



EXPLORING *Qarâra al-Mawjah*: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ITS LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines Nâzik al-Malâ'ika's *Qarâra al-Mawja* (The Bottom/Depth of the Wave) as a significant landmark in the development of modern Arabic poetry. Published in 1957 and comprising forty-one poems, the collection represents an important stage in al-Malâ'ika's artistic development. It demonstrates her mature engagement with free verse, psychological introspection, philosophical reflection, and modernist poetic expression.

The study focuses particularly on the symbolic significance of the title *Qarâra al-Mawja*. The "wave" represents the continual movement of human existence between ascent and descent, while its "depth" signifies introspection, latent creative energy, renewal, and the possibility of a new beginning. Thus, the apparent descent into despair becomes, paradoxically, a source of regeneration and hope. The research further analyses the collection's principal thematic concerns, including existential anxiety, memory, love, death, alienation, time, loss, social suffering, and the search for meaning.

Special attention is also given to al-Malâ'ika's formal and aesthetic innovations. Her free verse is characterised by flexible rhythm, repetition, evocative imagery, symbolic language, and a close correspondence between poetic structure and psychological experience. The study demonstrates how images of the sea, wave, darkness, light, memory, and journey function as vehicles for expressing the instability and complexity of human consciousness.

The study concludes that *Qarâra al-Mawja* transcends the boundaries of a conventional poetry collection and constitutes a profound artistic and philosophical exploration of human existence. Its synthesis of modern poetic technique, emotional intensity, symbolism, and existential thought establishes its enduring significance within modern Arabic literature.

KEYWORDS: Nâzik al-Malâ'ika, *Qarâra al-Mawja*, Modern Arabic Poetry, Free Verse, Existentialism, Symbolism, Memory and Alienation, Poetic Modernism, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Nâzik al-Malâ'ika occupies a distinguished position in the history of modern Arabic literature, particularly as one of the pioneering voices of Arabic free verse. Her poetic career coincided with a period of profound transformation in Arabic literary expression, when poets began to reconsider inherited conventions of metre, structure, imagery, and poetic language. Within this context, *Qarâra al-Mawjah* (The Depth of the Wave, 1957) represents an important stage in the development of her poetic vision. The collection demonstrates her increasing mastery of free verse and reveals a movement from formal experimentation towards a more mature engagement with psychological, philosophical, and existential questions.

The title *Qarâra al-Mawja* gives an important clue to the main ideas and style of the collection. The word *mawja* (wave) suggests continuous movement, change, and the rise and fall of life. The word *qarâra*, meaning depth or bottom, suggests looking inward, thinking deeply, and examining oneself. The poet does not see the bottom of the wave as a sign of failure or an end. Instead, it is a hidden source of strength from which a new rise can begin. Thus, the title expresses an important idea in al-Malâ'ika's thought: a period of decline can lead to a new rise, and despair can also create hope for renewal.

The collection consists of forty-one poems, which together form an artistic and philosophical journey through a wide range of emotional and intellectual experiences. Al-Malâ'ika moves between personal introspection and universal human concerns, between solitude and solidarity, and between despair and the possibility of awakening. The recurring wave imagery unifies these apparently contrasting states and gives the collection a coherent philosophical structure. Existence itself is represented as a continuous process of decline and resurgence, in which every descent contains the potential for another ascent.

One of the most significant features of *Qarâra al-Mawja* is its treatment of free verse as a medium for psychological expression. Al-Malâ'ika does not employ free verse merely to depart from traditional metrical patterns; rather, she adapts rhythm to the emotional movement of the poetic voice. Her poetic form frequently corresponds to psychological states such as grief, longing, anxiety, and recollection. Consequently, rhythm becomes an expressive instrument through which the inner world of the poet is communicated. This development marks an important stage in her modernist poetic practice.



The collection is also characterised by a rich system of symbolic and natural imagery. The sea and the wave are among its most important recurring symbols. The wave signifies movement, desire, memory and transcendence, while the depth of the sea suggests the unconscious, introspection and the hidden dimensions of human existence. Images of darkness, night, light and the sea repeatedly establish a dialogue between the external world and the inner consciousness of the poet. In this way, nature becomes more than a decorative element: it functions as a symbolic language through which psychological and philosophical experiences are articulated.

The problem of time, mortality, and decay constitutes another important dimension of the anthology. Al-Malâ'ika presents human existence as vulnerable to the passage of time, loss and death. Yet her poetry does not remain confined to pessimism. Memory becomes a means of resisting disappearance, while poetic creation provides a possibility of transcending temporal limitations. The desire to move beyond the restrictions of time and mortality appears alongside an awareness of the inevitability of decay.

