



## *Darwish's Essentialist Poetics in a State of Siege*

**Patrick Sylvain**

*Brown University, Harvard University, and University of Massachusetts Boston*

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sylvainpa@att.net

**Abstract:** This article analyzes Darwish's creative dissidence and proposes a literary anthropological mapping that exposes his own relative historicity—his truth about Israel's occupation on the one hand, and his love for life and for his native land as a quintessentially locative human condition on the other. The existential echo that reverberates through Darwish's language is a calling, a desire for home—home in the poetic corpus and home for the nation. Socio-critical analysis of Mahmoud Darwish's poetics about his homeland requires that the corpus of his works be treated almost as a literary anthropological philosophy by relativizing it within the homo-historical and social literary contexts in which it was produced. My assessment of assigned categories onto Darwish's poetic corpus is an interpretive ontological signifying in order to map his literary evolution as it pertains to the identified categories (1-Formative, 2-Sublime, 3-Global). This assessment is not presumptuous or exhaustive; it is a theoretical study that tries to situate Darwish's poetic discourse within a socio-historical field and beyond the mere literary framework—a necessity given the broad scope of his works and philosophy.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The intersection of violence, national identity and literature has always been one of my intellectual interests, as has the plight and culture of Palestinians. The latter is due largely to the significant number of Palestinians that have migrated to my native Haiti since the first *Intifada* in 1987, and also because of the loss of a dear Haitian-Palestinian elder, Antoine Izmyer, to political violence in October 1994. Additionally, my relationships with Palestinian writers such as Suheir Hammad and Ibtisam Barrakat have solidified my understanding of Palestinian literary traditions, and have led me to

find a deep appreciation for Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish's work.

This essay is not about Palestinian history nor is it a comparative study of Palestinian poetry. Rather, it is about a writer who became dissident and exposed in his own relative historicity, his truth about Israel's occupation on the one hand, and his love for life and for his native land as a quintessentially locative human condition, on the other. In 1948, Mahmoud Darwish was six years old when his interrupted childhood brutally confronted exile. Thousands of Palestinians were forced to exile due to the systematic occupation by the Israelis. For Darwish, severance from the

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Patrick Sylvain is a Haitian language instructor at Brown University, a language coach at Harvard University, and has also worked as an adjunct professor in anthropology at UMass Boston. A writer, social critic, translator and photographer, he has been published in several anthologies, magazines and reviews including: *African American Review*, *Agni*, *American Poetry Anthology*, *American Poetry Review*, "The Best of Beacon, 1999," "The Butterfly's Way," *Callaloo*, *Caribbean Writers*, *Confrontation*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Haitian Times*, *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, *Massachusetts Review*, *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse (2005)*, *Ploughshares*, *Revue Noire* and "Step Into the World." His latest bilingual poetry collection *Love, Lust & Loss* was published by Mémoire d'Encrier (Dec. 2005). He is currently working on a collection of essays entitled: *Poetry as Political Discourse*.

homeland gave birth to his poetry, and commenced a love affair with location and dislocation. Throughout Mahmoud Darwish's poetics is the linkage of individuals or occupied entities to the ideal of a universal struggle for freedom and liberty from oppression, and a link to the "beauty" of life and language through the creative process—thus affirming Wellek & Warren's notion that: "[t]he work of literature is an aesthetic object, capable of arousing aesthetic experience" (1984: 241). And it was Darwish's creative work and precise language that transcended his experience not only as a Palestinian writer, but also as a writer who aroused the universal, while managing the aesthetic transmission of the oppressive side of the human condition under occupation. In his prosaic memoir, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Darwish writes in hauntingly surrealist manner:

"He's looking for a pair of eyes, for a shared silence or reciprocal talk. He's looking for some kind of participation in this death, for a witness who can give evidence, for a gravestone over a corpse, for the bearer of news about the fall of a horse, for a language of speech and silence, and for less boring wait for certain death. For what this steel and these iron beasts are screaming is that no one will be left in peace, and no one will count our dead" (1995: 24).

What Darwish aroused first in the Palestinians and then in the rest of the world is the aesthetic value of an experience that is free from oppression. He also brought to the surface an aesthetic that spoke truth to power and exposed the experienced madness of occupation. "Poetry is a dangerous game. It sometimes drives people to find a substitute for absence. It happens to me sometimes. At such times, I feel a sense of dangerous repose, that what I have written

has given me respite from inner torment, has liberated me" (Darwish, 1997 Documentary).

