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Symbolic Articulations of Post-Traumatic Memory in Women's Poetry: Fire, Ashes, and Self-Transformation in Atwood and Al-Malaika

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Abstract—**This paper explores poetry's capacity to transform post-traumatic memory into symbolic articulation in two major collections of prominent poets, Margaret Atwood and Nazik Al-Malaika. Both poets come from different cultures yet explore similar emotional experiences. Drawing on the psychological approach and trauma theories of Freud and Jung, this paper probes the psychological concepts of inner entrapment, fragmentation, transformation, and individuation. While prior studies have explored trauma in women's poetry, limited attention has been paid to the symbolic articulation of post-traumatic memory across different cultures. By focusing on language and imagery in the selected works, the study aims to demonstrate how post-traumatic memory can distort the perception of both inner and external realities. In addition, it argues that the employment of symbols such as fire and ashes reflects the poets' emotional bonds and psychological development throughout the poignant articulation of traumatic memories. The findings reveal a significant resemblance between the two poets in the symbolic expression of traumatic memory despite differences in time and cultural contexts. Both Atwood and Al-Malaika demonstrate psychological maturity through true self-acceptance and resilience. This paper contributes to studies of trauma and memory by enhancing the understanding of women's poetic engagements with private traumatic memory as a transformative symbolic practice. Future research examining additional linguistic techniques in the poetry of diverse poets could enrich interdisciplinary scholarship and further illuminate poetry's role in post-traumatic self-reconstruction.**

Index Terms—**comparative literature, poetic symbol, post-traumatic memory, psychological reading**

I. Introduction

Post-traumatic memory is a profound psychological burden that emotionally disrupts self-representations and complicates straightforward narratives of lived experiences. According to Nadal and Calvo (2014), "It is not the first act which is traumatic, it is the internal reviviscence of the memory that becomes traumatic" (p. 3). Emerging from psychological studies and complex experiences of humans suffering, trauma theory emphasizes the fragmented and resistant nature of traumatic memory. The trauma theorists argue that these memories often defy linear narration, which makes literary forms -especially poetry- a suitable medium for articulation. Poetry provides a space for repressed experiences and memories through its reliance on symbolism and non-leaner structure. Ulrich Baer (as cited in Armstrong, 2020, p. 543) notes, "enacting rather than directly communicating its truth, poetry registers the type of experience that an individual, after suffering a trauma, may be compelled to reenact but cannot recall at will". This insight validates the use of symbolic imagery in Atwood's and Al-Malaika's poetry in order to articulate post-traumatic memory.

Painful memories make it difficult for writers to emotionally explain themselves in their literature. Therefore, they rely on figurative language and representations to demonstrate their experiences and reveal obscured areas of their psychological situation. This strategy can be seen in the poetry of Maragret Atwood and Nazik Al-Malaika, who employ the symbols of burning and ashes to express the self-fragmentation that occurs due to a post-traumatic memory. The emotional experiences that the two poets went through left deep scars in their psyches and vividly appear through their imagination. Therefore, psychological theories, mainly trauma theory, were used to explain what lies beneath and works as a catalyst for their poetic expressions.

Although better known for her novels, Atwood is also one of Canada's premier poetic voices, expressing themes of alienation, myth, power, women, and survival with an intellectual sharpness and emotional resonance. Her work demonstrates self-awareness and profound critique while exploring feelings and identity concerns. Atwood's (1995) collection *Morning in the Burned House* is a powerfully personal work that discusses existential themes of loss, grief, memory, and individuality. Atwood's use of symbols in this collection resonates with Iraqi writer Al-Malaika's (1949) collection *Shathaya wa Ramad* (Shards and Ashes), which relies on symbolism to discuss traumatic memory and emotional and existential anxieties. Al-Malaika is known for her contributions to modern Arabic poetry, with a style marked by innovation, social critique, and an authentic personal voice that breaks with gender expectations.

Through a comparative reading of their poetry, this paper argues that symbolism functions as an instrument for expressing post-traumatic memory and reshaping the self. The collections reveal struggles with distortion and fragmentation while attempting to escape psychological entrapment. Therefore, the psychological approach fits for

investigating the crucial impact of traumatic memory on the poetic representations of Atwood and Al-Malaika. Selected poems are analyzed from a comparative psychological perspective to answer the following questions. How does symbolism function as a medium for articulating post-traumatic memory in the selected works? How does poetic language enable the reconstruction of the self after trauma? What similarities and divergences appear in Atwood's and Al-Malaika's use of symbols in representing post-traumatic memory and identity?