Thematically, *Qarâra al-Mawja* brings together the personal, philosophical, and social dimensions of human experience. Its poems engage with existential anxiety, love, memory, alienation, death, fear, hope and the search for meaning. The poet frequently portrays the individual as caught within the currents of time and destiny, much like a wave subjected to continuous movement. These concerns place the collection within the wider intellectual atmosphere of twentieth-century modernism while retaining a distinctly Arabic poetic sensibility.

At the same time, the collection contains a persistent movement towards renewal and affirmation. Poems such as *Da'wah ilâ al-Hayâh* (*Invitation to Life*) mark a movement from sorrow and disillusionment towards vitality and creative affirmation. Similarly, memory, love and faith are represented not simply as sources of suffering but as forces capable of preserving meaning after emotional or existential crisis.

Therefore, *Qarâra al-Mawja* should be approached not merely as a collection of individual poems but as a coherent poetic and philosophical composition. Its importance lies in the interaction between form and meaning, symbolism and psychology, tradition and modernity.

The wave becomes an overarching metaphor for the human condition, while the depth becomes the fertile space in which reflection, suffering and creative energy generate renewal. The collection consequently demonstrates al-Malâ'ika's ability to combine intellectual depth with emotional sensitivity and modern poetic technique.

It is worth noting that the present study seeks to examine the collection from literary, thematic and aesthetic perspectives. Particular attention is given to the significance of its title, its use of free verse, its symbolic imagery, its treatment of existential and psychological concerns, and its representation of memory, time, alienation, death, and renewal. The study argues that *Qarâra al-Mawja* represents a significant expression of al-Malâ'ika's mature poetic consciousness and constitutes an important contribution to the development of modern Arabic poetry.

Brief Biography of Nâzik al-Malâ'ika

The poet Nâzik al-Malâ'ika was born in Baghdad in 1923 and grew up in an intellectually and culturally cultivated household. She was raised under the care of her mother, the poet Salmâ 'Abd al-Razzâq, Umm Nizâr al-Malâ'ika, and her father, the literary scholar and researcher Şâdiq al-Malâ'ika. Growing up in such an environment provided her with favourable conditions for intellectual development and literary cultivation from an early age.

After completing her secondary education, she joined the Higher Teachers' Training College, from which she graduated with distinction in 1944. In 1950, she travelled to the United States of America to pursue further studies in the English language and its literature, in addition to her studies in Arabic literature, in which she had already obtained a qualification. She subsequently worked as an Assistant Professor at the College of Education, University of Basra.

Nâzik al-Malâ'ika was proficient in several languages, including English, French, German, and Latin, in addition to Arabic. She obtained a bachelor's degree in Arabic from the College of Education in Baghdad and a master's degree in Comparative Literature from the University of Wisconsin in the United States. Her linguistic and academic training greatly broadened her intellectual horizons and contributed to the development of her literary and critical thought.

In 1965, she represented Iraq at the Arab Writers' Conference held in Baghdad, reflecting the recognition she had already achieved as an important literary figure.¹

Her Major Literary Works

Nâzik al-Malâ'ika produced a substantial body of poetry as well as important works of literary and social criticism. Her principal poetry collections include:

- (i) *Âshiqât al-Layl* (*The Night Lover*), published in 1947.
- (ii) *Shazâyâ wa Ramâd* (*Fragments and Ashes*), published in 1949.
- (iii) *Qarârat al-Mawja* (*The Depth of the Wave*), published in 1957.
- (iv) *Shajarat al-Qamar* (*The Tree of the Moon*), published in 1965.
- (v) *Ma'sât al-Hayât wa Ughniyat li-l-Insân* (*The Tragedy of Life and a Song for Humanity*), published in 1977.
- (vi) *Li-l-Şalât wa al-Thawra* (*For Prayer and Revolution*), published in 1978.



(vii) *Yughayyir al-Baḥr Alwānahu (The Sea Changes Its Colours)*, which was published in several editions.

(viii) *Al-A'māl al-Kāmila (The Complete Works)*, published in two volumes in several editions.²

In addition to her poetry, al-Malā'ika wrote several important prose and critical works, including:

(i) *Qaḍāyā al-Shi'r al-Mu'āṣir (Issues of Contemporary Poetry)*;

(ii) *Al-Tajzi'yya fī al-Mujtama' al-'Arabī (Fragmentation in Arab Society)*;

(iii) *Al-Ṣawma'a wa al-Shurfa al-Ḥamrā' (The Convent and the Red Balcony)*; and

(iv) *Sīkūlūjiyyat al-Shi'r (The Psychology of Poetry)*.