It has been established to the point of becoming cliché, that true poets, conscientious poets, are depositories of societal memories as well as witnesses to human conditions. In an essay written between 1944 and 1945, entitled *Poetry and Knowledge*, the young French-Martinican poet, Aimé Césaire, lucidly described the role of the poet. This description easily connects to the essence and the life of Darwish: "the poet is that very ancient yet new being, at once very complex and very simple, who at the limit of dream and reality, of day and night, between absence and presence, searches for and receives in the sudden triggering of inner cataclysms the password of connivance and power" (1990: 1vi). Mahmoud Darwish became the ancient and the new, the social chronicler of Palestinian emotions—emotions felt, or repressed, the whole gamut of human emotions in various states of siege and exile. The notion of the poet as chronicler is further supported by musings of a prominent Syrian critic, Subhi Hadidi, who writes that: "All cultures, like Arabic culture, attributed a special role to their poets at a particular moment of their history. It became incumbent upon poets everywhere to speak for their communities, to find answers to existential questions, to give poetry a power that was national and cultural, spiritual and material, aesthetic and informative" (2008: 97).

The existential echo that reverberates through Darwish's language is a calling, a desire for home—home in the poetic corpus and home for the nation. Through his lived conditions as a "stateless being," Darwish learned and transmitted his "lessons" through verses, his creative freedom-land. According to Fady Joudah, a major translator of Darwish's work into English, "Darwish does not disengage the act of writing from its subject matter. Instead, he performs a twinning. The beloved is not exclusively a

woman or a land, self or other, but also poem and prose" (2007: xvi). Perhaps, in a state of siege or exile, the poet has learned that in order to survive or to maintain one's humanity, one must love arduously. Darwish's love is constant throughout his poems; it is as if he is reminding himself and his enemies of love, and the sense of what it could be like to create a bond based on human values rather than religious or capital dogmas, values that transcend constructed borders. In a sense, the social and material constructs engineered by the Israelis to maintain the Palestinian as the other, become their own legacies. Their dehumanization and Darwish's *Earth Poem* clearly elucidates that point:

And they searched his chest  
 But could only find his heart  
 And they searched his heart  
 But could only find his people  
 And they searched his voice  
 But could only find his grief  
 And they searched his grief  
 But could only find his prison  
 And they searched his prison  
 But could only see themselves in chains  
 (1993: 563)

What pulls me in and through Darwish's monde poetic is his sense of humanity that seems to constantly restore hope and love even when Israeli tanks and aircrafts are pounding Ramallah, Gaza or other occupied territories. His restoration or established desire to love becomes the specific point of humanity that occupation cannot put under control. This desire to love in what seems to be a fragmented "nation" restores a constant hope of a new dawn. This is where lives; despite attempts to confine, imprison, and destroy his home, he continues to strive by what the poet refers to as an intuitive sense of survival, the "sixth sense." In the epic book of poems *A State of Siege* (2002), Darwish's poetic sensibility and journalistic training formed a literary sym-

biosis that expanded a new vastness of the creative language into a space that heaved surprises and pain:

The soldiers measure the distance  
 between being  
 and nonbeing  
 with a tank's scope ...

We measure the distance with our  
 bodies  
 and mortar shells... with the sixth  
 sense (2007: 125)

The spatial confinement of the occupied Palestinian territory is defined ideologically and reinforced through a military apparatus where marginalized subjects are further objectified and scoped as if as mechanical objects placed on shooting ranges to be snuffed into infinity. However, the poet is reminding us that the nonbeing-like-object is a conscientious being, a highly developed subject who is able, at times, to measure high-speed mortars "with a sixth sense" because of his experience with habitual Israeli shellings. Darwish's poetics are not allegories of provocation against Israel, but rather, they are historical *mise en abyme*, a form of poetic historical mirroring, a reproduction of the 'is'. Thus, Darwish's dissidence is a result of his accurate reproduction of the "is" that Israel produces. In the bilingual edition of the Arabic poetry anthology *Victims of a Map*, Darwish's selected poems elucidate the problematic of the Israeli occupation by poetically mapping the cartography of emotional and spatial confinement. In the poem "We Fear for a Dream," Darwish's brilliance at aesthetically historicizing through poetic means becomes evident:

We know you have abandoned us, built  
 for us prisons and called them  
 the paradise of oranges.  
 We go on dreaming. Oh, desired  
 dream. We steal our days from  
 those

Extolled by our myths.  
 We fear for you, we're afraid of you. We  
 are exposed together, you  
 Shouldn't believe our wives' patience.  
 (1984: 17)

Being a dissident is about exposing the immoral aspects of institutions; it is about exposing the contradictions inherent in the superstructure of power, and revealing what it is like to be the other and to construct one's own ontology about a group's felt experiences while deconstructing imposed myths of the other. "And when we write, call upon other writers to write, in the name of creative freedom, we are doing nothing more than bringing into focus the points of light and first efforts scattered by dissension over an idea founded on this simple assertion: we want to liberate ourselves, our countries, and our minds and live in the modern age with competence and pride" (Darwish, 1995: 140). What the Israeli government perceived as Darwish's dissention is nothing more than his fundamental right to supremely love his birthplace, and to be free from control without consent. Darwish's perceived dissention became the acclamation of Palestinians with a lucid voice of conscience. According to John Mikkail Asfour's biographical notes, "Darwish has been influenced by political and social changes and liberation movements throughout the world, on which subject he is an avid reader. Unlike many poets Darwish may claim to have lived his poetry, for many a time he has faced imprisonment by the Israeli authorities for his activities in the pro-Arab faction of the country's Communist Party, while living and working as a journalist in Haifa" (1992: 208).

