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Mahmoud Darwish

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Mahmoud Darwish is a literary rarity: at once critically acclaimed as one of the most important poets in the Arabic language, and beloved as the voice of his people. He is a living legend whose lyrics are sung by fieldworkers and schoolchildren. He has assimilated some of the world's oldest literary traditions at the same time that he has struggled to open new possibilities for poetry. This collection spans Darwish's entire career, nearly four decades, revealing an impressive range of expression and form. A splendid team of translators has collaborated with the poet on these new translations, which capture Darwish's distinctive voice and spirit.

Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems Details

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Ammara Abid says

A man is travelling in the desert under the scorching heat of sun, suddenly dark clouds gathered, gust of wind start blowing & carried away all the heat. Moreover, the clouds pouring rain washes the man's soul from worries and hardships.

Mahmoud's poetry is that scorching heat of sun along with the gust of wind & dark clouds. That can't be blown & poured down always but from time to time it happened.

After a while it happened.

His words make us stand & realize the facts of life with such a mesmerising manner that you got captivated in his poems and there's no escape.

You have to suffer

You have to bear

You have to accept

You must know the truth

In spite of all that

You have to love.

My first book by him & I absolutely adore his collection and love his writing style. I'm really glad that I got a chance to read this brilliant book.

'What does life say to Mahmoud

Darwish?

You lived, fell in love, learned, and all those you will finally love are dead? '

'My longing weeps for everything. My longing shoots back at me, to kill or be killed.'

'We Travel Like All People

We travel like everyone else, but we return to nothing. As if travel were a path of clouds. We buried our loved ones in the shade of clouds and between roots of trees.

We said to our wives: Give birth for hundreds of years, so that we may end this journey within an hour of a country, within a meter of the impossible!

We travel in the chariots of the Psalms, sleep in the tents of the prophets, and are born again in the language of Gypsies.

We measure space with a hoopoe's beak, and sing so that distance may forget us.

We cleanse the moonlight. Your road is long, so dream of seven women to bear this long journey on your shoulders. Shake the trunks of palm trees for them.

You know the names, and which one will give birth to the Son of Galilee.

Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me rest my road against a stone.

Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me see an end to this journey. '

'An eagle settles on our bodies, and we chase after dreams. May we find them.

They soar behind us to find us here. There is no escape!

We live our death. This half-death is our triumph. '

*'In this hymn we lay a dream, we raise a victory sign, we hold a key to the last door,
to lock ourselves in a dream. But we will survive because life is life. '*

'We are captives of what we love, what we desire, and what we are. '

*'Let us be kindhearted! Take me to the sea at dusk.
Let me hear what the sea tells you when it returns to itself in peace.
I won't change. I will embrace a wave and say:
Take me to the sea again.
This is what the fearful do:
when a burning star torments them, they go to the sea.'*

*'Death, O my shadow who leads me, O my third person,
emerald and olivine's irresolute color,
blood of a peacock, sniper of the wolf's heart,
sickness of imagination, have a seat.
Leave your hunting gear at the window and hang your heavy key chain on the door.
Mighty one, don't gaze into my veins looking for some fatal flaw.
You are stronger than my breathing, stronger than medicine, and the strong honey of bodily love.
You don't need some sickness in order to kill me.
So be nobler than the insects.
Be yourself—transparent, a clear message from the Unseen.
And like love, be a raging storm among trees.
Do not sit in the doorways like a beggar or a tax collector.
Do not become a traffic cop in the streets.
Be powerful, of well-tempered steel, and take off that fox mask.
Be gallant and knightly, and launch your mortal assaults.
Say whatever you wish to say:
I emerge from meaning to meaning.
Life is fluid, I distill it.
I introduce it to my domination and my measure.'*

*'I have work to do for the afterlife, as if tomorrow I will not be alive.
I have work to do for the eternal presence of today.
Hence I listen, little by little, to the ants in my heart:
Help me bear the brunt of my endurance.
I even listen to the gasping scream of the stone: Free my body.
In the violin, I see longing migrate from an earthly country to a heavenly one.
I hold my dear one, eternity, in the palm of a woman's hand.
First, I was created. After a while, I fell in love.
Then I got bored to death.
Later on, in my grave, I opened my eyes*

*and saw the grasses mirroring me from time to time.
What use is Spring, then, if it does not bring joy to the dead,
and if it does not restore life and the bloom of oblivion after life?
That is one way to solve the riddle of poetry, the riddle of my tender poetry at least.
Dreams are our sole utterance.'*

*'As if I am. As if I am not.
Every time I listen to the heart the words of the Unseen flood me, and trees grow tall in me.
I fly from dream to dream but I am without end.
A few thousand poetic years ago, I was born in a darkness of white linen,
but I could not distinguish between the dream of myself and my self.'*