Her literary significance has attracted considerable scholarly attention, and numerous studies and university theses have been devoted to her work at Arab and Western universities.³

The Beginning of Her Poetic Career

Nāzik al-Malā'ika published her first poetry collection, *Āshiqāt al-Layl (The Night Lover)*, in 1947. The poems in this collection were characterised by a profound atmosphere of sadness and melancholy. According to the literary critic Marūn 'Abbūd, wherever one turns in *Āshiqāt al-Layl*, one encounters scenes of mourning, lamentation, pain and sorrow. The collection therefore reveals the emotional intensity that characterised al-Malā'ika's early poetic voice.

Her second collection, *Shazāyā wa Ramād (Fragments and Ashes)*, appeared in 1949 and generated considerable literary discussion. It was during this period that al-Malā'ika became closely associated with the emergence of free verse in modern Arabic poetry. Her name was subsequently linked with that of the Iraqi poet Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb in discussions concerning the precedence of free-verse composition.⁴

Nāzik al-Malā'ika and the Emergence of Free Verse

The question of who first composed Arabic free verse became an important subject of literary debate between Nāzik al-Malā'ika and Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb. Both were associated with the early development of this new poetic movement, and each was at times regarded as having priority in its emergence.

In her book *Qaḍāyā al-Shi'r al-Mu'āṣir (Issues of Contemporary Poetry)*, al-Malā'ika initially maintained that the free-verse movement began in 1947 in Iraq, particularly in Baghdad, before spreading throughout the Arab world. She regarded her poem *Al-Kūlîrâ (Cholera)* as the first free-verse poem to be published, stating that it was written according to the al-Mutadārik (al-Khabab) metre. Her account presented the emergence of free verse as a movement originating in Baghdad and subsequently extending throughout the Arab literary world.

However, al-Malā'ika later revised this assertion. In the preface to the fifth edition of *Qaḍāyā al-Shi'r al-Mu'āṣir*, she acknowledged that when the book was first published in 1962, she had concluded that free verse had originated in Iraq and then spread to other Arab countries. She subsequently discovered that examples of free verse had appeared in the Arab world before 1947. According to her revised understanding, many free-verse poems had already appeared in literary magazines and books from 1932 onwards.

She explained that she learned of these earlier examples through the writings of researchers and commentators, although she herself had not yet examined those poems directly in their sources. This later admission is particularly significant because it demonstrates her willingness to reconsider an earlier literary-historical judgement in light of subsequently discovered evidence.

Thus, Nāzik al-Malā'ika's literary career represents an important intersection of poetic innovation, literary criticism and intellectual inquiry. Her early collections helped establish her reputation as one of the major voices of modern Arabic poetry, while her critical writings provided a theoretical framework for understanding the transformations taking place in Arabic poetic form. Her recognition of the complexity of the history of free verse also illustrates the evolving nature of literary scholarship surrounding the modernist movement.⁵

Qarāra al-Mawja: An Introduction

The collection of poetry titled *Qarāra al-Mawja* was not chosen arbitrarily; it carries with it profound symbolic significance that reflects Nāzik al-Malā'ika's poetic vision and her philosophical understanding of life and creativity. From the dialogues found in the preliminary pages of the anthology, we notice several reasons behind al-Malā'ika's preference for this title.

Al-Malā'ika highlights the contrast between the wave's highest point (the crest or summit) and its lowest point (the bottom or depth). The crest represents temporary triumph and exhilaration, yet it is followed inevitably by decline and descent. By contrast, the bottom (*Qarāra*) is not simply failure or emptiness; it is the point of rest, reflection, and hidden energy from which a new surge begins. This symbolism resonates with her worldview. It was the true creativity and renewal that emerged not from superficial peaks but from inner depths.

In the quoted dialogue, the poetess expresses disdain for the "summit" (*al-qimma*), calling it "cold" and lifeless. For her, reaching the summit represents a state of exhaustion and decline rather than fulfilment. She notes that she writes "cold poems" at such points, suggesting that triumph is sterile, unable to sustain creative intensity. Thus, she turns away from the summit and embraces the bottom of the wave as a richer and warmer metaphor.



Al-Malâ'ika describes the bottom not as an end but as "a rest that contains within it the seed of deepening, of hot emergence, and of ascent to the next summit." In other words, the bottom of the wave is the womb of creativity, a hidden source of energy where reflection leads to rebirth. By naming her anthology after this image, she implies that her poetry emerges from the depths of human experience, pain, alienation, and meditation, rather than from superficial heights.