Socio-critical analysis of Mahmoud Darwish's poetics about his homeland requires that the corpus of his works be treated almost as a literary anthropological philosophy by relativizing it within the homo-historical and social literary contexts in which it was produced. "In the Arab and

specifically the Palestinian case, aesthetics and politics are intertwined for a number of reasons. One is the ever-present repression and blockage of life, on every level, by the Israeli occupation, by the dispossession of an entire nation, and the sense that we are a nation of exiles. So, that defines our situation, to which the writer responds. Another dynamic is the pressure of the Islamic and Arabic language tradition itself, which is very powerful. Language is the central cultural expression of the Arabs" (Said, 2003: 164). With the centrality of language as an integral part in the expressive modalities of Mahmoud Darwish's aesthetic project, and unlike the post-modern writers whose aesthetic was to utilize language for language's sake, Darwish vehicles language with locative content and referential context.

I discern three informative periods in the history of his poetics: Formative, or, what I would classify as Trenchant; Sublime, as Love and Exile; and Global, as Humanity, Return and Dashed Hope.

## II. FORMATIVE: THE PERFOLIATION OF TRENCHANT POETICS

My assessment of assigned categories onto Darwish's poetic corpus is an interpretive ontological signifying in order to map his literary evolution as it pertains to the identified categories (1-Formative, 2-Sublime, 3-Global). My assessment is not presumptuous or exhaustive; it is a theoretical study that tries to situate Darwish's poetic discourse within a socio-historical field and beyond the mere literary framework—a necessity given the broad scope of his works and philosophy. In other words, it would not be at all sufficient to remove the poet from the social and read his works as simply as a literary genre, namely poetry, and thus assign aesthetics, tropes, meters and rhyme sequences to his work without contemplating what Chris Miller refers to as "the dissidence of the imagination" (1995: 13).

Darwish's poetic is much more complex than assigned signifiers; hence, I insist upon the use of poetic corpus and discourse as modes of analysis and reference in order to fully grasp his *dissidence of the imagination*, his witnessing.

In 1964, the young Darwish, published a poem entitled "To the Reader" in which he explicitly channeled his politics, and was also conscious of the mode of his expression, namely *literati*.

O reader,  
 don't expect whispers from me,  
 or words of ecstasy:  
 this is my suffering!  
 A foolish blow in the sand  
 and another in the clouds.  
 Anger is all I am  
 anger, the tinder  
 Of fire.  
 (1992: 209)

At this, the outset of his formative years, Darwish's poem announced that his poetic consciousness of the needed or expected poetics would be non-pastoral, non-nominal, and non-conventional (made to feel good); but rather, his poetics would be involved in what "is" the actual. Darwish's noesis of the quintessential power of words would later establish him in the realm of poets as understood by Aimé Césaire, one of the most revered poet and statesmen of the postcolonial world. In one of Césaire's essays, *Poetry and Knowledge* he lucidly affirmed that: "it is not merely with his whole soul, it is with his entire being that the poet approaches the poem. What presides over the poem is not the most lucid intelligence, or the most acute sensibility, but an entire experience: all the women loved, all the desires experienced, all the dreams dreamed, all of the images received or grasped, the whole weight of the body, the whole weight of the mind..." Indeed, it is Darwish's poetic consciousness and experience that informed his poetics, and therein lies the

importance of Césaire's assertion of the all-lived experience. "All the possibility[ies]. Around the poem about to be made, the precious vortex: the ego, the id, the world" (1990: xlvi). And in the 1964 poem "To the Reader" Darwish's ego and id were already engaging the world.

In yet another example of poetic engagement with the world, particularly the Israeli world, Darwish's poem "Identity Card" also written in 1964, brought forth the social determination of language that stresses the tensions within poetry as it consciously articulates the contradictions of the social world. Here, although not in a superb poetic form, Darwish's communicative capacity to create and to intervene with relative poetic prowess is demonstrated so as to render Palestinian situations and histories meaningful with great stressors placed on textual signification:

Write down:  
 a name with no friendly shortcut.  
 A patient man, in a country  
 brimming with anger.  
 My roots have gripped this soil  
 since time began,  
 before the opening of ages  
 before the cypress and the olive,  
 before the grasses flourished.  
 My father came from a line of  
 plowmen,  
 And my grandfather was a peasant  
 Who taught me about the sun's glory  
 Before teaching me to read.  
 My home is a watchman's shack  
 Made of reeds and sticks  
 Does my condition anger you?  
 (1992: 214)

