Canadian Social Science
Vol. 6, No. 6, 2010, pp. 31-44

ISSN 1712-8056 [Print]
ISSN 1923-6697[Online]
www.cscanada.net
www.cscanada.org

Aesthetic Dying:

The Arab's Heroic Encounter with Death

LA MORT ESTHETIQUE:

LA RENCONTRE HEROÏQUE ARABE AVEC LA MORT

Nayef Ali. Al-Joulan[1]

Abstract: This paper examines the classical Arab poet Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb's poem "Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb Yarthy Nafsah", "Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb mourning his own death", to underline elegiac patterns in Arabic poetry and pave the way for comparative studies of self elegies and elegiac verse across cultures and languages. It is to be asserted that this study of Ibn Ar-Rayb's self-elegy is not meant to exclude the abundant elegiac verse in Arab culture; rather, it is a case study of a representative example of an Arab poet who wrote an elegy in which he mourned his conceived death, a particular case of mourning. It turns out that the elegiac pattern of the poem adopts sorrow, sincerity, and praise at its core while emphasizing the qualities of the mind and the spirit, and transforming personal grief into universal philosophical statements on the futility of human existence, death, human relations, and poetic creativity. Poetry is celebrated as a distinction the loss of which to mourn, the power of which to pride oneself at, and the help of which to invoke in order to eloquently (still sincerely) express the situation of mourning and, at the same time, immortalize the poet.
Keywords: Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb; Arabic poetry; elegy; death; "*riTHaa?*"

Résumé: Cet article examine le poème "Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb Yarthy Nafsah" - "Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb en deuil de sa propre mort" d'un poète arabe classique Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb, afin de souligner les modèles élégiaque dans la poésie arabe et ouvrir la voie à des études comparatives des auto-élégies et des vers élégiaques à travers les cultures et les langues. Il doit être affirmé que cette étude sur l'auto-élégie d'Ibn Ar-Rayb n'est pas destinée à exclure les versets élégiaques abondants dans la culture arabe; c'est plutôt une étude de cas d'un exemple représentatif d'un poète arabe qui a écrit une élégie dans laquelle il a pleuré sa mort imaginée, un cas particulier de deuil. Il s'avère que le modèle élégiaque du poème adopte la douleur, la sincérité, et la louange à la base tout en mettant l'accent sur les qualités de la pensée et de l'esprit, et en transformant la douleur personnelle en énoncés philosophiques universels sur la futilité de l'existence humaine, la mort, les relations humaines , et la créativité poétique. La poésie est célébrée comme une

[1] Dr. Nayef A. Al-Joulan, Department of English. Al al-Bayt University. Mafraq, JORDAN. Email: Nayef-Ali@rocketmail.com
*Received on May 27, 2010; accepted on July 15, 2010

distinction dont la perte est à déplorer, la puissance est à faire l'honneur, et l'aide de laquelle est à invoquer afin d'exprimer éloquement (encore sincèrement) la situation de deuil et, en même temps, immortaliser le poète.

Mots-clés: Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb; poésie arabe; élégie, mort; "riTHaa?"

Poets have come up with much verse that deals with death, whether of man (humanity), a relative, a friend, their own selves, and, even, their animals, places, and lost love (Luck; Ross; West, 3ff; Lyne, 201ff; O'Gorman, 105-9). Elegies and elegiac verse have occupied a considerable space in the poetry of mankind. Poets have employed elegies, lamenting lyrics, to express emotions of sorrow, despair, and woe, rendering their mourning into utterances carrying their personal bereavement in absolute sincerity of emotion. Grief, brevity, and sincerity are chief characteristics of elegies. For example, English poetry has known many elegies such as, to name few, Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break" and *In Memoriam*, the latter a collection of over a hundred lyrics centering around the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, moving on to comments on human life and destiny. Of the other famous English elegies there are Matthew Arnold's "Rugby Chapel", a recording of grief on the death of his father, and Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", one of the most famous in English, where the poet passes from personal grief to pessimistic reflections on human life in general, such as matters of human suffering, shortness, triviality, and vulnerability of human life, and the futility of human ambition, philosophical and religious thoughts that find their way in most elegies (Ross, Lyne, O'Gorman).

However, English literature has known a special kind of elegiac verse called 'pastoral elegy', in which the mourning poet puts on the attire of the shepherd as he mourns the death of a fellow shepherd, such as Edmund Spenser's "Astrophel", John Milton's "Lycidas", Shelley's "Adonais", Keats's "When I have Fears that I may Cease to be", and Arnold's "Thyrsis" and "Scholar Gipsy", notwithstanding the abundance of legiac verse in the eighteenth-century graveyard school of poetry. This tradition flourished among the Greeks in the works of Theocritus and Bions, and in the works of Virgil in ancient Rome. One major distinction to be assigned to pastoral elegy is that, as a work of art drawing on images of rural scenery and artificial conventions, it lacks genuine sincerity of grief and lament (Day, Luck, Ross, West, Connolly, Lyne, O'Gorman, Wyke 1989, Wyke 1994). Traditionally, in elegies poets pour out their frustrations, despairs, and anxieties and all nature joins them in the mourning of death, despite the fact that, mainly in pastoral elegy, death is celebrated as a natural matter that fulfills the course of the cycle of life and death in nature. And in general terms, traditional elegies argue the glory of the dead and the heaviness of his loss.