II. Literature Review

A. Traumatic Studies and Memory

Post-traumatic memory has received considerable attention from literary communities, which have explored the connections between trauma, memory, and post-experience representations through philosophical and psychological perspectives. From a psycho-scientific perspective, Clewett and Murty (2019) explained the profound influence of negative emotional experiences on memory and the significance of memory retrieval, recollection, and encoding in the process of reliving trauma. Based on experiments with trauma victims and random participants, they argued that emotional memories were more vivid when they are aroused. This process contributes to the recurring sensory pain associated with post-traumatic experience. Through the lens of Lacanian theory, LaCapra (2016) explained the role of traumatic memory in the construction of self-image and collective identity. Using examples of major historical traumas, such as the Holocaust, the U.S. displacement of American Indians, and the 9/11 attacks, LaCapra explored the lasting effects of trauma on the language that constructs victims' collective memory. Through literary texts, he also demonstrated the function of archive and testimony in oral history and collective memory while passing on and preserving historical traumas.

Alhourani et al. (2025) asserted that trauma is a layered experience of interrelated forces as gender, race, poverty, and social exclusion. It was suggested that trauma is not only confined to personal memory but integrated within structures of power and social meanings. The fragmentation of memory and the difficulty of articulating painful experiences demonstrate the psychological impact of trauma.

Van der Kolk (2002) investigated the common assumptions concerning memory and post-traumatic stress disorder, including formation, recollection, and the fragmentation and unreliability of traumatic memories in the process of deformed retrieval as a self-defense mechanism. Misperceiving these traumas has a strong effect on whether they are translated accurately into a narrative. People respond to trauma in diverse ways, connected to different biological factors and nervous readiness that sometimes leads to a misrepresentation of the self and others (van der Kolk, 1994).

Caruth (1996) argued that the primary source of pain in trauma emerges from the confusion that often coincides with traumatic memories. Relying on the theories of Freud, Lacan, Kant, and others, she explained the connection between public traumas and the formation of history. Following Freud's approach in defining trauma, Caruth used literary texts to explain the agony of trauma retrieval through memories. She emphasized the heavy influence of these memories during the healing process on the self, body, and time and explored the function of language in fathoming a trauma while representing it.

While these psychological and theoretical studies primarily addressed historical and cultural dimensions of trauma, they further provided a framework for understanding the difficulties in representing and articulating traumatic memories. This concern is pivotal to the present analysis of the selected poetic works of Atwood and Al-Malaika.

B. Literary Representations and Trauma

The variety of traumatic experiences, whether personal or public, leads to a wide range of representations of them. Whitehead (2004) examined themes and styles of distinguished modern authors, such as Toni Morisson, Pat Barker, and Anne Michaele, where a painful memory can haunt characters in different ways. Intertextuality and repetition in literary texts discussing traumatic memories can create a stark space and temporal consciousness within transgenerational memory. Probing into two novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, Trimarco (2023) argued that public trauma is ethical and collective, while its traumatic recollections are disruptive and difficult to fully recover or explain.

In *Trauma in Contemporary Literature*, post-traumatic representations in major literary works are introduced and analyzed. Marita Nadal and Monica Calvo argue in this book that trauma writing has layers of functions: a genuine process of healing and recovery, a historical documentation of private and public silenced experiences, and an ethical responsibility that encompasses the victim and the witnesses. While verbalizing trauma appears to be an effective means of resistance and healing, Kostova and Martinez-Alfaro admit the difficulties in rendering these experiences linguistically without resisting the tendency towards fragmentary language and repetitive narration.

Articulating certain experiences through figurative language may intensify meaning and add other dimensions to these experiences. The symbols of fire and burning have long been rooted in human experience, deeply connected to our imagination, memory, and personal reflection of the past (Bachelard, 1964). Fire can be seen as a poetic force and intimate symbol, because it fuels creativity and mirrors human desires and fears. Between immortality, purification, and destruction, fire was given a divine presence and power in Ancient Greek songs (Stuligrosz, 2020). Fire is a conceptual image connected to readers' emotions and passion (Karlson-Weimann, 2014). It is always contemporary since its

subjective connotations are related to history and culture. Therefore, fire is metaphorical before it becomes physical. It achieves its importance through the sense of estrangement that readers encounter in different texts.

Like fire, ashes have come to carry various meanings. Marder (2012) conceptually categorized fire into the sun of reality and the fire of the cave. These are fires of spirit, revolution, and ideology. People in recent times are dealing with the ashes (remains) of these two extinguished fires, symbolizing fragmentation, victimhood, unclassifiable society, and resistance. On another level, ashes have been discussed as a symbol of protection, ritual closure, transformation, and renewal (Adams & Roth, 2019). In this sense, ashes have a transformative meaning as a transformation of fire. They symbolically create social memory and identity over time and mark transitions like life and death.