Whether Darwish was consciously portraying the real, that is the non-fictive, for affect, or simply was self-conscious of the poetics of poetry to the point of being pragmatic, is not at all an issue; Darwish's verses, ornamented or not, were conversing with history through the "I" and were al-



ready in connection with the “we”. The objective as well as the symbolic “we” was the family, the land, and the occupied Palestinians. Thus, the real in Darwish’s poetics was not an abstraction of the fictive, and what perhaps was fictive is an abstraction of the real that has hunted his creative landscape; the true space from which he was free to write and to be without being a “non-being” in a state of siege, or exile. Hence, my complete agreement with Wellek and Warren’s affirmation on of the fusion between material world and language:

In a successful work of art, the materials are completely assimilated into the form: what was ‘world’ has become ‘language’. The ‘materials’ of a literary work of art are, on one level, words, on another level, human behaviour experience, and on another, human ideas and attitude. All of these, including language, exist outside the work of art, in other modes; but in a successful poem or novel they are pulled into polyphonic relations by the dynamic of aesthetic purpose. (Wellek & Warren, 1984: 241)

To critically read Darwish’s text, one must construct relations between texts and world as well as with extratextual relationships that would inform the writer’s intention and attitude. Again, aware of the weight of the word, Darwish’s “Identity Card” is a poem that presupposes the reader’s attitude by reading the reader and thus pre-imposing its meaning which the author prejudices by known discoveries, attitudes and articulations of expectations. This particular poem is drawn within the immediacy of the poetic space that reflects on itself while it simultaneously projects the reader’s expected attitude within the textual field and the social operative field. In a sense, that particular poem was consciously constructed to be confrontational and ex-

pected responses that are a result of the interrogations that conclude each declarative stanza. “It’s a poem that actually derives from the personal experience of having to register at an Israeli office” (Said, 2003: 161).

The poetic reflective tenacity of Darwish’s discourse can be viewed through the production and consumption of his work as the inspiring mirror of the Palestinians and the Arab world. The reflective dimension of his work became apparent when he was popularly crowned as “the poet laureate of the Middle-East,” a title he rejected because it was officious and not official. Nevertheless, the prowess of his works are reflected through the predominance of the poet’s presence upon the cultural landscape as he voiced the pain, love, aspirations and simply the lyrical precision of words through the Arabic language that reflects and maintains its poetic eloquence present in progressive Islamic discourse. Edward Said also provides an accurate assessment of Darwish’s poetic caliber as “a poet of many dimensions.” “He’s certainly a public poet, but also an intensely personal and lyrical poet. And I think, on the world scale today, he’s certainly one of the best. He ranks with Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney to mention two Nobel Prize winners, one from the Caribbean, one from Ireland in mastery of his language” (162). In a sense, through the mastery of the language, the poetic consciousness of the Arab further solidifies the bond felt through Darwish’s poetics—hence, his essentialism as a modern poet who has flipped the categorization of Palestinians on its head and entered into a pseudo-direct dialogue with the Israeli occupier about the presence of life, love, liberty and memories of oppression, and includes the concentration camps in which the Jews died. In the formative period of Darwish’s work, what is called for is to establish an understanding of a fully literary anthropological context of textual productions that occur within a tense social modality mandating implicit responses. The texts

produced between 1964 and 1970, and even through the '70s, were indicative of the transgressed needs, as well as the personal age of radical militancy that rightly opposed a dehumanizing occupation. "It goes back to the Mahmoud Darwish poem about the identity card. Many Palestinians' identity cards don't list 'Palestinian' as one's nationality; they list one's nationality as 'undetermined'" (2003: 161). Thus, not only a trenchant voice arose and produced "Identity Card," "To The Reader," "Of Poetry," "Earth Poem," and "Prison"; but also, the poems composed in that period provided the literary anthropology to which I can assign a category, the Formative Period, that seems very distinctive in voice, outlook and *deontic* modality from the other two discerned categories. However, what remains constant throughout Mahmoud Darwish's poems and prose is that poetry is intrinsically connected to self-realization, and self-realization is a gradual, constantly dynamic and fluid process that is imbrued in his poetic project.

The ontological imposition of what a Palestinian is within the occupier's discourse was explicitly seized by Darwish's poem "Identity Card" and was re-imagined and re-ontologized in order to re-indicate the material condition of the Palestinians as an occupied people... Having outlined and hurled into the world the Palestinian as a conscious subject of the Israeli, and still being imbued with full memories of his past, Darwish's poem became the catalyst for his essential presence within the discursive framework of Palestinian identity and desire for independence from state-sponsored terror and occupation. "Identity Card" catapulted Darwish center stage to poetically counteract with the occupier.

### III. SUBLIME: LOVE & EXILE

When Darwish's material Palestinian world is approximatively reduced to one of oppression and repression, it becomes fun-

damentally clear that in order to protect his psyche from becoming oppressed, his imaginative mind must turn to creativity, and thus finds a release center, compensation if you will. It is not that Darwish's works have changed the material world for Palestinians, but rather that his creative self has provided a psychical compensation that alleviates the pain from the actual conditions of repression. Love and hope become far greater weapons of resistance that do not allow the psyche to be broken.