On the other hand, Arabic poetry is overloaded with elegiac verse called "*riTHaa?*". Sorrow constitutes the main ingredient of the Arabic poem (*qasiida*) which threads together all its components. Arab poets expressed utter sincerity of emotions in their reflections of sorrow, bereavement, and despair along with images of physical weakness, fatigue, and apathy. It is even asserted that *riTHaa?* is the most sincere and honest type of poetry, because it is written under *true* pain, away from all that harms morality and honor, and is hence devoid of satire, flirtation, wooing, eroticism, impudence, indecency, and dissipation (Al Asma'i, in Abd-el-Wahaab, 165). Crying, weeping, and tears take a leading role in the Arabic *riTHaa? qasiida*, as translations of the sorrow of the heart and a healing of it; a putting off of the fire that burns inside the weeper's saddened heart, an Aristotelian cathartic effect (Joboury, 218). Weeping and tears reveal also the spontaneous uncontrollable overflow of the emotions of the mourner who can find no other ingredients of sorrow to bring into his elegy, asserting hence his sincerity. Nonetheless, recalling the honorable heroic past of the dead, his physical strength and chivalric deeds accompany a more important remembrance of his mental and spiritual traits, such as kind spirit, wisdom, intelligence, valuable and rich discourse, and sublime poetry. Sagacity and intellectual distinctions of the mind of the dead overshadow his physical (animalistic) traits in the *riTHaa? qasiida* as the poet counters heroism and bravery in battle with justice, honesty, chastity, and intellectuality, the second group of which suits better the praise of the one whose dead body neutralizes the chance for any overstated physical praise (Ja'far, 43). Indeed, critics have seen elegiac verse along with the poetry of praise, a praise of the dead though (Shak'ah, 133; Mowafi, 35; Isma'il, 362-2). Mourning poets universalize personal grief as they pass to mourning life at large; the present and the future of the mourned becomes the present and the future of life as a whole, its futility and triviality becoming realized. Here poets deal with philosophical thoughts on the inevitable destiny of mankind (Salih, 42).

In the pre-Islam period as well as after the coming of Islam, *riTHaa?* poets never attempted to question the reality of death and took for granted its control on humanity, except for the difference in their perception of the power that stands behind it, as to whether they believed in God and afterlife or not. In fact, in both periods, poets, just like their communities, realized their vulnerable existence before the inevitability of death, against which they felt powerless and therefore only amused themselves in leaving behind deeds and traits that would keep their fame, which in both cases would mean qualities such as bravery, wisdom, and the like, except for some differences that Islam generated, particularly regarding deeds that would be deemed irreligious. It is even believed that much elegiac Arabic verse does not include references to the peoples' or the poets' struggle against death, *time's power*, for lack of them in reality, as the people took for granted the actuality of death which also stood before them as a reminder of the coming of their own death. It is more depressing for the pre-Islam poet to think of his own death, for it was extremely worrying for him and for his community not to know the enigmatic domains to which the dead moves. On the other hand, Islam eliminated that fear by implanting the idea of an easeful afterlife, providing the poet hence with an alternative acceptable solution, death being tranquilly accepted as God's reassuring and peaceful destiny. This has necessarily generated a difference between pre-Islam and post-Islam elegiac poetry, a matter that is beyond the scope of this paper (Salih, 101-3; Abdraboh, 345).

The aesthetic building of the Arabic *riTHaa? qasiida* incorporates introductions that would not oppose the sincere emotions of sorrow and woe, such as the well-known ruins or remains introductory nostalgic lines, characteristic of classical Arabic poetry, as they remind of the lost home and distant past, and hence reinstate the sense of calamity and reassure feelings of passion, sadness, loneliness, exile, and anxiety. Other major introductions poets used in this regard are those of crying (over) youth (weeping over lost youth, bewailing premature death), chivalry, and knighthood (Salih, 137; Ibn Qutaybah, 28). The Arabic *riTHaa? qasiida* is also characterized by unity of the topic of the disaster of death and sorrow-related calamities which would intensify the heavy burden death generates, for the use of introductions as those mentioned above, the employment of images of the lost home and youth, and the blaming of time and life, all intensify the elegiac tone at the center of the poem. Then comes the core part which is the sad announcement of the death of the person mourned, followed by a tightened conclusion, with universal philosophical statements on human life at large (Al-Hamawi, 159). Music is an essential component in the *riTHaa? qasiida*, a frame for the poet's passions and the general atmosphere of his poem and, therefore, meter should fit the poem's topic (Dhaif, 301; Ibn Rashig, 134; Al-Askarani, 145; Al-Gurtajini, 69, 205; Hadarah, 439; Abdeen, 19).[2]

Writing about the poet's own death is an established tradition in Arabic poetry and one of the most famous Arab poets to have written about his own death is Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb, whose poetry has become a notable example on mourning the self (Bagazi, 87).[3] Ibn Ar-Rayb is an Islamic prolific poet who grew up in the Badia of Tamim in Al-Basra. Historians believe that he satirized Al-Hajjaj and then flew away to become, consequently, a thief and a killer, before he embraced Islam and led an ascetic life to join later the army of Sa'eed Ibn Affan. Some historians, however, argue that he was in the company of Ibn Affan when a snake bit him and, feeling and fearing inevitable death, recited his famous elegy, lamenting and mourning his own demise. Others claim that he recited his elegiac verses mourning his death when he fell to sickness while in Khorasaan, a year before his death. Nonetheless, a third group argue that he was in the battlefield along with Ibn Affan when he was stabbed to death. (Gabaawah, 620). This article examines the classical Arab poet Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb's poem "Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb Yarthy Nafsah", *"Malik Ibn Ar-Rayb mourning his own death"*, to underline elegiac patterns in Arabic poetry and pave the way for comparative studies of self elegies and elegiac verse across cultures and languages. It is to be asserted that this study of Ibn Ar-Rayb's self-elegy is not meant to exclude the abundant elegiac verse in Arab culture; rather, it is a case study of a representative example of an Arab poet who wrote an elegy in which he mourned his conceived death, a particular case of mourning.

---

[2]. Critics have identified a number of sounds and words that reveal psychological status. Fore example, the strong sounds [r], [GH], and [ḍ] are linked to anxiety and disorder (Bagazi, 1-20).

[3]. The dates of birth and death of Ibn Ar-Rayb are controversial. However, it is generally agreed that he was born close to the emergence of the Umayyad state, around the year forty A.D., and that he died not long before the year fifty-nine A.D., leaving behind a father, mother, son, two daughters and brothers (Al-Khish, 63-4 (Arabic); Al-Khish (English); Farookh, 260).

