my heedlessness toward what I have committed, and my confusion on the day when the herald calls for the reckoning.

My wretchedness and worldly desires overcame me, until my life faded away, and yet I never attained my desires.

O you who are heedless of what is intended for you tomorrow, in a station (of judgment) that is fiercely difficult for all who arrive!

Read your book! Everything you have sent forward in life will be strictly enumerated against you at the resounding blast of the Appointed Day.

How can salvation be possible for an evil, helpless servant—one who is capable of and habituated to committing crimes?

O heedless one, take warning before your death approaches, and wear the garment of mourning in preparation for the Day of Gathering!

Abū Nuwās positions death as an unexpected guest, inviting the individual to intellectual and spiritual preparation for this inevitable encounter. By defining worldly life as a transient waypoint and the afterlife as the ultimate destination, this approach underscores the necessity for the human being to reconfigure their actions through the perspective of eternity (Abū Nuwās, 1953).

المَوْتُ صَنِيفٌ فَاسْتَعِدَّ لَهُ // قَبْلَ النُّزُولِ بِأَفْضَلِ الْغِنَى
وَأَعْمَلْ لِدَارٍ أَنْتَ جَاعِلُهَا // دَارَ الْمَقَامَةِ أَجْرَ الْأَمَدِ
يَا نَفْسُ مَوْرِدَكَ الصِّرَاطُ غَدًا // فَتَاهَبِي مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَرُدِّي

Death is a guest, so prepare for it with the best of provisions before it alights.

And strive for the abode that you will make your permanent residence and final destination.

O soul, your destination tomorrow is the Sirat (Bridge); so prepare yourself before you fall.

These verses express the human dignified stance in the face of adversity, as well as the impotence of all material and spiritual defense mechanisms against the absolute will of death. Abū Dhu'ayb al-Hudhalī highlights the individual's dignified posture by framing the fortitude he exhibits against his tribulations as both a form of external perception management and an internal resistance. Yet, the moment this representation of unwavering will confronts the volition of death, it evolves into an ultimate reality where all protective measures and superstitious beliefs are rendered ineffective; thus, the text delineates the insurmountable chasm between human worldly resistance and the absolute sovereignty of *qadar* (destiny) (Al-Dhahabī, 2001).

وَتَجَلْدِي لِلشَّامِتِينَ أَرْبِهِمْ // أَتَيْ لِرَيْبِ الدَّهْرِ لَا أَتَضَعُغُ
وَإِذَا الْمَنِيَّةُ أَنْشَبَتْ أَطْفَارَهَا // أَلْفَيْتُ كُلَّ تَمِيمَةٍ لَا تَنْفَعُ

And I display my endurance to those who rejoice in my misfortune, showing them that I do not break or yield to the calamities of time.

But when death digs its claws deep (into its prey), you will find that every single amulet or protective charm becomes utterly useless.

These verses address the futility of human endeavor in the face of the absoluteness of death, the rational limits of mourning as a natural reflection of grief, and the necessity of "passing away" as the

ultimate reality of existence. In this poem, Abū Dhu'ayb al-Hudhalī emphasizes the encompassing power of death, which renders all defense mechanisms ineffective, and posits the human confrontation with the final end—irrespective of location—as an ontological necessity ('Abd al-Raḥīm, 2000).

وَإِذَا الْمَنِيَّةُ أَثْنَبَتْ أَطْفَارَهَا // أَلْفَيْتَ كُلَّ قَمِيمَةٍ لَا تَنْفَعُ
لَا بُدَّ مَنْ تَلَفَ مُقِيمٍ فَانْتَظِرْ // أَبَارِضِ قَوْمِكَ أَمْ بِأُخْرَى الْمَصْرُغِ
وَلَقَدْ أَرَى أَنَّ الْبُكَاءَ سَفَاهَةٌ // وَلَسَوْفَ يُوَلِّغُ بِالْبُكَاءِ مَنْ يُفْجَعُ
وَلَيَأْتِيَنَّ عَلَيْكَ يَوْمٌ مَرَّةً // يُنْكِي عَلَيْكَ مُقْتَعًا لَا تَسْمَعُ

When death digs its claws deep, you will find that every single amulet becomes utterly useless.

Since an abiding destruction (death) is inevitable, then wait and see: will your place of death be in the land of your own people, or in another land?

Indeed, I consider weeping to be a folly; yet, he who is struck by a devastating calamity will surely become consumed by weeping.

And a day will surely come upon you, when you will be wept over while shrouded (covered), unable to hear.

The following verses illuminate the transience of life and the inevitability of destiny with striking realism. Sherif al-Murtada employs a metaphor of flight and pursuit to depict the human lifespan, reminding us with profound wisdom that escape from the clutches of time is impossible. In these jarring verses, the helplessness of the human being before the resolute strides of death—which overtakes even the swiftest—and the ultimate cessation of existence find a timeless resonance (Al-Dhahabī, 2001).

أُرُونِي امْرَأً مِنْ قَبْضَةِ الدَّهْرِ مَارِقًا // وَمَنْ لَيْسَ يَوْمًا لِلْمَنِيَّةِ دَائِقًا
هُوَ الْمَوْتُ رَكَضًا إِلَى كُلِّ مُهْجَةٍ // يُكَلِّمُ مَطَائِنًا وَيُعْيِي السَّوَابِقَا
فَإِنْ هُوَ وَلَّى هَارِبًا فَهُوَ فَائِثٌ // وَإِنْ كَانَ يَوْمًا طَالِبًا كَانَ لَاحِقًا
يَسْعَى الْفَتَى وَخُبُولُ الْمَوْتِ تَطْلُبُهُ // وَإِنْ نَوَى وَفَقَهُ فَالْمَوْتُ مَا يَقِفُ

Show me a single man who has escaped the grip of time! Or anyone who will not, one day, taste death?