The imaginative content of Darwish's love poems provides both emotional and ideological expressions that are overtly female and optimistic. It is precisely this use of writing style that makes Mahmoud Darwish such a respected and mesmeric writer. Even when writing about love, Darwish's writing was never demoted or *démodé*, nor robbed of its social and historical contexts, for exile was always there, never cut off from its socio-cultural lifeline:

I do not know why, I am so widely read, but I find there are generations of Palestinians who become acquainted with their homeland and their past by embodying the scenes of my poems. My poems do not deliver mere images and metaphors but deliver landscapes, villages, and fields, deliver a place. It makes that which is absent from geography present in its form, that is, able to reside the poetic text, as if residing on his land. I don't think that a poet is entitled to a greater happiness than that some people seek refuge in his lines of poetry, as if they were real houses. Indeed, in Arabic, there is a nice and unusual homonymy. Both the poetic verse and the house are said 'bayt'. As if a man can reside there. (Darwish, 1997: Documentary)

Since the self occupies multiple spaces

and is also fluid through its materialization and adaptation processes, one would be foolish to box Darwish, or other poets whose works are committed to witnessing, to a specific non-interactive category or categories, space, or creative voice. Again, Subbi Hadidi reminds us that Darwish's love poems "allow greater individual freedom and offer a spontaneous expression of profound emotions. Darwish's love poetry thus possesses a psychological infrastructure. This organizational method is certainly relevant to Darwish, his poetry, and his readers. Indeed, the structure negotiates the limits of the reader's interpretations of the poems as well as the emancipation of the poet's and reader's subjectivities" (111).

Darwish's textual communicative prowess can be measured through the interception, interpretation and renditions of his work through the Palestinian culture. Hence, his capacity to create and to imaginatively intervene in the routine of the people is indeed a rendering of their human lives meaningful through literature, despite an inhumane existence outside of the poetic text. As such, Darwish's language carried the weight of his historicity within his literary monde that encountered prison, exile, love, hope, despair, return and occupation. His poems on love and exile are maps of his diasporic journeys. Beyond the aesthetically pleasing poetic construction of the love poems, there are the incidences of dislocation, displacement, and dashed hopes. The archaeology of those particular poems is therefore an extended meditative container for dislocation, unsustainable love due to flight, unanchored diasporic lives, and the pain involved in experiencing brutal repression while maintaining hope in the face of a dwindling *self-ruled cage* that might become the eventual Palestinian homeland:

Two of my verses, which have become popular, seem to contradict each other, although, in my opinion, they are complimentary. The

first, which has become something of a motto, is 'my homeland is not a suitcase, and I am not a traveler.' Years later, this suitcase spoke with itself and said, 'my homeland is a suitcase.' I see no contradiction between the two statements. When I examine how I feel as an exile, I find that my exile did not begin outside my homeland but inside it. The military Judge who punish[ed] me for my poetry was Jewish. The woman teacher who taught me Hebrew and inspired my love for literature, was Jewish. The English teacher, a stern man, was Jewish. The woman Judge who presided over my first trial was Jewish. My first lover was Jewish, my next door neighbor was Jewish, and my political comrades were Jewish. Therefore, I did not look at Jews as a separate entity; I did not have a stereotypes view. Thus from the beginning for me, coexistence has seemed possible psychologically and culturally, but the main problem remains the political one. (Darwish, 1997: Documentary)

Love and Exile are firmly established themes throughout Darwish's work. They form a complex anthropological map, of contentious spaces and perspectives. The poem "She's Alone in the Evening" captures this form of poetic anthropological mapping where desire and loneliness form the master narrative of the poem, and where the subtext remains the plight of exile and a language that is silenced:

She's alone, and I am in front of beauty  
Alone. Why doesn't delicacy unite us?  
I say to myself  
Why don't I taste her wine?  
She doesn't see me, when I see her  
uncrossing her legs...  
And I also don't see her, when she sees



me  
 taking off my coat...  
 Nothing bothers her when she's with  
 me  
 nothing bothers me, because we are  
 now  
 harmonious in forgetfulness...  
 Our dinner was, separately, delicious  
 the night sound was blue  
 I wasn't alone, and neither was she  
 alone  
 we were together listening to the  
 crystal  
 (nothing fractures our night). (2007: 265)

Love is the space within which a continuous process of self—of emotional evolution—takes place in order to reach humanity's apex, and exile is the space of longing for what is imaginatively desirable or at least a return to the known and the familiar. In a re-rooting of the self, those two spaces create a hyperspace of desire and longing where the self binds to its primal relationship, its receptacle nature, the native land. As Ibtisam Barakat accurately expressed, and I will hitch my thoughts with hers "Who in the world would not be able to relate to missing their mother! Words that symbolized the state of exile for the Palestinians in the most universal of words...but also could reach the farthest points of the human heart..." (2008: Roundtable).