In his self-elegy (quoted in Arabic, interpreted and broadly transcribed in the appendix), Ibn Ar-Rayb conceives his own death and, under fear that he will inevitably cease to be, starts mourning his own loss. He invokes his poetry to help him visit his far away home to meet his family, kinsfolk, beloved, and people, and he implants into the essence of his verses his happy, honorable, and worth-remembering past. His mind is overloaded with thoughts on unfulfilled desires and dear people, animals, places, deeds, and qualities which his fear of death generates and of which death will deprive him. As he recalls his homeland and beloved, he explains the heroic and religious motives for which he left his sons, fellow people and possessions, while at the same time wishing that news of his dying would be passed back to home. The poem's varied elements and the poet's numerous superficially paradoxical thoughts simultaneously coexist, each leading to, and led to by, the other in the sense of Freudian association, as if they are all felt at once. He thinks of past and present altogether, and momentary sensation overlaps and intermingles with recalled elements. He imagines his faithful sword, spear, and horse weeping over his death early in the poem alluding to his past chivalric and heroic deeds and achievements and then later in the poem his mother, sisters, aunts, and beloveds, bewailing his loss, suggesting his devotion to his family and relatives, and hinting at his past knightly love affairs, asserting an essential quality of manhood, which is a reflection of his overall significance as an ideal man desired, loved, and pursued by women. Every now and then the heroic, knightly, muscular, leading, and gentle image he is portrayed to have had, is juxtaposed with images of a grave in a dry, desolate, desert (wasteland), with recurring references to sand and dust and related images of a weakened body and a helpless man, begging for help – though with momentary eruptions of heroic attitudes, perhaps similar to those at the beginning of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song"; for as mentioned above, evidence of the poet's conflicting mentality marks the associated, sometimes paradoxical, images of the poet in the texture of the poem. At times he seems too given to his destiny and accepting of his ending, begging for help, asking for a decent burial and honorable immortal fame, insisting that such is his (distinctive life's) due, which suggests that he is, at the same time, never free from boasting about his character. The heroic, proud utterances are mixed together with those of exhaustion, conciliation, and surrender, suggesting both the reality of the moment of dying and also adding to the necessary contradiction of life and death and the essentially sad note of the poem, which is overloaded with images of weeping, bewailing, crying, and tears.

Ibn Ar-Rayb's well known thirty-two line elegy is a collection of painted sceneries connected by his painful conceiving of his own death, representing his sorrow in different contexts that collectively enclose an intact vision of extinction and death. The poet starts by *diving* into his distant past, recalled under the pressure of his present fear of an inevitable death. Such journey is enabled by poetry; he invokes poetry to help him satisfy the desire of visiting home — for one night at least — and once poetry responds, it evaporates from the poem's surface which turns out to be merely serving the presentation of the sensations of the poet as he recalls the well-detailed places, deeds, qualities, and other elements of the recall. Nonetheless, poetry never dissolves from the essence of the poem for it remains the fact that the poet's memory is aroused by the poetic creativity (as much as by fear of inevitable death) and the poem becomes the means of immortalizing the recalled past, the conditions of the recall, and Ibn Ar-Rayb as a poet. He recalls his past dreams, wishes, and the pleasures he had as a shepherd tending camels, memories that intensify the sadness of parting from those joyful days. He repeats the phrase 'I wish' three times in the first couple of lines, a linguistic witness to his coupled hope and joy on the one hand and depression and suffering on the other, the wished-for is no longer achievable. A. Bagazi argued that Ibn Ar-Rayb is aware that his wishes and hopes are inconceivable elements of the world of impossibility and hence resorts to the world of the conceived and achieved, the past, which is recalled with utter pleasure in the face of inevitable death (88). Nostalgia becomes an essential component of the poet's encounter with death. He goes back to his home and tribe and wanders the grazing fields. He then wishes to (?abiitanna laylatan) *sleep one night* there, a statement that not only highlights the strong love he feels for his home, people, and family but also intensifies his sense of exile and desire for a reunion with his tribe; the woe generated by the nearing of his death is intensified by the exilic distance from home.

Natural and human elements join together in the presentation of the poet's pain. Fast (Young she-) camels (?alqilaṣannwajiaa), are symbols for the continuity of life in Arabic culture at the time, represented by the image of their lively grazing in the *wealthy* valley (?alGHaḍaa) *the beloved rich valley (and woman)*, an indication of the active life of the Bedouin community, which relies mainly on raising camels; and this arouses the poet's desire to take part in that activity and have the opportunity to constantly meet his fellows,

as underlined by the use of the word (mazaaru) *shrine*. The human element comes as the poet invests the recall to remember the *beloved* dwellers of the *beloved* valley (laqad kana fiy ?ahlil GHaḍaa law dana-al GHaḍaa/ mazaaru wa laakinalGHaḍaa laysa daanyaa) *among the people of Al-ghadah (valley) for my love there was a shrine to visit, but Al-ghadah (valley or beloved) never nears* (Bagazi, 88). This is utter helplessness; the poet realizes his weakness before death which distorts the recalled memories of his desired place and woman and he can only express personal sadness, using the word (daanyaa) which literally means *coming/nearing*, but at the same time collocates with the word death, in Arabic, meaning the nearing of death. Although the words and images of the poem are all about sadness and parting, boasting references to praiseworthy deeds of honor are abundant. In lines seven and eight, knighthood, heroism, bravery, courage, and chivalric skill are incorporated to display the poet's honorable past, with reference to such weapons as sword and spear, along with the horse that cries over the death of its knight. The sword and the spear are usually overloaded with a great history (and present) of heroism and distinguished social status in Arabic culture (Al-Abd, 53-4). The image of the horse in line eight (wa ?šqara maHbukan yajurru 9anaanahuu/ ?ila lmaa?i lam yatruk lahu lmawtu saaqiyaa) *the long, blond, fair-haired horse which, pulling its rein to water, found death left it not its horseman who would drive it to water to drink*, becomes a translation of the status of the poet, thirsty for water and for life. The poet's pride in his heroic past is also evident in lines seventeen through nineteen. His faith, wisdom, and courage are all brought together in one image (?alam tarani bi9tu ḍḍalaalata bilhuda/ wa ?ṣbaHtu fiy jayšibni 9affaana GHaaziyaa) *Is it not so that I have sold perversity (aberration, deception, delusion) for religion (true guidance, Islam) and become a defender of the faith (a warrior) in Ibn Affan's army?* He hence left his home, fellow people, and family (ṭaa?i9an), *willingly and in obedience to his faith*, an act both heroic and showing religious devotion, and therefore, worth praise, totally devoid of the sense of regret that Bagazi mistakenly attached to Ibn Ar-Rayb, while interpreting line twenty-five: (wa ?aṣbaHa maaliya min ṭariifin wa taalidin/ liGHayrii wa kaana lmaalu bil?amsi maaliyaa) *And my money – made or inherited – has become others' when yesterday it was mine* (88-9). In fact, these qualities are the attributes of the stereotypical Arab hero (Dhaif, 5, 16).