The title reflects her broader existential concerns. Life, like the wave, oscillates between highs and lows, but meaning is not found in the fleeting peak. Instead, it is discovered in the depths where struggle, silence, and internal conflict prepare the soul for renewal. Thus, *Qarâra al-Mawja* encapsulates her philosophical outlook: that poetry and existence are processes of continual descent and ascent.

Although the bottom might seem negative, she insists that her title is optimistic. To her, the bottom is not stagnation but the point of future energy. It is the beginning of a motion toward another crest. This paradox of hope within despair mirrors her poetic tone, which often oscillates between sorrow and renewal.

Nâzik al-Malâ'ika named her anthology *Qarâra al-Mawja* to symbolise the fertile depths of human experience from which true creativity and renewal spring. Unlike the summit, which she saw as cold and final, the bottom of the wave embodies hidden strength, introspection, and the potential for rebirth. The title, therefore, reflects both her personal philosophy of existence and her artistic vision, making it a fitting emblem for a collection that seeks to explore the profound themes of struggle, despair, and the promise of regeneration.

The following excerpt relates to the entitlement of the anthology, *Qarâra al-Mawja* as follows:

"The First (mockingly): 'How generous of you. I would like to speak to them about the 'wave', about the upper point, which I call the summit, and the lower point, or the bottom. The summit is where the wave reaches as it thrusts upward, and the bottom is where it settles when the temporary surge subsides.'"

The First (with disdain): 'The summit? There is nothing at the summit at all. I write cold poems when I reach it. And what is the summit afterwards? It is nothing but the beginning of decline.

As for the bottom, it is only the repose that enfolds within itself the seed of deepening, of fiery emergence, and of the ascent to the next summit.'"

The Second: 'They will say, when they hear you: what is the value of ascent if the summit itself is cold?'"

*The First: 'Whatever it may be, my title Qarâra al-Mawja 'The Bottom of the Wave' is optimistic.'"*⁶

Nâzik's anthology *Qarâra al-Mawja* (The Bottom of the Wave), published in 1957, stands as one of her most significant contributions to Arabic poetic modernism. It captures not only her stylistic innovations but also her profound thematic concerns, ranging from existential anxiety to social reflection.

The title itself, *Qarâra al-Mawja* (the Bottom of the Wave), is deeply symbolic. It suggests the unseen depths beneath the surface of life, a metaphor for hidden struggles, inner turbulence, and the mysteries of human destiny. The wave becomes a central image throughout the collection, representing both destruction and regeneration, as well as despair and hope. Through this symbolism, al-Malâ'ika reveals her ability to fuse natural imagery with philosophical depth, reflecting the duality of human experience.

The anthology titled *Qarâra al-Mawja* is particularly valuable for understanding al-Malâ'ika's mature poetic voice. While her earlier works were revolutionary in breaking away from the rigid constraints of classical Arabic verse, this anthology demonstrates her mastery of free verse as a vehicle for profound meditations on existence, time, and the human condition.

In fact, this anthology is the third collection of poems published by the poetess. Nâzik al-Malâ'ika explained the reason for naming it so in a conversation between herself and her inner self, in the preface to the third edition, saying: 'What is the summit, after all? It is but the beginning of a decline. As for the trough, it is not a place for repose, which carries within it the seed of readiness for a sharp surge and an ascent towards the next summit.'⁷

In 1957, Nâzik al-Malâ'ika composed an analytical dialogue which she employed as the preface to the first edition of her third poetic collection, *Qarâra al-Mawja* (The Bottom of the Wave). Within this reflective piece, she sought to trace and interpret her own psychological development across two distinct phases of her creative life: the first, spanning the years 1947 to 1953, during which the poems of this collection were written; and the second, the year 1957, when she was simultaneously engaged in the composition of her fourth collection, *Shajarah al-Qamar* (The Moon Tree). Al-Malâ'ika explains that it was her consistent practice not to publish her poetry immediately upon its composition, but rather to allow the passage of time to intervene. Only then, she believed, could her judgement of her own work be rendered with greater clarity and accuracy. This deliberate delay, she argued, accounted for the temporal and psychological differences apparent between her earlier intellectual personality, as reflected in *Qarâra al-Mawja*, what she termed "the first", and the renewed self she identified with in 1957, which she described as "the second." In doing so, she presented not merely a preface but a critical self-assessment, demonstrating a profound awareness of the transformations within her own artistic and inner life.⁸

The poetess went so far as to declare that no connection whatsoever existed between the poems of *Qarâra al-Mawja* (The Bottom of the Wave), which she referred to as "the first", and the poems she composed in 1957, "the second." To her, the earlier poems had lost all personal significance, and she refused to adopt the role of a critic to revisit them. At various points, she even contemplated altering the title of the collection, replacing *Qarâra al-Mawja* with *Ṭarîq al-'Awda* "The Road of Return". This inclination arose from her conviction that the poem *Ṭarîq al-'Awda* carried profound meaning, serving as the very cornerstone of the philosophy upon which



she had built her life. Yet, ultimately, she abandoned this idea, fearing that readers might misinterpret the proposed title as a mere literary affectation or assume that she had failed to discover a name capable of unifying and encapsulating the central concern of the collection.