The Reading of Darwish's poetic corpus as literary anthropology is further supported by the poet's statement as quoted by Subbi Hadidi:

...Regarding poetic language, poetry is in a general way a journey between cultures, languages, and different temporalities. Poetry cannot be nationalist in the strict meaning of the word; but, because of the fact that there is a link between poetry and community and because the poet belongs in some way to this community and is the

product of a particular historic configuration, has a role in shaping the cultural identity of his people. (2008: 108)

Darwish's conscious reading and interpretation of his role as poet solidifies my argument that his aesthetic and poetic project is not simply literary, but firmly cultural with a philosophical appendage reminiscent of the ancient Greeks. He acts a poet-philosopher whose task is to represent and meet the need of the collective and yet inspire them. Thus, the existence of a co-mingling between the private and the public, freedom and un-freedom, and the overall desire for the poet to please himself is but to be embraced by his readers. Hence the importance of his expressed sentiment in Simone Bitton's 1997 documentary:

The harmony of poetry, the rhythm of poetry cannot be realized unless a lyrical atmosphere pervades the poem. An atmosphere which requires certain harmonic and rhythmic conditions not found in poems written in private. I write a poem in private, but transmitted to the people, it becomes a different poem, dissociated from the written text. It creates another ritual, a celebration between the image, the voice, the body and the collective rewriting of the text.

Through the cinematographic lens of the documentary "Mahmoud Darwish as Land is Language," a Film by Simone Bitton (France 3/ PDJ Productions: 1997), I was able to further comprehend and solidify my interpretation of Darwish's works. While on Mount Nebo in Jordan, Darwish looked out on the Eastern Slope of the Dead Sea to contemplate his homeland cradling just beyond the River Jordan, and said: "The dialogue I conduct with myself here, is a dialogue with the absent part of me. I see

absence so closely that I can touch it. I can embrace it, or keep it away, as if I were there. As if my shadow here addresses my essence there." Haunted by the absence of the sacred, one's birthplace, Darwish's poems hunts the imagination of the reader for his lyricism and his imageries are agencies that elicit compassion. The poem "Who Am I, Without Exile" captures that essence:

Water  
binds me  
to your name...  
There's nothing left of me but you, and  
nothing left of you  
but me, the stranger massaging his  
stranger's thigh: O  
stranger! What will we do with what is  
left to us  
of calm... and of a snooze between two  
myths?  
And nothing carries us: not the road  
and not the house.  
Was this road always like this, from the  
start,  
or did our dreams find a mare on the  
hill  
among the Mongol horses and  
exchange us for it?  
And what will we do?  
What  
will we do  
without  
exile? (2007: 89)

The existential questions along with the problems faced by the strangers in the poem create a psychic doubling that requires a split consciousness in order to deal with the ordeal of natal-landlessness and the intense love for a shattered and occupied land. And where, as a result of dislocation, one's love cannot be grounded due to constant movement and unwanted fragmentation that forced exile engenders:

I feel somewhat like a stranger.  
One may feel a stranger even in the

mirror. There is something missing, and that is what pains me most. I feel that I am like a tourist but without the rights of a tourist. This feeling of being a visitor is devastating. The most difficult thing is to be a visitor to oneself... A Palestinian cannot reach Jerusalem. I myself cannot reach Jerusalem. I myself cannot hold that full moon. All I can do is to bear my disappointment and return to the cage to which I am doomed. (Darwish, 1997: Documentary)

In the Sublime period of Darwish's work, love becomes the nursing ground for imaginative poetic maturation as well as the house that nurtures the fragmented exiled-self. Again, an understanding must be established of the literary anthropological context of Darwish's textual productions that occurred within a tense period of rupture and flight. The texts produced between 1982-1995 were indicative of the imaginative and personal freedom needs that sublimely counteracted with his dehumanizing existence as a landless exile.

Through being incognito in Paris, although coincidental, Darwish benefited from isolation by becoming much more prolific and delved into his own psychological terrain, his geography of exile and longing, and therefore composed his best work. Here, he addressed the hardship of dislocation and defeat as a stateless being, as well as the carnal desire of the poet. "Of course, I have longings and inner drives, and there is a stirring in the blood, calling for the other, but not in any institutional sense" (1997, Documentary). As for carnal desire, in a passage from "Memory for Forgetfulness" he writes in a somewhat journalistic prose: "I turn to the poet: 'Tell me, why do young men get excited under the worst conditions? Is this a time for love? This is no time for love, but for sudden desire. Two fleeting bodies collaborate to hold back one

fleeting death by means of another—a honed death” (1995: 57). Although tragic, the Palestinian’s existentiality or will to exist despite the certainty of death, embraces the affirmation of life through the human embrace as a primordial human condition, albeit carnal desire.