Death is a sprinter racing towards every single soul; it exhausts our mounts and wears out even the fastest of racing steeds.

If it (death) were to turn back and flee, it could be escaped; but if it comes one day as a pursuer, it is bound to catch up.

The youth strives and runs while the horses of death chase after him; even if he intends to make a halt, death never stops.

In another poem, Sherif al-Murtaḍā treats the archaic tension between the human desire for survival and the resignation to the inevitable end with philosophical depth. As the poet interrogates the endeavor to preserve life and the futility of accumulated worldly possessions, he confronts the chilling reality of transience. These compelling verses—wherein wealth transforms into an inheritance for those who remain and a source of lamentation against the Provider of sustenance—lay bare the ephemeral nature of worldly goods and life itself with jarring clarity ('Abd al-Raḥīm, 2000).

شَهِيٍّ إِلَى النَّاسِ النَّجَاءُ مِنَ الرَّدَى // وَلَا غُلُقَ إِلَّا وَهُوَ فِي فِتْرِ خَانِقِ
وَمَا جَمَعِيَ الْأَمْوَالُ إِلَّا غَنِيمَةً // لِمَنْ عَاشَ بَغْدِي وَإِنِّهَا مَأْزِقِي

Escaping from destruction (death) is desirable and sweet to people; yet there is not a single neck except that

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it is caught within a suffocating noose.

My gathering of wealth is nothing but a windfall (booty) for whoever lives after me, and an accusation (distrust) against my Provider.

al-Ma'arri skillfully explores, through historical and theological narratives, how the fear of death compels humanity toward profound searching and exertion. While articulating that deep-seated anxiety—ranging from those seeking refuge in caves to those constructing vessels—the poet interrogates the contradiction between the human desire for eternity and the pursuit of worldly sanctuaries. Despite the promise of paradise, the profound restlessness remaining in the soul and the unsettling quest engendered by the reality of death are reflected in these verses as a timeless human experience (al-Ma'arri, 1924).

وَحَوْفُ الرَّدَى آوَى إِلَى الْكَهْفِ أَهْلُهُ // وَكَلَّفَ نُوحًا وَابْنَهُ عَمَلِ السُّفُنِ
وَمَا اسْتَعْدَبَتْهُ رُوحُ مُوسَى وَآدَمَ // وَقَدْ وَعَدَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ جَنَّاتِي عَدْنِ

It was the fear of destruction that drove the People of the Cave to seek refuge in the cave, and compelled Noah and his son to build the ark.

Neither the soul of Moses nor Adam found death to be sweet, even though they both were promised the twin Gardens of Eden after it.

Al-Mutanabbī, one of the renowned poets of the Abbasid era, expresses in a verse the despair of separation and death—the shared destiny of humanity—with a profound sense of resignation. Reminding us that those who preceded us were also severed from their loved ones, the poet underscores the inadequacy of medicine and human power in the face of death (Al-Iḥṣānī, 1992)

وَقَدْ فَارَقَ النَّاسُ الْأَجْبَةَ قَبْلَنَا // وَأَعْيَا دَوَاءُ الْمَوْتِ كُلُّ طَبِيبٍ

People before us have also parted from their loved ones; for the cure of death has exhausted every physician.

In another verse, al-Mutanabbī shifts the focus from lamenting the dead—asking "why did they die?"—to expressing astonishment at those who survive despite the myriad perils of existence, thereby highlighting the fragility of life. By viewing death as the normative state and life as a miraculous exception, this perspective reminds the individual of the value of existence through a striking irony (ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, 2000).

لَا تَعْجَبَنَّ مِنْ هَالِكٍ كَيْفَ تَوَى // بَلْ فَاعْجَبَنَّ مِنْ سَالِمٍ كَيْفَ نَجَا

Do not wonder about the perished one, how he passed away; but rather wonder about the safe and sound one, how he escaped.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that death occupies a central and multidimensional position in Classical Arabic poetry, extending far beyond its literal meaning as the termination of biological life. Through a thematic examination of poetic texts from the Jāhili, Ṣaḍr al-Islām, Umayyad, and Abbasid periods, it becomes evident that death functions simultaneously as an ontological reality, a psychological experience, a moral reminder, and a metaphysical transition.

The analysis demonstrates that the theme of death is represented in three primary forms. First, some poets have depicted death as a sanctuary providing release from the tribulations of worldly life, evaluating it as a vehicle for peace, mercy, and liberation from suffering. Second, death is presented as an inevitable fate awaiting all people, regardless of wealth, social status, courage, or power; thus, the absolute equality of humans in the face of death is emphasized. Third, in many poems, the limitations

of human effort in the face of divine decree are underscored, articulating the inadequacy of human reason, worldly ambitions, and material wealth when confronted with the reality of death.

Although the poets examined differ in terms of their historical periods and poetic styles, they share a common understanding that human life is transient and that death is the most definitive truth of existence. Nevertheless, with the advent of Islam, a significant transformation occurred in the perception of death. While death in *Jahiliyyah* poetry is predominantly associated with inevitable fate and the destructive power of *dahr* (time), in the poetry of the Islamic era, it has been recontextualized within the framework of divine decree, the responsibility of accountability, and the afterlife.

In conclusion, death in classical Arabic poetry is not merely a poetic theme; it is a profound field of philosophical and moral inquiry through which poets interrogate human existential fragility, the meaning of life, and the relationship between man, destiny, and the Almighty. By employing a thematic approach to illuminate the ontological and psychological dimensions of the theme of death in classical Arabic poetry, this study contributes to the relevant scholarly literature.

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