Previous studies focused on the literary representations of trauma in prose to discuss linguistic resisting strategies against post-traumatic memory, which left an underexplored area in poetic narration. This study re-examined the significant symbols and metaphysical concepts in the poetry of Atwood and Al-Malaika as manifestations of post-traumatic memory and psychological anguishes. It sought to explain how individuals with post-traumatic memory experience the present through the lens of distorted memories.

C. Studies on Atwood and Al-Malaika

Atwood's (1995) *Morning in the Burned House* has received considerable critical attention. Pylvainen (1996) characterized the development of Atwood's awareness and perception throughout its five chapters as a phoenix rising from the ashes. What starts as a physical relationship with the self and the other leads to a conscious spirituality of selfhood. Conversely, Jamieson (1993) presented another reading, arguing that in this collection, Atwood resides in a liminal space between life and death due to grief over her dead father. Jamieson suggested that Atwood's struggle with pain and tension is a result of her being caught between a need for fulfilling societal expectations and a deep urge for fathoming her angst.

Lucas (2006) agreed that Atwood is entrapped within a temporal and metaphysical liminality. According to her, the traumatic experience of loss and absence in *Morning in the Burned House* produces a fragmentary language and a partial memory, leading to an opened closure that resists final recovery. In that work, the symbolism of fire, with its transformative meaning, lies in defying the decay of time and enduring powerful emotions and memories.

Naadiya Yaqoob Mir (2023) argued that Atwood's fiction presents traumatic women as victims of patriarchal violence, social constraint, and personal rupture. She further emphasized the function of memory, embodiment, and fragmented structure in the discourse of Atwood's female protagonists. Through the lens of trauma studies, Nazki (2024) asserted that Atwood's early novel *The Edible Woman* is considered her foundational literary work for exploring women's trauma and identity formation. It reveals her interest in the fractured female ego under patriarchal pressure.

In contrast to *Morning in the Burned House*, Al-Malaika's (1949) *Shathaya wa Ramad* has received far less attention beyond the scope of its contribution to modern Arabic poetry. Al-Ta'i (2016) explored how titles structurally and symbolically function in this work, connecting fragmentation, displacement, contrasting, and intertextuality to the traumatic emotional experience of the poet. He argued that the poet's use of symbols in titles, such as ashes and fragments, creates a transparent ambiguity and a linguistic transformation in readers' minds. He asserted that this process can enrich meaning and encourage contemplation and engagement with emotional experiences.

According to Al-Tuhami and Amin (2022), symbols in Al-Malaika's collection manifest the dark side of her life: her breakdowns, disappointments, and traumas. Through the dualism of light and darkness, her poetry reveals a profound need and persistent search for recovery and peace. Likewise, Muarich (2025) connected the pessimistic tone, the sense of grief, and the apparent alienation of Al-Malaika to her sensitivity to suffering and psychological angst. These feelings of sorrow and despair, according to Muarich, contributed to the creativity of Al-Malaika's poetry.

Nazar (2021) explained the role of Al-Malaika's poetry in exposing the psychological and social struggles of Arab women. He argued that her poetry exposes a profound sense of inner struggle. This struggle, according to Nazar, was generated by a conflict between traditional expectations and Arab women's self-awareness. Moreover, Nahhay (2020) suggested that a combination of private and collective experiences contributed to the sorrowful tone and fragmentation in Al-Malaika's poetry. He examined the psychological and socio-historical forces that shaped her poetic identity and influenced her engagement with pain.

Despite the informative insights of the existing studies on the works of Atwood and Al-Malaika, the role of post-traumatic memory as a psychological force in shaping their poetic language remained unexamined. The current study offered a comparative analysis of their foundational poetic works to explain how traumatic memory is articulated and represented in different cultural contexts.

III. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, text-based psychoanalytical approach to examine the representation of traumatic memory and its effects on poetry. The analysis focused on selected poems from Atwood's (1995) *Morning in the Burned House* and Al-Malaika's (1949) *Shathaya wa Ramad*. The procedures involved a close reading of each poet's texts to investigate and elucidate the poetic language. Guided by trauma studies, careful attention was paid to poetic representations, symbolic language, imagery, fragmentation, and emotional articulation as expressive mechanisms of traumatic memory. The analysis traced the psychological changes and personal development across the selected texts to demonstrate how individuation is expressed symbolically and poetically. The thematic focus of this study centered on the

poets' treatments of perceptual emotions within the metaphysical entrapment of post-traumatic experiences. After individual analysis, the works were compared to identify convergences and divergences.