The creative freedom achieved in Paris temporarily liberated Darwish’s traumatized-exiled psyche and delved into creation. It was because of Paris, after being bestowed as a Knight of Arts and Belles Lettres, that he achieved international recognition and his work began to be widely translated. Thus he expanded the geographical recognition of Palestine and the Palestinian plight with a dashing hope of a possibility of a right to return. The universality of his work, whether longing for the homeland, longing for love, or expressing the horror of living under occupation, brought the voice and the ordeal of the marginalized to the center:

Perhaps one of the reasons why I like Paris is that I don’t speak French, which kept me on the margin of French life, without mixing with the neighbors or society in general. This gave me greater freedom to be what I want to be and to act as I want. When I walk in the streets, nobody knows me. In an Arab country, I cannot sit alone in a café, for there, people recognize me and come to greet me. I cannot read my newspaper nor meditate. Here, I am an unknown person. Here, I wrote my best works: ‘It is a Song, It is a Song’; ‘Fewer Roses’; ‘I See What I Want’; ‘Eleven Stars’. The last work I wrote here was ‘Why You Left Me Alone?’ In addition, I wrote some prose works: ‘A Memory For Forgetfulness’; and ‘Passers among Passing Words’. (Darwish, 1997: Documentary)

The Sublime stage is indicative of the creative dissident imagination that sustained Darwish’s humanity and bestowed the freedom to push his fierce modernist creativity while maintaining a literary link with the classical past. His creative dissident imagination allowed him to rebelliously innovate without alienating himself and his readers. Through his innovative realms, history is still center stage.

#### IV. GLOBAL: HUMANITY, RETURN, DASHED HOPE

The global has become a metaphor from which I am able to further theorize on the last decade of Darwish’s work. The post-trenchant (Formative) period is where the self is solely centered upon the national. The gaze of the trenchant is immediate and myopically precise, and thus, the immediate must be understood, explicated and voiced. Anger, shame and humiliation embodies the trenchant and the response is always *du tac au tac*. That is, the global becomes bi-focal and pluralistic in tone while the content is still singular and contains a Palestinian consciousness. The singularity of the “I” becomes the universal, the “I” can be inhabited by the reader, as if in an echo chamber or a mirror effect had occurred. The last nineteen lines from the poem “Cadence Chooses Me” perfectly illustrate this point:

...  
Whenever I listen to the stone I hear  
the cooing of a white pigeon  
gasp in me:  
My brother! I am your little sister,  
So I cry in her name the tears of speech  
And whenever I see the zanzalakht  
trunk  
on the way to the clouds,  
I hear a mother’s heart  
palpitate in me:  
I am a divorced woman,  
so I curse in her name the cicada  
darkness

And whenever I see a mirror on a moon  
 I see love a devil  
 glaring at me:  
 I am still here  
 but you won't return as you were when  
 I left you  
 you won't return, and I won't return  
 Then cadence completes its cycle  
 and chokes on me... (2007: 179)

The global, although it is still national, is in a non-contradictory co-existence with the universal. That is, Darwish's connectivity with the world was never a negation of the local, instead, it intensified the connection with the locale but with an ontology and epistemology that could be grasped by the "we" of the global, particularly the struggling global.

The witnessing poet relocates occupational practices from the hidden to the open and declaratively categorizes the events in terms of human occurrences and refuses margins in order to be "read" as center, as anthropological events and not simply as raw historical events. The poet puts a face, a content, behind the number of person "X" whose house was bulldozed, whose olive groves were destroyed and whose land was seized. The poet writes with an intimate intentionality, with a conscious articulation about social & personal events that have personified contours and historical data. In fact, for Darwish, historical writing is the antithesis of poetry. Thus in the prose-poem "Don't Write History as Poetry" this is his fundamental plea:

Don't write poetry as history, because  
 the weapon is  
 the historian. And the historian  
 doesn't get fever  
 chills when names his victims, and  
 doesn't listen  
 to the guitar's rendition. And history is  
 the dailiness  
 of weapons prescribed upon our  
 bodies. [...]

Aimlessly we make it and it make us...  
 Perhaps  
 history wasn't born as we desired,  
 because  
 the Human Being never existed?  
 Philosophers and artists passed  
 through there...  
 and the poets wrote down the dailiness  
 of their purple flowers  
 then passed through there... and the  
 poor believed  
 in sayings about paradise and waited  
 there...  
 and gods came to rescue nature from  
 our divinity  
 and passed through there. And history  
 has no  
 time for contemplation, history has no  
 mirror  
 and bare face. It is unreal reality  
 or un fanciful fancy, so don't write it.  
 Don't write it, don't write it as poetry!  
 (2007: 259)

During an interview with Sarah Adler, an Israeli television reporter, Darwish was asked to clarify his view on his usage of Homer as it relates to Israel and the Israelis' rights to the land. And he provided an answer that elucidated his poetic project and his complex understanding of the poetic of politics: Darwish's poetic corpus can be viewed as a discourse that articulates a Palestinian consciousness of history and a social project for the region that is based on respect for humanity and self. It is a consciousness that is linked to and dependent upon the fate of the nation within which all hopes are located. Darwish's poetic discourse situates him within a global context where dichotomous visions of nation-states are expressed in a supposed postcolonial framework, but where coloniality within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the center of history.