The body of the dying poet occupies a position of centrality in the *riTHaa? qasiida*. Ibn Ar-Rayb's body is a representative case: (wa lamma taraa?at 9inda ,arwin maiyyatiy/ wa xalla bihaa jismi wa Haanat wafaatiyaa) *and when demise showed up at Marow (a place) and seeped into my body weakening it, and death became inevitable*. He is assured that he drank demise and starts to imagine death crawling towards him before it started to seep into his body wiping it out gradually, an image that A. Hanafi considered a painting of extreme psychological effect on arousing the emotions of the recipient (211). As Proma Tagore says of a similar attitude in Keats's poetry, "the speaker experiences an intoxication of the senses as the nightingale's music enters and becomes incorporated into his body" (73). In fact, the image of a weakened body is an essential aspect of the elegy of the self, presenting both the effect of illness and of thoughts of dying on the body of the mourner, and hence provide the background for revelation of the troubled and disturbed mind. Nonetheless, this does not contradict the every-now-and-then allusions to his physical strength, good looks, and exquisiteness. Ibn Ar-Rayb's physical description of his body remains marginal and general, a characteristic, Mekheimer Salih claimed, of Arabic heroic and *riTHaa?* poetry, restricted mainly to allusions to the strength and beauty of the dead, comparing him to the sun and the moon (Salih, 40). The poet then holds strong to life, his eyes stick to all that surrounds him and he begs his eyes to raise him to see canopus, a symbolic star denoting highness and distinction, a desire for a distinguished social and literary position (poetic genius is an essential aspect of the character of the Arab at the time). He wants to be as high and distinguished as canopus (?aquulu li?aṣHaabi rfa9uuni fa?innahuu/ yaqirru li9ayni ?an suhaylan badaaliyaa) *I asked my companions to lift my body up for it pleases me to see canopus (or to see that canopus has replaced me)*; the word/phrase (badaaliyaa) suggests both shown up/replaced me. This star is also associated with love and fame in the eyes of beautiful ladies, whom, in lines twenty and twenty-one, he desires to be told of his death may they cry and bewail over his loss, in a very emotional image of his burial in a deserted desert where the wind piles sand upon him.

As the fear of nearing death intensifies, the poet, in lines eleven through fourteen, resorts to proclamation, to ask his friends for help, to pass his testament to them, and begging them to weep over his death, as if

weeping were a recognition of his distinction.[4] In fact, the phenomena of weeping, and of asking for it, is an aesthetic component in the *riTHaa? qasiida*, as abundantly evident in, fore example, the poetry of Al-Mohalhal, Abu Thoa'yb, Zohair Ibn Al-Absi, and Al-Khansaa', the most famous Arab *riTHaa?* poet, who repeatedly calls her eyes to generously shed tears on the death of her brother and sons (Al-Khansaa', 53; Al-Shoori, 157). The poet's appeal to his friends to dig his grave with the tips of the swords and spears is part of his pride at his heroic past, for it is honorable to die in battle, and he thus wants a grave that matches that honor. As the poet delivers his testament on the place and manner of his burial, death starts to control his body and deprive him the ability to move, whereby he starts begging his friends to *pull* him closer to them, but he suddenly changes mood (lines sixteen through nineteen) ,perhaps because of imagining himself pulled, and leaves begging to boast about his independence and strength (faqad kuntu qabla lyawmi ṡa9ban qiyaadiyaa) *for, mind you, I had been difficult to be led (or tough and leading) before this day*, his courage and heroic deeds (waqad kuntu 9iṫaafan ?iða lxaylu ?adbarat/ sarii9an lada lhayjaa liman da9aaniyaa) *And I had always been a re-attacker when the horses fled away and had always been in haste to combat and fierce fighting to defend those who called upon me*, and his patience and endurance before enemies (wa yawman taraaniy fiy raHan mustadiyratin/ taxruqu ?aṫraafu rrimaHi THiyaabiiyaa) *and I would be found at times in fierce fighting with the tips of spears penetrating my dress*.

It is clear then that Ibn Ar-Rayb is torn between sorrow and pride, a state of anxiety supported by the abundance of such sounds as the strong [r] and [GH], which, as mentioned earlier, reveal psychological disorder. Praise of courage, heroism, endurance, skill on battlefield, wisdom, chastity, and love are essential in his *riTHaa? qasiida*. It is also evident that he not only mourns mankind and himself but also all life, including son, beloved, friend, money, possession, wealth, place, and animal. He hence moves on to philosophical thoughts on life, destiny, calamity, and the vulnerability of mankind, which turns the *riTHaa? qasiida*, in the words of Salih, into "a symphony of life where the poet plays different lives" (40). Images and feelings of fear of loneliness, psychological exile, dominate Arabic poems of self-bereavement (Salih; Hanafi; Bagazi; Al-Shoori). However, a recall of past dilemmas and difficulties he passed with utter determination and success provides an essential aspect in the poet's attempt to levitate and allay the shocking fear of his own death. While suffering under such fears, contemplating the disappearance of his character, he resorts to elucidated praise of his distinctions and honorable deeds and achievements which would be missed by his community after his death. Most notable of these are chivalric skills and heroic traits and accomplishments, the saddening loss of which is the soul of his self-mourning.

