



If I Were Another: Poems

Mahmoud Darwish , Fady Joudah (Translator)

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Winner of the PEN USA Literary Award for Translation

Mahmoud Darwish was that rare literary phenomenon: a poet both acclaimed by critics as one of the most important poets in the Arab world and beloved by his readers. His language—lyrical and tender—helped to transform modern Arabic poetry into a living metaphor for the universal experiences of exile, loss, and identity. The poems in this collection, constructed from the cadence and imagery of the Palestinian struggle, shift

between the most intimate individual experience and the burdens of history and collective memory. Brilliantly translated by Fady Joudah, *If I Were Another*—which collects the greatest epic works of Darwish's mature years—is a powerful yet elegant work by a master poet and demonstrates why Darwish was one of the most celebrated poets of his time and was hailed as the voice and conscience of an entire people.

If I Were Another: Poems Details

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metaphor says

2.

I see what I want of the sea . . . I see
the rise of seagulls at sunset, and I close my eyes:
this loss leads to an Andalus
and this sail is the pigeons' prayer for me . . .

3.

I see what I want of the night . . . I see
the end of this long corridor by some city's gates.
I'll toss my notebook on the sidewalk of cafes, and seat this absence
on a chair aboard one of the ships

4.

I see what I want of the soul: the face of stone
as lightning scratches it. Green is the land . . . green, the land of my soul.
Wasn't I a child once playing by the edge of the well?
I am still playing . . . this vastness is my meadow, and the stones my wind
[...]

8.

I see what I want of love . . . I see
horses making the meadow dance, fifty guitars sighing, and a swarm
of bees suckling the wild berries, and I close my eyes
until I see our shadow behind this dispossessed place

Antonio Delgado says

An exile from the present brings Darwish's poetry closer to a humanity that spells its echo from every cardinal direction.

Dustin Kurtz says

Joudah is my favorite translator of Darwish and this my favorite collection.

Imen Benyoub says

a gem..thank you Mahmoud and thank you Fady Joudah..

Jeffrey Wright says

Self and place, language and love, inheritance and exile -- Osiris sings softly to the night wind, dressed in white, eyes stolen from stone windows.

Yasmeen says

I didn't intend on rereading this so soon, having read some other Darwish very recently- but hearing about the current situation in Gaza, I found myself gravitating towards him. So I don't really feel like I can write a proper review for it/change the rating, as I don't think there's much new stuff to add since the last time I read it. Love you lots Darwish.

Khashayar Mohammadi says

Darwish might be my favorite Existentialist(?) poet, though He does tend to overuse the "self-impersonation" and "self-alienation" trope. He puts a new spin on this rimbaudesque 'je-est-un-autre'; making the individualistic alienation bleed into socio-political issues of exile, cultural imperialism and so on.

I do NOT enjoy his poetry, but I have tremendous respect for him. I seldom enjoy poems longer than a page or two; which made this collection a true challenge. He's too maximalist for my taste but I consider his poetry to be relevant to an urgent degree! (if that makes any sense!)

Sincerae says

'Green, my poem's land is green. One river is enough for me to whisper to the butterfly: O sister. One river is enough for me to seduce the ancient myths to remain on the wings of an eagle. An eagle that changes banners and distant peaks, where armies have founded the kingdoms of forgetfulness for me. There is no nation smaller than its poem. But weapons widen the word for the dead and the living in it, and letters brighten the sword that hangs in dawn's belt, and the song either diminishes or expands the desert.' ~ from Mural

I will now have to add Mahmoud Darwish to my club of favorite poets, the majority of whom are Arab. I think if such poems are so wonderful, thought provoking, elegant, and beautiful in English, I would die of ecstacy if I had the skill to read them un-translated.

I rank Mahmoud Darwish beside another of my favorites Syrian and the most revered modern Arab poets, Nizar Qabbani. Mahmoud Darwish is also honored as the national poet of the Palestinians. Some of the poems of both of these men have been put into song by popular Arab singers. If you have seen the award winning 2009 film Amreeka, the closing song sung by Lebanese singer Marcel Khalife are the words from Mahmoud Darwish's poem Passport.

In If I Were Another Mahmoud Darwish's words are about longing and remembrance: longing for a homeland, longing for justice, remembrance of history, remembrance of childhood, remembrance of parents,

remembrance of a Jewish woman he once had a secret love affair with, remembrance of his Christian Palestinian friend with dual identities, Arab American scholar and writer Edward Said.

Even though he is of an oppressed group Darwish comes off as wise and elegant in the face of oppression. His language is never harsh or angry. He knows what the deal is, but he will never be anyone's lackey. These poems express the feeling he will always keep his dignity while facing injustice. He knows how to rise above his enemies. Poetry is his sword, and he will always be bigger than any brute.

In The Red Indian's Penultimate Speech to the White Man, Darwish even has the Native American speak because he can accurately compare his people's own plight in Palestine to what happened in America under European colonialism. Here is the poem by the translator of all the poems in this volume.

<http://harvardreview.fas.harvard.edu/...>

I've revealed enough about this wonderful collection. I took time to read Mahmoud Darwish's poems over months to really digest it. For me in some ways Mahmoud Darwish's *If I Were Another: Poems* functions similar to Tolstoy's prose. Certainly they are not in the same territory as artists and intellectuals. Both are in classifications of their own in time, place, and technique. However, both I enjoy reading slowly and pondering over a very long time. Their artistry is such that I can learn from them and comprehend more about life by reading their works. Being a member of the African diaspora ancestrally, I can relate so much to Mahmpud Darwish's longing for a homeland and his feeling of exile.

In closing, here is Passport from the movie *Amreeka* sung by Marcel Khalife. This poem is not in this volume.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDRKs...>
