

The Representation of Pride in Poems of Al-Mutanabbi

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ABSTRACT

Al-Mutanabbi is widely recognized as one of the greatest poets in classical Arabic literature, whose works are distinguished by their linguistic richness and profound exploration of human experiences. Among the dominant themes in his poetry is pride, which reflects his identity, courage, and sense of honor. This study aims to analyze the representation of pride in selected poems of Al-Mutanabbi. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a literary approach. The data consist of three poems: The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess, At the Siege of Antioch, and The Poet Reproaches Saif al-Daula. Data were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques and analyzed by identifying, classifying, and interpreting textual evidence related to the representation of pride. The findings reveal that pride is represented through three categories: pride through self-glorification, pride through heroism, and pride through self-respect. Among these categories, self-glorification appears most frequently, reflecting Al-Mutanabbi's tendency to construct an image of himself as an extraordinary individual through expressions of superiority, courage, and honor. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the representation of pride in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry and provide an alternative perspective for the study of classical Arabic literature.

Keywords: Al-Mutannabi; Arabic Poetry; Pride

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INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been recognized as a form of artistic expression that embodies both aesthetic and intellectual value. According to Wellek and Warren, literature represents human life as interpreted through the author's observations, experiences, and imagination. In addition to its artistic function, literature also serves practical purposes. Among various literary genres, poetry serves as an effective medium for communicating ideas, beliefs, and reflections on human life. Nisa and Anantama (2025) argue that poetry is not merely created for aesthetic appreciation but also functions as a vehicle through which authors express their thoughts and responses to social realities. As a result, poems often contain moral messages that encourage readers to reflect upon ethical principles and social behavior.

One of the most influential figures in Arabic literature is Al-Mutanabbi, whose full name was Ahmad ibn Husayn ibn al-Hasan al-Ju'fi. Born in Kufa in 915 CE, he is widely regarded as one of the greatest poets in the Islamic literary tradition. His poetry is particularly renowned for its expressions of honor, courage, ambition, and self-pride, making him one of the most distinctive voices in classical Arabic poetry. Scholars such as Arslan (2025) and Al-Zahrani (2024) highlight his ability to combine aesthetic beauty with profound reflections on human life, making his poetry relevant across different historical periods.

Previous studies have examined Al-Mutanabbi's poetry from different perspectives. (Andriana & Rohanda, 2025) "*The use of simile in Al-Mutanabbi's poem Araqu 'alā Araqin wa Mithlī Ya 'raqu and its intended function: A study in Arabic rhetoric ('Ilm al-Bayān)*" investigated the use of similes in one of his poems and concluded that figurative language functions not only as a stylistic device but also as a means of expressing emotions and strengthening poetic imagery. Likewise, (Safii et al., 2024) "*Kajian semantik: Makna kiasan dalam syair '□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□' karya Al-Mutanabbi*" analyzed figurative meanings in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry and found that religious symbols and metaphors contribute significantly to the construction of meaning. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no previous study has specifically categorized the representation of pride in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry into self-glorification, heroism, and self-respect. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the pride represented in selected excerpts from Al-Mutanabbi's poems. By examining this representation of pride, the study seeks to reveal the ethical messages conveyed by the poet and their relevance to contemporary readers.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a literary approach. (Creswell, 2018) Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and interpreting meanings embedded in texts and human experiences. The data consisted of three poems by Al-Mutanabbi: *The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess*, *At the Siege of Antioch*, and *The Poet Reproaches Saif al-Daula*, which represent various expressions of pride. Data were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques. The data were analyzed following the interactive model (Miles et al., 2014) which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data were also collected by identifying, classifying into three categories of pride representation (Pride through Self-Glorification, Pride through Heroism, and Pride through Self-Respect), and interpreted to reveal how pride is represented in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Pride through Self-Glorification

“You displayed the like impatience which I displayed, yet you did not conceal the pain which I concealed” (Arberry, 1967, *The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess*, lines 10).

In this verse, Al-Mutanabbi compares himself to another person who experiences the same suffering. However, he emphasizes that while the other person openly shows their pain, he chooses to conceal it. This portrayal reflects pride through emotional strength and self-control. The poet presents himself as someone who is able to endure hardship without exposing his weakness to others. Through this comparison, Al-Mutanabbi constructs an image of himself as a resilient and strong individual.

This idea is reinforced in the following lines:

“To divert myself with hopes is no aim of mine, and to be content with impoverishment is not my character; I do not suppose that time’s vicissitudes will leave me until my aspirations bar their ways to them” (Arberry, 1967, *The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess*, lines 12).

In these lines, Al-Mutanabbi rejects passive hope and refuses to accept poverty and limitation as part of his character. The poet portrays himself as someone who relies on determination and action rather than mere expectation. This reflects pride through ambition and a strong belief in his own ability to overcome adversity

I see men, but all I get is sheep” (Arberry, 1967, *The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess*, line 15)

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi states that although he sees many men around him, what he actually finds are merely “sheep.” Through this comparison, he positions himself as superior to the people he encounters. This verse represents pride through self-glorification, as the poet emphasizes his own excellence and distinguishes himself from others. Furthermore, the verse portrays Al-Mutanabbi as a dominant and powerful individual whose qualities surpass those of ordinary men.

“My blade will accompany in me the like of its edge, and it will be revealed of me to men that I am the bravest of the brave” (Arberry, 1967, *The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess*, line 17)

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi states that his sword and its sharpness will serve as proof of his true identity to others. Through this expression, he portrays himself as a figure of extraordinary courage, even surpassing those around him. This line represents pride through self-glorification, as Al-Mutanabbi openly highlights his own courage and exceptional qualities. In doing so, he builds an image of himself as a strong, resilient warrior who is worthy of recognition and honor.