Although Ibn Ar-Rayb's is mainly and finally sad at the loss of his poetic endeavor, such loss remains hidden at the underlying texture of his verse, leaving his depressed mind and soul express themselves more through the human and natural images and emphasizing, superficially, the tragic loss of his heroic skills. Ibn Ar-Rayb's time elevated higher the hero over the poet, and he hence celebrates heroism more apparently. And it is the nature of his culture at the time that being a poet was one essential quality of the more important character of the hero. The people of his time sought immortality through a number of traits such as, mainly, heroism — along with bravery, skill, kind heartedness, wisdom, and religious devotion —, and poetic creativity. Ibn Ar-Rayb resorts to poetry to help him satisfy his desires, that of reliving the lost past. His attempt to recall his past within the verses of his self elegy turns his poem into an allegorical journey into the past which is consequently relived and documented (immortalized) in the poem itself, a matter that is apparent in the lines of his poem where he repeats "I wish", as discussed earlier. That is, Ibn Ar-Rayb's invocation of poetry to help him imagine traveling back home, seeing the fields, meeting with the family, beloved, friends, and tribe turns his poetry as shelter and escape from the saddening thoughts of his nearing death, which helps him also immortalize that past and its accompanying elaborations on the distinctions of his character. The poem is his easeful journey back into life again, a documentation of that life and of the poem's present situation; hence the power of poetry is maintained throughout. This rightly suggests that Ibn Ar-Rayb tried to write about death as an aesthetic experience and frame for his verse, poetry becoming the leading component in the poem, the poet's passport to the kingdom of immortal greatness that overpowers death and writes/puts it down, where the poet's aim is "not to deny the reality of evil and pain, but to conquer them by establishing their place in the harmony of life, through imaginative

[4]. Other related cases of proclamation evident in Arabic *riTHa*'? verse are those of talking to the dead asking him/her not to leave them, as fore example in line twenty-three (see Al-Hamadaani, 232 and Al-Mawla, 151), and of calling on the relatives, particularly the mother, to frequently visit the grave, as in lines twenty-six to twenty-eight.

insight" (Fogle 199), an attitude Robert Gittings described as an act of finding "relief by plunging into… 'imaginary interests'" (568). Such attitude, Barry Gradman asserted, represents "defending one aspect of his [the poet's] being, namely, his creative imagination, from an almost equally potent aspect of mind, namely, his fear of death" in order to underscore "the immortality of poetry" (134-5). This is, perhaps, what E. C. Pettet called the "belief in the supreme power of poetry" (29).

To conclude, it turns out that sorrow is a major component of the elegy of the self, which should be expressed in an utmost sense of sincerity, along with a praise of the lamented and an elaboration on *his* distinctive deeds, manners, traits, and accomplishments. That is, the elegiac pattern exemplified in Ibn Ar-Rayb's poem takes the form of praise in a sad, tragic even, note; the mourner, here the poet himself, is torn between pride and sorrow. And sorrow is presented in natural and human terms; the poet projects his sorrowful mind on nature, presenting what might be called 'the landscape of the mind', along with images of fruitfulness, fruitlessness, and friendship with the animals, while the landscape and its elements also project onto the mind of the mourner situations of sadness. And the expression of woe in human terms comes along with ideas of loneliness, loss of companionship, relatives, family, and community at large. Sadness is also expressed in connection with similar states of troubled mentality, chaotic emotions, and physical weakness. Therefore, and because the situation of dying does not allow it, Ibn Ar-Rayb reveals no overstated physical description of his lamented body; nor does he incorporate flirtation, wooing, seduction, eroticism, impudence, or indecency. More than physical strength or handsomeness, the poet emphasizes the qualities of the mind and the spirit: sagacity, wisdom, morality, kind spirit, and poetic creativity, where by he takes his elegy from personal to universal statements on the futility of human existence, mourning not only himself but life at large, within a philosophical argument on life, death, human relations, accomplishments, and poetic creativity. Concerning the question of poetic creativity, poetry is celebrated as a distinction the loss of which to mourn, the power of which to pride oneself at, and the help of which to invoke in order to eloquently (still sincerely) express the situation of mourning with the related sensations and examples, and at the same time, in order to immortalize the poet. Finally, it is hoped that with the abundance of elegiac verse in, for example, Arabic and English cultures, this paper may provoke further research on the parallel and unparallel aspects of such calamity across poets and cultures.

APPENDIX

Ibn Ar-Rayb's poem (the original text, the interpretation, and a broad transcription)

The Arabic text[5]

ألا ليـت شعـري هـل أبيتن ليلـــة
بجنب الغضى أزجي القلاص النواجيـا
فليت الغضى لم يقطع الركب عرضه
وليت الغضى ماشى الركـاب لياليـا
لقد كان في أهل الغضى لودنا الغضى
مزار، ولكن الغضـى ليـس دانيـــا
ألم ترني بعت الضلالة بالهـــــــدى
وأصبحت في جيش ابن عفان غازيـا
فلله درى يوم أترك طائعـــــــاً
بنى بأعلـى الرقمتـيـــن ومـاليـــا
ودر الظباء السانحات عشيـــــــة