This study was limited to the poets' experiences with traumatic memory, related concepts, and figurative language. Due to the sensitive nature of the poets' experiences of trauma, the methodological mood of this study was ethically attentive and reflective, remaining mindful of emotional complexity and nuanced psychological readings of the poetic expressions. Moreover, this study was limited by the lack of a published English translation of Al-Malaika's (1949) work, which was originally written in Arabic. Hence, all translations of her poems are my own, which may influence the interpretation of her work.

IV. Discussion

A. Morning in the Burned House

In *Morning in the Burned House*, Atwood (1995) explores post-traumatic memories in a poetic narration. In the poems, her childhood memories are distorted and surreal. There is no indication of the nature or date of her trauma, but it still influences her perception of her memories. For her, the traumatic memory has a color and a presence, as can be seen in the poem "Waiting." Linked to her childhood, the memory is aged, nostalgic, and poignantly fragile like yellowed paper. She describes expecting it to be "a dark thing" that "would hide / in your closet" waiting to strike (p. 8) but instead finds it to be "only a memory":

> And now it is now
> and the dark thing is here,
> and after all it is nothing new;
> it is only a memory, after all:
> a memory of fear,
> a yellowing paper child's fear. (p. 10)

The first poem in the collection, "You Come Back," is a preface to intrusive childhood memories that take place throughout the collection between the family house and the woods. In this poem, Atwood (1995) shows a scene of perplexed thoughts in the old house, where questions like "What's been going on / while I was away? Who / got these sheets dirty, and why / are there no more grapefruit?" (p. 3) imply the elapse of time. However, she later explains the situation: "You know it was you / who slept, who ate here, though you don't / believe it" (p. 3), emphasizing a painful awareness of an entrapment. Memories, consequently, transcend temporal boundaries and persist into the present. Freud (1961) named the process of reliving the past the repetition compulsion. Instead of avoiding a traumatic memory, the sufferer unintentionally repeats certain behavior or re-experiences the repressed painful memories in the unconscious since they are not fully processed or fathomed (p. 14).

Spatial and temporal entrapments are symptoms of this traumatic memory in Atwood's (1995) work, simultaneously presented in symbols of burning and ashes. These symbols are linked to both the experience of transformation and her parents. Across the collection, the mention of burning coincides with change and transformation. Even though it is not an actual physical burning, it has clearly left a profound influence on her psyche and perception of her surroundings. Burning is a painful transformative process. Sometimes, it is meant to create new life from the ashes, as shown in "A Fire Place," which describes how "Earth does such things / to itself: furrowing, cracking apart, bursting / into flame" and replacing something with "scrubland, a light-green / sticky new forest" (p. 116). Such destruction can thus be seen in a positive light. This perspective contrasts with how people often "regret / the perishing of the burned place. / Only we could call it a wound" (p. 117). They struggle with painful memories that expand in time and kindle inner flames. The fire within influences the psyche and transforms the identity as a survival mechanism to cope with difficult situations.

Throughout her memories in nature, her father's presence is central to the process of burning, due to his responsibility for kindling the fire. The "father chops with his axe" while "His gun leans behind the door" and "Smoke comes out of the metal chimney" (Atwood, 1995, p. 76). The main representative objects of her father inside the house are the fire, his gun, and his boots. In the woods, she remembers herself "Holding the log / while he sawed it" (p. 91). His emotional absence in her childhood memories is represented by him being busy in the woods. More recently, she has an auditory memory: "It's nineteen ninety-four, / I can hear the sound of the chopping" (p. 77). In her father's final illness, he remembers in fragments and likes to "talk about axes" and "the many names of wood" (p. 89). He says that "We need more wood" because "winter's on its way" (p. 84), as a necessity and duty that must be fulfilled. However, descriptions of his role as a father figure lack an emotional presence, signified, for example, by her description of "looking hard and up close at the small / details" such as "the blackish and then the greying / bristles on the back of his neck" (p. 91) and "his square finger, earth under / the nail" (p. 92), investigating his materiality. Such details suggest he did not render warmth and affection as a provider of fire but rather heat, distance, and burning.