Truth has two faces. We've listened  
 to the Greek mythology and, at

times, we've heard the Trojan victim speak through the myth of the Greek Euripides. As for me, I'm looking for the poet of Troy, because Troy didn't tell its story. And I wonder, does a land that has great poets have the right to control a people that have no poets? And is the lack of poetry amongst a people enough reason to justify its defeat? Is poetry a sign or is it an instrument of power? Can a people be strong without having its own poetry?

I was a child of people that had not been recognized until then. And I wanted to speak in the name of the absentee in the name of Trojan poet. There's more inspiration and humanity in defeat than there is in victory.

[Sarah: 'Are you sure?']...

In defeat, there's also deep romanticism in defeat. If I belonged to the victor's camp, I'd demonstrate my support for the victims. Do you know why the Palestinians are famous? Because you are our enemy. The interest in us stems from the interest in the Jewish issue. The interest is in you, not in me. So, we have the misfortune of having Israel as an enemy because it enjoys unlimited support. And we have the great fortune of having Israel as our enemy because the Jews are the center of attention. You've brought us defeat and renown. You've brought us defeat and renown...

[Sarah: 'We are your propaganda Ministry!']

Indeed. The world is interested in you, not us. I have no illusions.<sup>1</sup>

It is within such scope and complex outlook that Darwish's writing really fused and incorporated well-known mythologies into his writing in order to elucidate his points. That the Palestinian struggle was no longer a solitary struggle for a small group of people, but a struggle of the world, and also a struggle that belonged to the Israelis whose humanity he recognized was afflicted by the dehumanizing acts they inflicted upon the Palestinians.

In a sense, exile and suffering enabled Darwish to transcend the confines of nationalistic borders without losing his national identity, while becoming transnational as a grounded Palestinian poet with an "autonomous" identity that enabled him to simultaneously reflect inward and outward. The globalizing essence of his later writings unbounded his occupied identity, and essentialized his Palestinian self that was restricted in a context of inhumane occupation. Through his works, we, the non-Palestinians, became Palestinians and lament and hope with him for a new dawn; but the harsh reality of the occupation, despite his creative dissidence of the imagination, ushers in a cruel reality that even the most resilient poet must admit:

I consider myself a Trojan poet, that poet whose text has been lost to us and literary history. What I wish to express, although not with any finality, but with a certain ambiguity, is that I belong to Troy, not because I am defeated, but because I am obsessed by the desire to write the lost text. Of course, I would rather be victorious in the general sense, that is to say, not to belong to a defeated society, in order to test the validity of my desire to embody the sacrificed Troy, which can then write its own history... ..I

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dailymotion.com/playlist/x61vo\\_lapierreetlaplume\\_soustitres-fr/video/x3mr07\\_mahmoud-darwich-sarah-adler](http://www.dailymotion.com/playlist/x61vo_lapierreetlaplume_soustitres-fr/video/x3mr07_mahmoud-darwich-sarah-adler)



have a problem I would like to confess. I have not yet acknowledged that I am defeated. It may be that the illusion of creating has provided me with weapons that protect me from seeing the extent of the effect of the military and political defeat. Maybe I refuse to see it. Maybe a defeat is not ineluctable at the creative and poetic level. (Darwish, 1997: Documentary)

The philosopher-poet, or poet-philosopher, who had been exiled since the age of six, carried memories with him in his poetic suitcase from port to port and never fully grounded in one place. Even to visit his family in Israel, he had received a restricted state permit that allowed him, in 1997, for five days to be with his extended family, including his mother. His last and brief visit to Israel occurred on July 15, 2007, to attend a poetry recital. The poet-philosopher who is de-rooted from the familial found solace in poetry and conveys to the world his knowledge, his historicity, in a non-historical way. His daily contemplations become "ours" and we lament, laugh and hope with the poet because his voice forms symbiotic relations with ours as he resides inside of us with a poetic certainty and familiarity.

As a Non-Palestinian, and Non-Arab, but as a human being and a poet, I too mourned the passing of an elder poet. Darwish was a poet-philosopher, a national Palestinian poet, who died in August 9, 2008, in Houston, Texas as a result of heart failure at only 67 years old. Following the tradition of respect for the elder, as Khalis and Rahman did in their edited collection on Darwish, I too will give him the last word:

As the collective is closer to achieving its project, as the *nashid* becomes less serious, arrival is the last stanza. And when arrival has been achieved and identity with it, then beauty allows for an individu-

al voice. So the repressed within the individual has an opening and a possibility for expression. The Palestinian question has not been resolved, but it has been transformed from its human dimension to its administrative dimension. We are not present and we are not absent. But we are linked to the idea of a state. (Darwish, 2008: 324)

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