Her dissatisfaction extended further, for she excised several poems from the volume altogether, confessing that they no longer held any aesthetic or emotional appeal for her. Despite these omissions and her ambivalence towards the earlier work, the collection retained a rich assortment of poems, diverse in both form and theme. Together, they mirrored the breadth of the poetess's own inner struggles, her shifting psychological states, and the complex social realities that framed her creative expression. In this way, the collection not only reflected the contradictions of her personal development but also stood as a testimony to her uncompromising honesty and her refusal to present art that no longer resonated with her evolving sensibility.⁹

It has been observed that Nâzik al-Malâ'ika's *Qarâra al-Mawja* "The Bottom of the Wave" stands as one of the most important poetic collections in modern Arabic literature, reflecting the poetess's emotional complexity, intellectual depth, and philosophical insight. Composed between 1947 and 1953, this work marks a crucial stage in her creative evolution and occupies a distinctive position in the history of Arabic free verse. It represents a profound dialogue between despair and hope, silence and song, collapse and renewal. In this collection, Al-Malâ'ika does not merely compose poetry; she meditates upon the very act of poetic creation and the transformation of pain into beauty. Each poem is both an emotional confession and a philosophical reflection, and together they form a coherent artistic journey through the landscapes of memory, melancholy, love, alienation, and spiritual awakening.¹⁰

The collection opens with *Awwal al-Ṭarîq* "The Beginning of the Road", a symbolic starting point in which Al-Malâ'ika sets out on a poetic and existential journey. The poem captures the sense of embarking upon an unknown path filled with both promise and trepidation. It suggests that the road to self-realisation is not linear but cyclical, echoing the ebb and flow that the collection's title evokes.¹¹ In *Ughniyah* "Song", the poetess turns to the lyrical essence of poetry itself, treating song as the natural expression of emotion and intuition. The poem embodies her conviction that music and poetry arise from the same source, the human heart, and that both are means of reconciling inner pain with outer harmony.¹²

Da'wah ilâ al-Ahlâm "Invitation to Dreams" follows as an appeal to imagination. Here Al-Malâ'ika celebrates dreams as sanctuaries of freedom and renewal, portraying them as necessary antidotes to the disillusionment of modern life. Dreams are not mere escapism but a form of inner truth through which the poet reclaims her sense of wonder.¹³ In contrast, *al-Shahîd* "The Martyr" reflects Al-Malâ'ika's engagement with collective experience and social consciousness. The martyr becomes a symbol of sacrifice and human resilience, embodying moral courage in the face of oppression. The poem situates the personal within the national and universal, revealing the poet's sensitivity to the suffering of others.¹⁴

In *La'nah al-Zaman* "The Curse of Time", Al-Malâ'ika meditates on time's corrosive power. The poem expresses her deep anxiety about the impermanence of human endeavour and the futility of human aspirations. Time emerges as both destroyer and teacher, a recurring presence throughout the collection.¹⁵ Similarly, *Ilâ al-Âm al-Jadîd* "To the New Year" juxtaposes the external celebration of renewal with the poet's internal weariness.¹⁶ It reveals her disillusionment with the superficial optimism of new beginnings, suggesting that true renewal is an inner process, not a calendar event. *al-A'dâ'* "The Enemies" explores psychological conflict and alienation. The "enemies" of the poem are not only external forces but also the internal voices of doubt and fear that obstruct self-realisation.¹⁷

Themes of fate and chance appear vividly in *Haşâd al-Muşâdafât* "The Harvest of Coincidences", where Al-Malâ'ika reflects on the randomness of existence and the paradoxes of destiny. She questions whether life is governed by accident or by an inscrutable order, ultimately suggesting that meaning must be forged through awareness rather than passively received.¹⁸ In *al-Nâ'imah fî al-Shâri'* "The Sleeper in the Street", the poet turns her compassionate gaze toward the marginalised. The poem, a moving portrayal of poverty and neglect, denounces social injustice and reveals Al-Malâ'ika's humanistic concern for those abandoned by modern society.¹⁹