Morning memories in Atwood's (1995) burned childhood house are vividly persistent, almost surreal in their imagery. In the poem "Up," she wakes up paralyzed in bed and again refers to burning to encourage herself to get up: "Pretend the house is on fire / and you must run or burn" (p. 111), but she is held down by memories:

> No. Nothing so simple. The past, its density
> and drowned events pressing you down,

like sea water, like gelatin
filling your lungs instead of air. (p. 110)

In this sensory-heavy image, Atwood (1995) is suffocated by the sluggish movement of submerged events that penetrate into her psyche and create an emotional burden. These unresolved memories hold her back and prevent her from moving forward into the future.

In the final poem, which shares the name of the collection ("Morning in the Burned House"), Atwood's (1995) childhood house is burned down, but she still sees herself alone inside, with a lucid depiction of the objects around her. The image of a "spoon which was melted scrapes against / the bowl which was melted also" (p. 126) reminds of Salvador Dalí's famous painting *The Persistence of Memory*. Similar to the melting clocks in that work, objects in Atwood's burned house lose their fixed shapes, implying her subjective experience of time due to a traumatic memory. Scattered around absurdly, the "clothes are still on the hangers," and there is a "tin cup and rippled mirror" (p. 126), representing distorted memories that are pointless and difficult to perceive and explain. This follows from the tendency where "memories of trauma may have been organized on an implicit or perceptual level, without an accompanying narrative about what happened" (van der Kolk, 2002, p. 12).

While symbols of fire and burning are linked to Atwood's (1995) father, ashes are associated with her mother. As a symbol, ashes represent what remains: loss, memories, and ruin. They can also be regarded as signifying resilience and hope for a new beginning. Her mother in the old house patiently "rakes the ashes" (p. 76) after dead fires to collect the remains and hope for a resurrection. This action is her persistent female resilience in a materialistic masculine environment. The smell of ashes in the house is pervasive, as "The carpet smells of ashes" (p. 77). The olfactory information connected to her mother contrasts with the previous auditory description of her father chopping wood. Both are profoundly sensory in childhood memories, but the olfactory content is more emotional, vivid, and evokes nostalgia. This fragmentary expression of memories follows from a description of traumatic memories by van der Kolk (2002):

> Memories of the trauma tend to be experienced as fragments of the sensory components of the event, as visual images, olfactory, auditory, or kinesthetic sensations, or intense waves of feelings that patients usually claim to be representations of elements of the original traumatic event. (p. 14)

The old house is connected to Atwood's (1995) mother and certain familial activities. A paradoxical memory when "listening to the radio, news of disasters / that made you feel safe, / like the voice of your mother" (p. 9) carries a layered meaning of her psychological state: feeling comfort while hearing news of pain and fear. This detail implies that she was raised in chaotic times, when what should be anxiety-inducing news could be soothing in the family house. In another memory of the house, an atmosphere of pervasive peace and comfort takes over in 1943, when "children dance around" a bonfire, "singing about the" Second World War (p. 76). In this memory, this war "is happening elsewhere," yet she later retracts this notion, emphasizing that everything in her memory "recurs / and nothing is elsewhere" (p. 77). According to the conscious version of her mature self, what she once perceived as remote anguish actually exists within her.

Across the collection, dwelling in the past intertwines with a new distorted perception of the self and the body. In many of her memory poems, Atwood (1995) regularly uses the pronoun "you" as if conversing with the reader for the sake of engagement. In fact, by insisting on using this pronoun, she merely reveals the presence of another version of herself, which continuously relives the past in the old house: "someone else / has been here wearing / your clothes and saying / words for you" (p. 3). This is a motif she uses in reflective poems to emphasize a fragmented self that failed to escape a traumatic memory. According to van der Kolk (2002), "certain happenings ... leave indelible and distressing memories--to which the sufferer continually returns, and by which he is tormented by day and by night" (p. 6).

In these poems, self-transformation into different forms occurs in phases and is associated with a developing perception. Atwood (1995) justifies and expounds on the first transformation through the Greek myth of Daphne. Like Daphne, she escapes into another form, hiding from the anonymous man, who is the only one who knows what happened and witnessed her transformation: "before bark/fur/snow closed over / my mouth, before my eyes grew eyes" (p. 26). Her new form is silent, yet perceives more. While Daphne transformed into a harmless laurel tree, she transformed into a being with "eight fingers / and a shell, and live[s] in corners" (p. 27), working on her ideas: "venom, a web, a hat" (p. 27). She lost her sense of the wholeness with time and replaced it with a fragmented perception of her body: "When I was all body I was lazy. […] Now there are more of me" (p. 23). During her entrapment, she looks around in the burned house and observes missing parts of her body: "I can't see my own arms and legs" (p. 127). Her physical form is no longer whole or visible, as if she transcends through her memory into another ethereal form inside her "burning clothes" that are "holding my cindery, non-existent, / radiant flesh. Incandescent" (p. 127).