يخبـرن أنـي هالـك من ورائيـا
تذكرت من يبكي علي فلم أجـــد
سوى السيـف والرمح الرديني باكيا
وأشقر محبوكاً يجر عنانـــــــه
إلى الماء لم يترك له الموت ساقيـا
ولما تراءت عند " مرو " منيتـي
وخل بهـا جسمي وحانـت وفاتيـا
أقول لأصحابي ارفعوني فانـــه
يقر لعيني أن سهيـل بدا ليـــا
فيا صاحبي رحلي، دنا الموت ، فانزلا
برابيـة ، اني مقيـم ليـاليـا
أقيمـا علي اليـوم أو بعـض ليلـة
ولا تعجلاني قـد تبين ما بيـا
وقوما إذا ما استل روحي فهيئا
لي السدر والأكفان ثـم ابكيا ليـا
وخطا بأطراف الأسنة مضجعي
وردا علـى عيني فضـل ردائيـا
ولا تحسداني بارك الله فيكمـا
من الأرض ذات العرض أن توسعا ليـا
خذاني فجراني بثوبي اليكمـا
فقد كنـت قبل اليوم صعبـاً قياديـا
وقد كنت عطافا إذا الخيل أدبرت
سريعا لدى الهيجا إلى من دعانيـا
فطوراً تراني في ظلال ونعمـة
وطوراً تراني والعتاق ركابيـا
ويوماً تراني في رحى مستديرة
تخرق أطراف الرماح ثيابيـا
وقوما على بئر السمينة أسمعا
بها الغر والبيض الحسان الروانيـا
بأنكما خلفتمـاني بـقـفـرة
تهيـل على الريح فيهـا السوافيـا
ولا تنسيا عهدي خليلي بعدما
تقطع أوصالي وتبلى عظاميـا

[5]. This Arabic text of the poem is from Bagazi, 83-6.

يقولون لا تبعد وهم يدفنونني
وأين مكان البعد إلا مكانيـــــا
غداة غد يا لهف نفسي على غد
إذا أدلجوا عني وأصبحت ثاويـــــا
وأصبح مالي من طريف وتالد
لغيري وكان المــال بالأمــس ماليـــا
فيا ليت شعري هل بكت أم مالك
كما كنـــت لــو عالوا نعيــك باكيا
إذا مت فاعتادي القبول وسلمي
على الرمس أسقيت السحاب الغواديـــا
على جدث قد جرت الريح فوقه
تراباً كلــون القسطــلاني هابيـــا
رهينة أحجار وترب تضمنت
قرارتها مني العظام البواليـــــا
وبالرمل منا نسوة لو شهدنني
بكين وفدين الطبيب المداويـــــا
فمنهن أمي وابنتاها وخالتي
وباكية أخرى تهيج البواكيـــــا
وما كان عهد الرمل مني وأهله
ذميماً ولا ودعت بالرمل قاليـــــا

Interpretation:

A general account of the poem has already been given at the beginning of the discussion of the poem. Following is an interpretation of the poem's verses, sometimes of individual lines, and at others, of groups of lines, as they match together. This interpretation does not follow the word-for-word translation method, except where extremely necessary, and rather concerns overall meaning and image, with utter emphasis on the rich connotative nature of the original lexicon, which at times need be rendered in a multitude of related meanings in the target language. Such interpretation is made out of necessity, since this research is intended for English readers, and does not hence neutralize the researchers' conservative views about literary translation.

1. Oh by my poesy I wish I would sleep a night in Al-ghadah (name of a valley in Al-Basra and also means 'beloved'), caringly tending fast young she-camels.

2. If only the riders (convoy) did not cross Al-ghadah and if only Al-ghadah (valley or beloved) sauntered (remained close to) the rider(s) for nights.

3. Among the people of Al-ghadah (valley) for my love there was a shrine to visit, but Al-ghadah (valley or beloved) never nears.

4. Is it not so that I have sold perversity (aberration, deception, delusion) for religion (true guidance, Islam) and become a defender of the faith (a warrior) in Ibn Affan's army?

5 and 6. How exquisite and virtuous I am to willingly (in good faith) left my sons (family) (kinsfolk) and money (possessions) at Al-Raggmatayn (a place in Al-Basra). And how exquisite it would be of the deer I

could capture when they showed up in the evening but refrained from doing so, if they tell my folks I left behind that I was dying.

7 and 8. And recalling those who would weep over my death I thought of none but the sword, the spear, and the long, blond, fair-haired horse which, pulling its rein to water, found death left it not its horseman who would drive it to water to drink.

9 and 10. And when demise showed up at Marow (a place) and seeped into my body weakening it, and death became inevitable, I asked my companions to lift my body up for it pleases me to see canopus (or to see that canopus has replaced me)

11-13. Oh my companions, death has neared, so please dismount to a hill, for I am staying for nights. (I am so weakened that I can not continue traveling). And, if you may, take care of me for the day or part of the night and do not haste me for I have realized what I suffer. And, please, when my soul slips away, prepare for me the nabk (Lotus jujube: a kind of trees, used for washing the body, and endowed with religious implications) and coffins, and then weep over me.

14. And make (write) my resting bed (grave) with the tips of the swords and spears and cover my eyes with the best of my clothes.

15. And, may God bless you, do not let jealousy over the spacious land you dig for me prevent you from widening my grave.

16 and 17. Take me, pull me by the dress towards you, for, mind you, I had been difficult to be lead (or tough and leading) before this day. And I had always been a re-attacker when the horses fled away and had always been in haste in combat and fierce fighting to defend those who called upon me.

18 and 19. I would be found at times in shade and bounty (happy settled life) and at others riding the well-bred (from vintage genuine origins) horses. And at times in fierce fighting with the tips of spears penetrating my dress.

20-22. And let know the kinsfolk at Be'er Sumaynah (a name of well in Al-Basra) among whom there are fair beautiful ladies, that you have left me behind in a desolate dry desert (wasteland) where the wind is piling sand over me. And do not, my companions, forget my time/era/epoch/achievements (friendship, vow, knowledge, wisdom) after my connections/attachments have been severed (my limbs dismembered) and my bones worn out and turned into dust.

23. Do not go away, they say as they burry me, but what is going away but where I am.

24 and 25. Tomorrow morning – ah my soul's desire for tomorrow – as they walk away from me and whereby I will have passed away and been buried. And my money – made or inherited – has become others' when yesterday it was mine.

26. Oh the grace of my poesy, has Malik's mother (my mother) cried as I would, had any passed me the news of her death?

27 and 28. If I die please [mother] do frequent the graves, salute the tomb, and pray (invoke) the clouds to generously rain over (water) the dry grave over which the winds have swept fade colored sands (dust).