“I am he whose accomplishments even the blind can see, and whose words have made even the deaf to hear”

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi employs paradox to emphasize the greatness of his achievements. He claims that even the blind can see his accomplishments and even the deaf can hear his words. Rather than being interpreted literally, these expressions suggest that his reputation and excellence are so extraordinary that they are recognized by everyone. This verse represents pride through self-glorification, as Al-Mutanabbi openly praises his own achievements and highlights the exceptional influence of his poetry. Accordingly, this exaggeration reflects that he constructs an image of himself as an outstanding poet whose fame and accomplishments surpass those of ordinary people.

2. Pride through heroism

“So now I will act impetuously until impetuosity is exhausted. I will leave the horses’ faces horribly altered, whilst war is more firmly set than leg on foot,” (Arberry, 1967, *The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess*, Line 19)

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi declares that he will no longer hold himself back from acting boldly until his courage reaches its limit. He also describes how his presence on the battlefield will make the war more intense and fraught with tension. The image of the horses’ faces turning terrifying reinforces the picture of the ferocity of the battle he faces. This stanza represents pride through heroism because Al-Mutanabbi constructs an image of himself as a brave warrior who plays a crucial role in the war. Through this portrayal, he presents himself as a strong, influential leader capable of facing danger without fear.

“also for every king of the Arabs and non-Arabs who disobeys me; if they respond, my purpose with those blades is not them, and if they turn their backs, I shall not confine their service to them alone.” (Arberry, 1967, *The Poet Glories in His Own Youthful Prowess*, Line 30-31)

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi suggests that all rulers, whether Arab or non-Arab, must take notice of him and respond to his presence. Using hyperbolic language, he further implies that if they choose to oppose or ignore him, the consequences would extend beyond the rulers themselves. This verse represents pride through heroism, as Al-Mutanabbi portrays himself as a figure of extraordinary influence and significance. Through this exaggerated depiction, he constructs an image of himself as a powerful and respected individual whose presence commands attention even from kings and rulers.

The idea of pride through heroism is reflected in the following lines:

“*When you plunge yourself into the quest for a desired distinction, do not be content with anything short of the stars.*” (Arberry, 1967, *At the siege of Antioch*, Line 1)

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi encourages the pursuit of the highest level of achievement, symbolized by the image of the stars. The stars represent greatness and extraordinary success rather than ordinary accomplishments. Through this expression, the poet demonstrates pride through heroism by portraying an unwavering determination to pursue honor and distinction. The verse suggests that individuals should not settle for mediocrity but should strive for excellence despite the challenges they may face. Therefore, this imagery shows Al-Mutanabbi as an ambitious and courageous figure who constantly seeks greatness.

This idea is reinforced in the following line:

“*Cowards deem that impotence is intelligence.*” (Arberry, 1967, *At the siege of Antioch*, Line 6)

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi criticizes those who disguise fear and weakness as wisdom. By contrasting courage with cowardice, the poet elevates bravery as a noble and admirable quality. This verse represents pride through heroism because Al-Mutanabbi associates honor with courage and action rather than passivity. This contrastness shows that he constructs an image of himself as a fearless individual who is willing to face risks in pursuit of glory and achievement.

“And many a heart there is, whose owner has purposed my heart’s destruction, I have overtaken riding a noble steed whose back was inviolable, his feet in the gallop as one foot, his hands one hand, and his action all that the hand and foot desire.” (Arberry, 1967, *The poet reproaches Saif al-Daula*, Line 19-20)

In this verse, Al-Mutanabbi states that those who intended to destroy him were ultimately overcome while he rode a noble and invincible steed. The description of the horse's unmatched strength and swift movement reinforces the image of the poet as a fearless warrior who is capable of overcoming his enemies. This verse represents pride through heroism, as Al-Mutanabbi portrays himself as a courageous and powerful figure whose bravery enables him to triumph over every challenge. As a result, in this heroic imagery, he constructs an image of himself as an exceptional warrior worthy of honor and admiration.

3. Pride through self-respect

“How far removed is fault and defect from my honour” (Arberry, 1967, *The poet reproaches Saif al-Daula*,, Line 29)

In this line, Al-Mutanabbi declares that fault and imperfection are far removed from his honor. Rather than claiming that he is entirely flawless, the poet emphasizes the purity of his dignity and reputation. This verse represents pride through self-respect, as Al-Mutanabbi asserts that his honor cannot be diminished by criticism or accusations. Therefore, in this statement, he constructs an image of himself as a man of integrity whose dignity remains intact despite the challenges and hostility he faces.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the representation of pride in selected poems of Al-Mutanabbi through a descriptive qualitative approach. The findings reveal that pride is represented through three main categories: self-glorification, heroism, and self-respect. Self-glorification is reflected in the poet's tendency to praise his own superiority, achievements, and reputation. Heroism is expressed through images of courage, determination, and strength in facing challenges, while self-respect is represented by the poet's emphasis on preserving his honor and dignity. Among the three categories, self-glorification appears most dominantly, indicating that Al-Mutanabbi consistently constructs an image of himself as an extraordinary individual through expressions of superiority, courage, and honor. These representations illustrate that pride in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry functions not merely as personal arrogance but also as a literary expression of identity, courage, and honor that characterizes his poetic style. Therefore, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how pride is constructed in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry and provides an alternative perspective for the study of classical Arabic literature. Future studies are recommended to explore other dominant themes in Al-Mutanabbi's works or apply different literary approaches to enrich the interpretation of his poetry.

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