Her awareness of herself as layered grows deeper, as shown in "The Signer": "in an area of darkness behind my head / stands a woman dressed in black, / even the stockings: my unknown twin" (Atwood, 1995, p. 114). This woman who is mourning and trapped in her traumatic memory could represent her Shadow self. According to Jung (1969), "Everyone carries a Shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is […] if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected, and is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness" (p. 77). Since the poet "speak[s] / in a kind of blindness" (Atwood, 1995, p. 114), the woman in black takes the stumbled words and turns them into something "solid, / [that] become a gesture, a skein, / a semaphore of the body / for those who listen with their eyes" (p. 114). Bringing the Shadow into consciousness creates a sense of profound introspection and a perfect duality: brightness and darkness, fragility and strength, and blindness and discernment. Even

though her Shadow is taking control of her words in this phase, realizing its presence and accepting its influence on her life suggests that she is heading toward individuation. Jung considered this process of discovering and accepting the different sides of oneself as a means of psychological healing and finding one's true self (as cited in Dobie, 2012, p. 63).

B. Shathaya wa Ramad

Post-traumatic memory in Al-Malaika's (1949) *Shathaya wa Ramad* is articulated in different ways, gradually from a melancholic and desperate tone into a sublime voice that transcends temporal liminality. Through her poems, Al-Malaika expresses her deep sorrow and resentment toward her emotional trauma, which was probably recent based on the intense feelings expressed. She treats concepts in her poems as beings and gives them human traits for them to be part of her emotional experience. Figurative language symbolizes her psychological state in a poetic reflection of an unacceptable situation. The title of the collection *Shathaya wa Ramad* (Shards and Ashes) symbolizes her experience as a trauma survivor and its ramifications. The word shathaya (shards) suggests the poet's inner anguish and emotional wounds. The haunting of painful memories turns her life into fragments of struggle that are reflected in her psyche. The word "shards" resonates with the cultural memory of post-war consciousness. Although the term "ashes" evokes feelings of loss and regret, it also stands for renewal, resurrection, and hope. It is a sign of the poet's resistance and the gradual healing in the aftermath of trauma.

As a modern poet, Al-Malaika heavily relies on metaphors and symbols to intensify meaning and reflect the layers of psychological experience. In "Tawārīkh Qadīmah wa Jadīdah" (Old and New Histories), she starts a recurrent metaphor; the past is portrayed as an entity that lives, dies, is buried in darkness, and lives again. In this poem, she initiates a metaphysical journey that extends throughout the collection to find and revive the past (Al-Malaika, 1949, p. 47). Since trauma does not make sense to the survivor, the external world fails to provide a conceivable reality, and a dissociation occurs. Therefore, she looks inside to construct meaning out of painful memories. As van der Kolk (2002) noted, "It is precisely because there is no immediate accommodation that there is complete dissociation of the inner activity from the external world. As the external world is solely represented by images, it is assimilated without resistance to the unconscious ego" (p. 6). Al-Malaika (1949) relies on metaphors and surreal imagery to draw an alternative inner landscape. In this deeply internal quest into the unconscious, she seeks to comprehend her anguish, fears, and desires. Through her memories, she sees fragments of dysfunctional body parts that have certain important connotations in Arab culture. The forehead, which normally signifies dignity and honor, is blind. The eyes, which indicate knowledge and insightfulness, are silent. The heart, which provides affection and spirituality, is barely a remnant. All these fragments imply loneliness, injustice, and lack of support in the past. While the dead past is buried in a forsaken coffin, the future drags its half-paralyzed body, indicating extended suffering, "and tomorrow life will grow / upon the painful wound" (p. 49). It is a cumulative experience of painful memories that will not allow the future to thrive and prosper.

Al-Malaika's (1949) poetry does not reflect the external world alone; it exposes the fragmentary internal self as well. In "ʿIndamā Unbiʿitha al-Māḍī" (When the Past Is Resurrected), she hears voices in the dark coming from the past. Facing painful memories, she "stumbled upon the remains of [her] youth" (p. 57). The pain is so acute that her youth is scattered by the sharpness of her memories. Every time the memory reaches her with its hands, the poet's soul and heart are ripped off by her nails (p. 58), an attempt to escape and overcome the pain. In "ʿUrūq khāmidah" (Dormant Veins), she perceives herself as a distorted illusion: "Our eyes with no color / to reflect things," "Our lips are mere meat [and] lack of tones," and "our fingers are dead / with no depth" (p. 67). Because of such a traumatic memory, she is stuck with dysfunctional organs and a vaguely defined identity. Her senses cannot provide the certainty needed to eliminate doubt.