29-31. [I am] a captive of stones and sands which deep enclose my worn out bones. And had into sand women seen me (had they seen me into sand), they would have bewailed and sacrificed themselves to the physician who would heal (revive)me. Among them are my mother, her two daughters, my aunt, and another one who, as she bewailed, erupted (stirred, moved, aroused) the other bewailing weepers.

32. For I had never been thought obnoxious at home, never performed deeds to be deemed so and, after I left my tribe, there were none of the people of my tribe to hold grudges against or hate me..

Broad Transcription

Following is a broad transcription of the poem. Attempt was made to transcribe each word separately. But it turned out necessary at times to transcribe two or more words as connected speech, without showing word-boundary, in order to maintain the poem's original sound sequence and music. The following is a key

for some the symbols used here, particular attention is to be given to capitalization (upper case) which is used to distinguish less familiar sounds from common ones:

H: voiceless pharyngeal fricative/continuant.

TH: voiceless dental fricative.

9: voiced pharyngeal continuant.

ṣ: voiceless emphatic alveolar.

GH: voiced velar fricative/continuant.

ṭ: voiceless emphatic alveolar.

q: voiced/voiceless (controversial) velar stop.

ð̣: voiced emphatic dental.

ḍ: voiced emphatic alveolar.

1. ?alaa layta ši9ri hal ?abiitanna laylatan

biĵanbilGHaḍaa ?uzjilqilaṣannwajiaa

2. fa laytalGHaḍaa lam yaqṭa9irrakbu ?ardahuu

wa laytal GHaḍaa maašarrikaaba layaliyaa

3. laqad kana fiy ?ahlil GHaḍaa law dana-al GHaḍaa

mazaaru wa laakinalGHaḍaa laysa daanyaa

4. ?alam tarani bi9tu ḍḍalaalata bilhuda

wa ?ṣbaHtu fiy jayšibni 9affaana GHaaziyaa

5. fa lillaahi durri yawma ?atruku ṭaa?i9an

bunayya[6] bi?9la rruqmatayni wa maliyyaa

6. wa durru ð̣ð̣iba?i ssaniHaati 9ašiyyatan

yuxabbirna ?anni halikun man waraa?iyaa

7. taðakkartu man yabkiy 9alayya falam ?ajid

siwa ssayfa wa rrumHa rrudayniyya baakiyyaa

8. wa ?šqara maHbukan yajurru 9anaanahuu

?ila lmaa?i lam yatruk lahu lmawtu saaqiyaa

9. wa lamma taraa?at 9inda ,arwin maiyyatiy

wa xalla bihaa jismi wa Haanat wafaatiyaa

10. ?aquulu li?aṣHaabi rfa9uuni fa?innahuu

yaqirru li9ayni ?an suhaylan badaaliyaa

11. fa yaa ṣaHibaiyya raHliy dana lmawtu fanzilaa

biraabiyatin ?inniy mugiimun layaaliyyaa

12. ?aqiima ?alaya lyawma ?aw ba9ḍalaylatin

---

6. Possibly /baniyyah/ also, meaning my fellow kinsfolk, while the earlier more agreed upon /banyya/means my sons.

wa rudda 9ala 9aynayya fadlu ridaa?iyaa

13. wa qumma ?iðaa mastalla ruuHiy fahayyi?aa
liya ssidra wa l?akfaana THumma ?ibkiyaaliyaa

14. wa xutta bi?atraafi l?sinnati madja9iy
wa ruddaa 9alaa 9aynayya fadlu ridaa?iyaa

15. wa laa taHsudaaniy baaraka llahu fiikumaa
mina l?ardi ðaati l9ardi ?an tusi9aa liyaa

16. xuðaani fajurraani biTHawbi ?ilaykumaa
faqad kuntu qabla lyawmi sa9ban qiyaadiyaa

17. waqad kuntu 9itaafan ?iða lxaylu ?adbarat
sarii9an lada lhayjaa liman da9aaniyaa

18. fatawran taraaniy fiy dilaalin wani9matin
wa tawran taraaniy wal9itaaqu rikaabiyaa

19. wa yawman taraaniy fiy raHan mustadiyratin
taxruqu ?atraafu rrimaHi THiyaabiiyaa

20. wa qawman 9alaa bi?ri ssumaynati ?asmi9aa
biha lGhurra wa lbiida lHisaana rrawaaniyaa

21. bi?annakumaa xallaftumaani biqafratin
tahiilu 9alayya rriHu fiiha ssawaafiyaa

22. wa laa tansayaa 9ahdi xaliilayya ba9damaa
taqatta9a ?awsaalii wa tablaa 9iðaamiyaa

23. yaquuluuna laa tab9ud wa hum yadinuunanii
wa ?ayna makaanu lbu9di ?illaa makaaniyaa

24. GHadaata GHadin yaalahfa nafsii 9alaa GHadin
?iðaa ?adlajuu 9anni wa ?asbaHtu THawiyaa

25. wa ?asbaHa maaliya min tariifin wa taalidin
liGHayrii wa kaana lmaalu bil?amsi maaliyaa

26. fayaa layta š9iri hal bakat /ummu maalikin
kamaa kuntu law 9aaluu na9yaki baakiyaa

27. ?iðaa mittu fa9taadi lqubuura wa sallimii
9ala rramsi /asqayti ssaHaaba lGHawaadiyaa

28. ?alaa judTHin qad jarrati rriiHu fawqahuu
turaaban kalawni lqastalaaniy haabiyaa

29. rahiinatu ?aHjaarin wa turabin tadammanat
qaraaratuhaa minni l9iaamaðaama lbawaaliyaa

30. wa birramli minna niswatun law šahidnanii

bakaynaa wa fadayna ttabiiba lmudaawiyaa

31. fa min hunna ?ummii wabnataahaa wa xaalatii
wa baakiyatin ?uxraa tuhiiju lbawaakiyaa

32. wa maa kaana 9ahdu rramli minnii wa ?ahlahuu
ðamiiman wa laa wadda9tu birramli qaaliyaa

WORKS CITED

English references

Al-Khish, Suliman. (1994). *Arab and Islamic Conquest as Seen* by Malek Ibn Al-Rayeb Al-Mazini.