In *Murthiyah Imra'a Lâ Qîmah Lahâ* "Elegy for a Worthless Woman", Al-Malâ'ika gives voice to a woman rejected and forgotten by her world. The poem is both a lament and a protest, expressing sympathy and outrage at a social order that denies women dignity and worth. It stands as one of the early feminist articulations in modern Arabic poetry.²⁰ *Al-Arḍ al-Muhajjabah* "The Veiled Earth" moves into metaphysical territory, where the earth symbolises hidden truth and mystery. The veil suggests both concealment and protection, and the poet's role is to pierce through appearances to perceive the essence of existence.²¹

Linaftariq "Let Us Part" explores the tension between love and freedom, expressing the painful necessity of separation as an act of self-preservation. The emotional tone of this poem is one of resignation rather than bitterness.²² In *Sukhriyah al-Ramâd* "The Mockery of Ashes", the imagery of ashes conveys the aftermath of passion and the futility of human endeavour. It speaks to the cyclical nature of destruction and renewal, reminding readers that from ashes new life may still arise.²³ *Şâ'idah al-Mâḍî* "The Huntress of the Past" presents memory as a double-edged force, an act of preservation and entrapment. The poetess becomes both hunter and hunted, trapped within her recollections of what once was.²⁴

In *Ilâ Ukhtî Suhâ* "To My Sister Suhâ", al-Malâ'ika's tone softens to one of familial affection. The poem expresses sisterly love, unity, and emotional support, serving as a rare moment of tenderness amidst the surrounding melancholy.²⁵ By contrast, *al-Hâribûn* "The Fugitives" deals with escapism and existential flight. It portrays humanity's vain attempts to flee from pain, truth, or the self, ultimately concluding that escape is an illusion.²⁶ *Mâdhâ Yaqûl al-Nahr?* "What Does the River Say?" transforms nature into a source



of wisdom. The river, with its eternal flow, speaks of continuity, patience, and the quiet persistence of life. Through dialogue with the natural world, the poet contemplates transience and endurance.²⁷

Thalâth Marâth li-Ummî “Three Elegies for My Mother” is one of the most moving sequences in the collection. It reveals al-Malâ’ika’s grief, devotion, and longing through lyrical precision. Her mourning becomes a spiritual exercise, blending personal loss with reflections on mortality and the permanence of love.²⁸ This trilogy is followed by another triad, *Ughniyah li al-Huzn* “Song for Sorrow”, *Muqaddim al-Huzn* “Prelude of Sorrow”, and *al-Zahrah al-Sawdâ’* “The Black Flower”. These interconnected poems form a unified meditation on suffering and transformation. Sorrow here is not mere lamentation but a creative force that sharpens the poet’s perception and deepens her humanity.²⁹

In *Yuhkâ Anna Haffârayn* “It is Said that Two Diggers...”, al-Malâ’ika adopts a narrative approach to probe the human condition. The poem’s symbolic figures of the diggers evoke toil, mortality, and the futility of human labour.³⁰ *Al-Zâ’ir alladhî Lam Yaji’* “The Visitor Who Never Came” explores themes of anticipation and disappointment. The absent visitor symbolises unfulfilled hope and the haunting presence of the unattainable. In *al-Râqishah al-Madhbûhah* “The Slaughtered Dancer”, the poetess presents one of her most powerful images, the artist as a victim. The dancer, symbolising beauty and freedom, is destroyed by a cruel world that misunderstands art’s sanctity.³¹

Al-Shakhs al-Thânî “The Second Person” delves into the psychology of the divided self. The poem reflects al-Malâ’ika’s fascination with introspection and identity, depicting an inner dialogue between conflicting aspects of her consciousness. This theme of inner struggle continues in *Indamâ Qatalî Hubbî* “When I Killed My Love”, where she confesses emotional exhaustion and the deliberate act of extinguishing passion to regain control over her spirit. In *Lahñ li-l-Nisyân* “A Tune for Forgetfulness”, she contemplates the paradox of memory and oblivion, finding solace in the idea that forgetting can itself be an act of remembrance.³²

Kalimât “Words” is a meta-poetic reflection on language. al-Malâ’ika questions the power of words to capture truth, acknowledging both their beauty and their limitation. *al-Sullam al-Munhâr* “The Collapsing Staircase” portrays the instability of existence through vivid imagery of descent and disintegration, suggesting the fragility of human ambition. In *Ghislan li-l-’Âr* “A Washing of Shame”, the poet engages in moral and spiritual purification, transforming guilt into redemption.³³