Throughout this collection, traumatic memory is figuratively illustrated with psychological implications. In "Al-Afʿuwān" (The Serpent), her memory is portrayed as a serpent that comes after her, crossing temporal and spatial boundaries: "behind the translucent fog / lurks a gigantic serpent / I cannot escape" (Al-Malaika, 1949, p. 79). The symbolism in the title suggests the influence of Mesopotamian mythology, in which the serpent represents the primal chaos, as embodied by the goddess Tiamat as described in the introduction to *Enuma Elish* (Dalley, 2000, pp. 228-230). In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the serpent reflects the reality of human limitations, a creature that must be defeated or it will ruin people's lives (Dalley, 2000, pp. 151-153). Al-Malaika's foe comes from within, from her unconscious. It chases her through darkness and mocks her screams and silence. Therefore, her attempts to escape are futile while she is burdened with dark thoughts and doubt:

> The farther I flee
> the higher my steps transcend the summits
> yet what daylight's labor had undone
> returned with chains of memory
> I shall not desire release
> for what release is there
> while my terrifying foe
> his eyes spit autumn
> over a soul that yearns for spring (p. 78)

Recognizing the reality of her "foe" and accepting its existence contribute to her rising self-awareness. Instead of being pulled down by the heaviness of sad memories, she climbs above her fears and anger. The contrasting image of autumn and spring indicates the liminality that she intends to escape from and her desire to move forward.

The symbols of fire and burning in this collection represent her resilience in the face of a traumatic experience. In "Al-Jurḥ Al-Ghāḍib" (The Furious Wound), her repressed anger from unjust experiences agitates an internal fire: "My silence turns into a fire screaming across the horizon" (Al-Malaika, 1949, p. 70). Her world crumbles in this poem, the previously paralyzed future is now a fragmented corpse, and the dreams fall on earth as fallen stars (p. 71). The internal fire unleashes a hidden part of her that refuses to be repressed. This could be understood from Jung's (1969) assertion:

> We carry our past with us […] and it is only with an enormous effort that we can detach ourselves from this burden. If it comes to a neurosis, we invariably have to deal with a considerably intensified shadow. And if such a person wants to be cured it is necessary to find a way in which his conscious personality and his shadow can live together. (p. 77)

Since Al-Malaika's (1949) ego suffers in silence, her shadow rebels against the stereotype of the submissive female. Her inner world integrates with the outside natural world in response to her frustrated self. Hence, the night, the moon, stars, waves, and darkened clouds become angry with her (Al-Malaika, 1949, p. 70). This cosmic sympathy indicates a transcendent self, where the intense feelings resonate with the natural world. The state of introspection associated with her internal burning participates in her journey of self-realization. While remembering traumatic memories of her life, she tosses out reflective questions, such as the following: "how to endure sadness while burning with thirsty tears?", "how does the bitterness of despair turn into a burning fire inside?", and "is there any past dream / to survive burning?" Any "unburned hopes?" (p. 134). Through these questions, she inspects her boundaries, endurance, and strength.

Al-Malaika's (1949) attitude toward the ashes in this collection is contradictory, torn between hope and sorrow, and they represent an infinite resistance, as in "beware of this ash / within its depths living embers" and "you who thought fire is a dormant clay / and forgot the tempest of youth and its immortality" (p. 169). A cycle of burning and ashes continues till her soul is purified and elevated. She "screamed at the material earth / to release the exhausted youth" since it is burned with flames (p. 170). She intends to "break the chains with her hands" and "fly high from the past to the future" (p. 171), creating a new life from her painful memories, fears, and sighs. She realizes that internal fire brings life, and the burning lifts her above the material world. Nevertheless, Al-Malaika reveals in "Ramad" (Ashes) her sense of sorrow regarding life's cruelty (p. 182). Ashes in this poem represent the pain of loss. She investigates the remains (ashes, a faded planet, ancient stories, silence, empty glasses, and painful memories) and comes to the conclusion that "no image pulses with life / nothing but ashes" (p. 184). Even with this melancholic tone, she unconsciously presents ashes as a transformative phase: "we are still shoveling the ashes / to feed the stove / and the hands of hope vainly / pray for tomorrow" (p. 183). Ashes in this work are a multilayered symbol that conveys contrasting meanings between entrapment and emancipation, acceptance and resistance.