Connolly, Joy. (2000). "Asymptotes of Pleasure. Thoughts on the Nature of Roman Erotic Elegy." *Arethusa 33*: 71-98.

Day, A. A. (1938). *The Origins of Latin Love Elegy.* George Olms Publishers.

Fogle, Richard H. (1949). *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley: A Comparative Study.* Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP..

Gittings, Robert. (1968). *John Keats*. London: Penguin.

Gradman, Barry. (1980). *Metamorphosis in Keats.* Sussex: Harvester.

Luck, Georg. (1959. 2d ed.). (1969). *The Latin Love Elegy.* London.

Lyne, R. O. A. M. (1998). "Love and Death. Laodamia and Protesilaus in Catullus, Propertius, and Others." *CQ 48*: 200-212.

O'Gorman, Ellen. (1997). "Love and the Family. Augustus and Ovidian Elegy." *Arethusa 30*: 103-124.

Pettet, E. C. (1996). "Keats's Romanticism." In O'Neil, Judith (ed.). *Critics on Keats: Readings in Literary Criticism.* New delhi, Universal Book Stall, 1968; repr.: 26-32.

Ross, D. O. (1975). *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry*. Gallus, Elegy, and Rome. Cambridge.

Tagore, Proma. (2000). Keats in an Age of Consumption: the "Ode to a Nightingale"". *Keats-Shelley Journal. xlix:* 67-84.

West, Martin L. (1974). "Elegy." In S*tudies in Greek Elegy and Iambus,* 1-21. Berlin and New York.

Wyke, Maria. (1989). "Mistress and Metaphor in Augustan Elegy." *Helios 16*: 25-47.

Wyke, Maria. (1994). "Taking the Woman's Part. Engendering Roman Love Elegy." *Ramus 23*: 110-128.

Arabic references

Abd-el-Wahaab, Shihaab-ed-Deen. (1965). *Nihayat Al-Arab fi Fonoon Al-Adab. Vol. 5*. Cairo: Dar Al-Kitaab Al-Misriyah.

Al-Askarani, Abu Hilaal. (1971). *Al-Sina'ataan*. Second edition. Ed. Ali Al-Bajawi and Mohammad Ibraheem. Cairo: Eesa Al-Baby and co..

Al-Gurtajini, Abu Hazim. (1966). *Minhaaj Al-Bulaghaa' wa Siraaj Al-'Udabaa'*. Introd. Mohammad Ibn Al-Khawjah. Tunis.

Al-Hamadaani. (1291). *Sharh Dewaan Abi Firaas Al-Hamadani.* Beirut: Dra Maktabat Al-Hayaat. Nd.

Al-Hamawi, Ibn Hujah. *Khazanat Al-Adab*. Cairo: Al-'Aamerah, Hijri.

Al-Khish, Suliman. (1994). *Al-Fath Al-Araby Al-Islamy fi Serat Malik Ibn Al-Rayb Al-Mazini*. Riad El_rayyes Books.

Al-Khansaa'. *Sharh dewaan Al-Khanssa' biladafati ela Maraathy Siteen Sha'erah min Shawa'er Al-Arab*. Beirut: Dar Al-Turath. Nd.

Al-Mawla, Mohammad and Al-Bajaawi, Ali. (1942). *Ayaam Al-Arab fi Al-Jahiliyah*. Cairo: 'Eesa Al-Babi.

Al-Mubrid, Mohammad Yazedd. (1976). *Al-Ta'aazi wa Lmarathy*. Ed. Mohammad Al-Dibaaji. Damascus: Matba'at Said bin Thabit.

Al-Shak'ah, Mustafa. (1958). *Fonoon Al-Shi'er fi Al-Hamadaanyeen*. Cairo: Matabat Al-Anglo.

Al-Shoori, Mustafa. (1995). *Sho'araa' Al-Rithaa' fi Al-Asr Al-Jahili: dirasah Faniyah*. Al-Jizah (Egypt): Al-Sharikah Al-Misriyah Al-'Aalamiyah lil-Nashr.

Bagazi, Abdullah Ahmad. (1987). *Rithaa' Al-Nafs fi Al-Shi'er Al-Araby*. Mecca: Al-Maktabah Al-Faysaliyah.

Dhaif, Shawgi. (1971). *Fosool fi Al-Shi'er wa Lnagd*. Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'aarif.

Farookh, Omar. (1965). *Tareekh Al-Adab Al-Araby*. Vol. 1. Beirut: Dar Al-Elm LelMalayeen.

Gabaawah, Fakhr-ed-Deen. (1984). *Al-Ikhtyarayn: Sin'at Al-Akhfash Al-Asghar*. Second edition. Mu'sasat Al-Risaalah.

Hadarah, Mohammad. (1963). *Itijahaat Al-Shi'er fi –Al-Garn Al-Thani Al-Hijri*. Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'aarif.

Hanafi, Abd Al-Haleem. (1982). *Al-Maraathy Al-Sha'biyah: al-'Adeed*. Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Misriyah Al-'Aamah.

Ibn Al-Abd, Trafah. (1958). *Dewanoho*. Ed. Ali Al-Jundi. Cairo: Matbat Al-Anglo.

Ibn Ja'far, Gudamah. (1302). *Nagd Al-Shi'er*. Constantinople: Matba'at Al-Jawa'ib. Hijri.

Mowafi, 'Uthmaan. (1975). *Min Gadaayah Al-Shi'er wa Al-Nathr*. Al—Escandariyah (Egypt): Mu'sasat Al-Thagafah Al-Jam'iyah.

Salih, Mekheimer. (1981). *Rithaa' Al-Abnaa' fi Al-Shi'r Al-Araby ela Nihayat Al-garn Al-Thamin Al-Hijri*. Zarqa (Jordan): Maktabat Al-Manaar.