Al-Rahîl “Departure” captures the solemn dignity of leaving behind what no longer belongs, whether people, places, or stages of life. It is a meditation on impermanence and graceful acceptance. *al-Khaybah* “Disappointment” returns to a tone of melancholy, presenting despair as a fact of existence rather than a momentary mood. Yet in *Ustûrah ‘Aynayn* “The Legend of Two Eyes”, al-Malâ’ika merges personal experience with mythic imagery, elevating emotion into universal symbolism. The poem demonstrates her ability to weave the intimate and the archetypal into a single poetic vision.³⁴ *Al-Wuṣûl* “Arrival” seems to promise fulfilment, yet al-Malâ’ika undermines the notion of final attainment. Every arrival, she implies, is temporary and preludes another journey. *Ughniyah li-Shams al-Shitâ’* “Song for the Winter Sun” introduces a delicate note of optimism, celebrating the fragile warmth that persists amidst cold and darkness. In *Baqâyâ* “Remnants”, she meditates on what endures after emotional devastation, the fragments of memory, love, and faith that survive the storms of life. *Sâ’ah al-Dhikrâ* “The Hour of Memory” transforms remembrance into an act of resistance against oblivion, elevating memory to a sacred ritual.³⁵

Hal Tarji’in? (“Will You Return?”) centres on the emotional experience of separation and the hope of reunion. Through its intimate yet widely relatable voice, the poem conveys the deep human yearning to recover a lost relationship and overcome the pain of absence. In *Ṣalâh al-Ashbâh* (“The Prayer of Ghosts”), al-Malâ’ika moves from personal emotion towards a more metaphysical exploration of existence. The poem reflects on the relationship between life and death, faith and mortality, while contemplating the possibility of spiritual continuity beyond physical existence. *Khâ’ifah* (“Afraid”) turns inward to examine fear as an inseparable element of human experience. Rather than simply rejecting fear, the poet recognises it as a psychological reality that must be confronted and understood. The collection ultimately moves towards a more affirmative vision in *Da’wah ilâ al-Ḥayâh* (“Invitation to Life”). After passing through experiences of grief, separation and disappointment, the poetic voice turns towards renewed hope, affirming life, creativity and the enduring capacity of the human spirit to overcome suffering.³⁶

Taken as a unified whole, the forty-one poems in *Qarâra al-Mawja* constitute a rich exploration of both artistic expression and philosophical thought. Throughout the collection, Nâzik al-Malâ’ika moves fluidly between personal introspection and universal experience, despair and hope, solitude and a sense of human connectedness. The recurring image of the wave serves as a central symbol of renewal and transformation, suggesting that every descent into the depths can become the starting point for a renewed ascent. In this sense, the collection presents human existence as a continuous movement between moments of decline and recovery. By bringing together intellectual reflection and emotional sensitivity, traditional cultural elements and modern poetic consciousness, al-Malâ’ika transforms *Qarâra al-Mawja* into a significant work of modern Arabic poetry. Its enduring appeal lies in its sincerity, emotional depth, sensitivity to human experience, and persistent search for meaning and truth.

Qarâra al-Mawja occupies an important place in Nâzik al-Malâ’ika’s poetic oeuvre, bringing together her formal experimentation and her profound thematic concerns. The collection demonstrates her effective use of free verse as a flexible vehicle for emotional and intellectual expression, while its poems engage with existential questions, philosophical reflections, natural imagery and social experience within a coherent artistic framework. At the centre of this poetic world stands the image of the wave, which



symbolically expresses the recurrent contrasts inherent in human existence—despair and hope, mortality and renewal, destruction and regeneration.

A close reading of *Qarâra al-Mawja* reveals al-Malâ'ika not merely as an important pioneer of Arabic literary modernism but also as a poet whose concerns possess a wider human significance. Her poetic vision extends beyond particular cultural circumstances to address universal questions of existence, suffering, meaning, beauty and the possibility of renewal. Through the combination of emotional sensitivity, philosophical reflection and innovative poetic form, the collection continues to demonstrate the enduring power of her literary imagination.

Findings

The study of Nâzik al-Malâ'ika's *Qarâra al-Mawja* reveals that the collection occupies an important position in the development of modern Arabic poetry. Published in 1957 and comprising forty-one poems, the anthology represents a significant stage in the poet's artistic development and demonstrates her increasingly mature use of free verse as a vehicle for psychological, philosophical, and existential expression.

A major finding of the study is that the title *Qarâra al-Mawja* functions as the central symbolic key to the collection. The wave represents the continuous movement of human existence between ascent and descent, while its depth suggests introspection, hidden strength and the possibility of renewal. Al-Malâ'ika does not regard the bottom of the wave as an absolute state of defeat. Rather, it is a temporary stage from which another ascent becomes possible. Consequently, the collection transforms apparent despair into a potential source of regeneration and hope.