C. Atwood and Al-Malaika

Examining the representation of traumatic memory in Atwood's (1995) *Morning in the Burned House* and Al-Malaika's (1949) *Shathaya wa Ramad* revealed key similarities and differences between the two poets. Both demonstrate a painful psychological entrapment in the past that leaves them with a fragmented self and prevents them from moving on. Atwood (1995) explains this as follows: "What prevents you? The future. The future tense, / immense as outer space. / You could get lost there" (p. 110). Similarly, Al-Malaika (1949) describes her situation by asking, "where to escape from my enemy's spiteful lashes / In my path they spit unbearably dead tomorrow?" (p. 79). Memories of the past destroy any hope of a promising future. Thus, both poets portray traumatic memories as horrible entities that haunt them for a long time. Although they narrate the ramifications of traumatic memories, they both assert the deficiency of their bodily senses regarding intense emotions, as mouths cannot speak, eyes cannot see, and hands cannot reach. According to Al-Malaika, "we are here illusions, no color / no voice, no shape. Mirage of nothingness, no meaning / no utterance no shade" (p. 66). The self-image is destroyed when the past is deformed due to painful memories and doubt.

Atwood (1995) relies on the material world to represent her memories while she pensively expresses her struggle with post-traumatic memories. Al-Malaika (1949), on the other hand, presents her experience with a tone of protest and questioning, which contributes to the chaotic atmosphere of her metaphysical world. This world that she creates for her quest mirrors her rejection of her cultural boundaries. In this world, abstract concepts are personified to express her true feelings and thoughts: "I rage for the trembling and complaining wound / With me the slaughtered quivering patience will go mad" (p. 72).

Both poets use burning and ashes as central images of post-traumatic transformation, but their perspectives vary according to their different focuses. Atwood's (1995) recurrent use of burning reflects her desire to comprehend the origins of her trauma: "Who is it, exactly, you have needed / all these years to forgive?" (p. 111). A question needs to be answered and healed before moving on. On the other hand, Al-Malaika (1949) asks questions to fathom the consequences of her trauma: "this is me no doubt / why can I not touch it with my hands? / Why can I not touch myself? / And end my eternal burning?" (p. 165). At the same time, for both poets, burning symbolizes a ritual of transformation and transcendence. The end of each collection emphasizes an internal growth, an acceptance of their inner realities, and symptoms of psychological individuation. Atwood (1995) asserts the importance of accepting oneself: "together we are practicing / for the place where all the languages / will be finalized and / one; and the hands also" (p. 115). With her shadow, they form one true self that is capable of surviving and resisting.

Although ashes can be regarded as a symbol of death and loss, the psychological development the poets reveal by the end of each collection suggests that ashes stand for resistance in *Morning in the Burned House* and for the liminal space

before resurrection in *Shathaya wa Ramad*. Al-Malaika (1949) pessimistically states that "our ghosts carve their way / through the trembling graveyard of memories / no image pulses with life / nothing remains but ashes" (p. 184). The confident tone at the end of the collection never denies her awareness of the damage within. Therefore, she relies on ashes to symbolize the irreversible outcomes of her emotional experience.

V. Conclusion

This paper offers a comparative psychological analysis of two poetry collections: *Morning in the Burned House* by Atwood (1995) and *Shathaya wa Ramad* by Al-Malaika (1949). It brings forth the role of symbolism in translating painful experiences that resist direct narration. The poetic imagery embodied in the symbols of fire and ashes facilitates the emotional demonstration while preserving its intensity within certain cultural contexts. Drawing on the transformative symbolism of fire and ashes, both poets depict the post-traumatic memories while simultaneously illuminating the psychological self-transformation. By offering a resilient, symbolic mode of expression, poetic language defies traumatic disruption and allows self-reconstruction after trauma. This procedure endowed their poetic voices with scope and identity within the broader context of women's poetry. Although the two poets mainly rely on fire and ashes to represent post-traumatic memory, the comparison reveals a notable divergence in their poetic lenses. Since Atwood's traumatic memory is connected to her parents and childhood, her focus is pensively psychological. This focus allows her to reach individuation early in the process of self-reconstruction. Al-Malaika's symbolism is closely tied to a recent, socio-cultural experience of her life, which accounts for her vague and stark emotional imagery. This comparative analysis deepens the understanding of traumatic memory in women's poetry by highlighting the works of two modern female poets with different cultural backgrounds. The study emphasizes the role of poetry as a means of survival and self-reconstruction. It paves the way for further interdisciplinary studies in literary representations of trauma, and calls for further research in the maturation of women's poetry and its pivotal role in shaping both identity and poetic voice.

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