The analysis further establishes that the anthology is characterised by a close relationship between poetic form and psychological experience. Al-Malâ'ika employs free verse not simply as a rejection of classical poetic conventions but as an expressive form capable of accommodating changing emotional states. Rhythm, repetition, imagery and symbolic language contribute to the representation of grief, anxiety, longing, memory and inner conflict.

Another important finding concerns the extensive use of natural and symbolic imagery. The sea, wave, darkness, night and light are not merely ornamental features; they function as a symbolic vocabulary through which the poet articulates hidden dimensions of consciousness and existence. The wave, in particular, embodies movement, desire, memory and transcendence, while the depths of the sea suggest the unconscious and the inner world.

The study also finds that *Qarâra al-Mawja* encompasses a remarkably broad range of existential, psychological, emotional and social themes. Time, mortality, death, memory, alienation, love, fear, loss, social injustice, loneliness, hope and the search for meaning recur throughout the collection. Poems such as *La 'nat al-Zaman* ("The Curse of Time"), *al-Nâ'ima fî al-Shâri'* ("The Sleeper in the Street"), and *Murthiyat Imra'a Lâ Qîmata Lahâ* ("Elegy for a Worthless Woman") demonstrate the poet's engagement with temporal anxiety, social suffering and the marginalisation of women.

The analysis of individual poems also demonstrates the movement from personal grief towards broader human and philosophical reflection. The elegies for her mother transform private bereavement into meditation on mortality and enduring love, while poems concerning memory, departure, disappointment and forgetfulness explore the psychological consequences of loss.

A further finding is the importance of memory as a means of resisting oblivion. In poems such as *Sâ'at al-Dhikrâ* ("The Hour of Memory"), remembrance becomes more than recollection; it functions as a means of preserving emotional and spiritual meaning against the destructive passage of time.

The collection ultimately moves towards affirmation and renewal. Although sorrow, death, alienation and disappointment dominate many poems, the concluding movement is not one of complete pessimism. *Da'wah ilâ al-Ḥayâh* ("Invitation to Life") represents a significant turn towards vitality, hope and creative affirmation. Thus, the structure of the collection itself reflects the wave metaphor: descent is followed by the possibility of ascent.

Finally, the study demonstrates that al-Malâ'ika's own preface to the collection provides valuable evidence of her self-conscious artistic development. She distinguished between the poetic personality reflected in the poems written between 1947 and 1953 and the self she associated with 1957. Her decision to delay publication and subsequently reassess, remove or reconsider some poems indicates a highly critical attitude towards her own creative production.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that *Qarâra al-Mawja* is far more than a collection of individual poems; it constitutes a coherent artistic, psychological and philosophical vision of human existence. Through forty-one poems, Nâzik al-Malâ'ika transforms personal experiences of sorrow, solitude, memory and loss into reflections of universal human concerns.

The symbolism of the wave provides the collection with its essential unity. Its movement between crest and depth becomes a metaphor for the fluctuations of human life, in which moments of suffering and decline may contain the possibility of renewal. The depth of the wave therefore acquires a positive philosophical significance: it represents the inward space where suffering, contemplation and creative energy are transformed into the possibility of a new beginning.



The collection also confirms al-Malâ'ika's importance as a pioneer of Arabic poetic modernism. Her free-verse technique demonstrates that formal innovation can be closely connected with psychological expression. Rather than treating free verse merely as a departure from established metrical structures, she employs its flexibility to reproduce the changing rhythms of consciousness and emotion. This synthesis of form and experience constitutes one of the major aesthetic achievements of the anthology.

At the thematic level, *Qarâra al-Mawja* brings together the personal, social and existential dimensions of life. Love, death, memory, alienation, fear, social injustice, femininity, time and mortality are presented not as isolated subjects but as interconnected aspects of the human condition. The poet's treatment of these themes demonstrates her capacity to move from individual experience towards universal significance.

The collection's progression from sorrow and despair towards hope and affirmation is particularly significant. Poems such as *Da 'wah ilâ al-Ahlâm* ("Invitation to Dreams") and *Da 'wah ilâ al-Hayâh* ("Invitation to Life") demonstrate the restorative power of imagination and creative vitality, while the recurring images of light, nature, memory and movement counterbalance the darker elements of the collection.

Briefly noting that *Qarâra al-Mawja* may be regarded as a significant achievement of modern Arabic poetry because it successfully combines modern poetic form, symbolic richness, emotional intensity, philosophical reflection, and social consciousness. Its enduring literary value lies in al-Malâ'ika's ability to transform personal anguish into a broader meditation on existence and to discover the possibility of hope within suffering. The anthology consequently strengthens her position not only as a pioneer of free verse but also as a poet of profound psychological sensitivity and philosophical depth.

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