*'In order to fight the beast in you, I asked a woman to give you milk.
I was unjust. But you were given pleasure, and you gave in.
Be kind to me, Enkidu. Go back to the dead.
It's possible we might find an answer
to the question of who we are when we are alone.
The life of a single man is not complete,
and I am in dire need of an answer to this question.
Whom can I ask about crossing this river?
So rise and lift me up, O brother in salt!
When you sleep, do you know you are sleeping?
Rise up! Enough.
Move before the wise men, like foxes, surround me.
All is vanity. Your life is a treasure, so live it, richly.
It's a single moment, promising its own sap—the distilled blood of the prairie.
Live your waking, not your dream: Everything dies.
Live your life in a beloved woman.
Life is your body, not some illusion.
Wait for a child to carry in your soul.
For us, procreation is immortality.
And all is vanity and mortal, or mortal and vanity.'*

*'What was mine: my yesterday.
What will be mine: the distant tomorrow,
and the return of the wandering soul as if nothing had happened.'*

*'I don't dream of anything now.
I desire only to desire.
I dream only of desiring harmony.'*

David says

For some reason, my initial response to Darwish's poetry when I first started reading it was negative. It seemed gloomy and hopeless. But after a short break I came back to it and was strangely enchanted.

"Strangely," because Darwish's poetry is, for me, like no other other literary landscape I have ever visited. It is big, somewhat like T.S. Eliot's but less densely populated, which makes it feel even bigger, and it is full of all sorts of optical illusions that make me go pleurably cross-eyed, like when staring looking for a hidden 3-D picture.

It is tempting to interpret Darwish's poetry in the context of the Middle East and its medieval mathematicians. The poet is constantly dividing and multiplying things into each other, with the result that you get flashes here and there of eternity—of strangely rippling surfaces that hold beneath them incomprehensible depths.

Yet, together with the awe-inspiring grandeur of much of his poetry are lines of warm, ravishing beauty achieved with apparent simplicity, lines that remind me of the simple but memorable similes of the Song of Solomon.

Then there is the wisdom throughout his poetry that makes you want to write lines down on the frontispiece, page after page, in case you lose them.

In conclusion, reading this anthology was like encountering one of those clusters of massive wind turbines you see in remote areas: towering, majestic, slightly menacing, beyond, somehow not belonging, but touched with the breezes, smells, songs, storms and hues of their setting. Reading the poems then looking at the professorial, twinkly-eyed photo of Darwish on the inside dust jacket makes for quite a disconnect. Forgive me, but I was expecting wild eyes and whiskers (robe, staff, sandals!)

Unfortunately, It Was Paradise is a keeper.

Afina says

"He said: My wings are time.

Love is the fire of love, so catch fire
to free yourself from the body of place.

We asked: Have you returned from Sheba to take us to a new Sheba?

Our letters were returned to us, yet you were not returned

. . . you returned not.

In Greece you didn't comprehend Aristophanes

In the city you didn't find the city.

You didn't find the tender home so as to dress us in the silk of serenity.

You didn't grasp the meaning, and the mystery of poetry obsessed you:

Fly, daughter of my feather, fly! You birds of plain and valley, fly!

Fly swiftly toward my wings, toward my voice!

There is a burning desire in us to fly into the openness of our longing!"

-The Hoopoe

Mahmoud Darwish wrote many brilliant poems, and *The Hoopoe* is one of my favorites. "Unfortunately It Was Paradise" is a book of his selected poems, the greatest ones. Many of his poems were hopeless at first, but they turn to be moving. This anthology is really beautiful, almost as beautiful as his native homeland.

Giuliana Chamedes says

beautiful!!

darwish is a palestinian poet. longing, and the (impossible) quest for a home, are the recurring themes in these wonderfully translated poems. these poems build a deep and immediate relationship with you as you read them -- they give you the impression of walking slowly alongside a smiling, if teary-eyed, ageless bard, who contains boundless wisdom, and is able to sing you to sleep or sing you to revolution in one second flat.

Carol says

I found Darwish's writing really moving - especially selections from *Fewer Roses*.

The mood of the translated texts are heavy with grief, loss, being lost and exiled, cast adrift, homeless and landless. The simple starkness of "Athens Airport" "What is your address? A woman of our group says: My village is the bundle on my back."

The poet holds on, almost desperately to memories, mood, language and imagination to recreate his paradise lost. Time is "timeless" as if stunted and standing still -- locked, in shock, confusion and chaos -- trying to make sense of this endless rape of the peoples and their country. He seeks validation, empty as it is, over and over, in "I Talk Too Much" with his repeated and plaintive appeal:

"Is it true ladies and gentlemen, that the earth of Man is for all human beings?"

I am struck by the openness of spirit and that is transformed into embrace, maybe forgiveness? for the incomprehensible invasion and occupation and failure to see his people's humanity. "He embraces his murderer. May he win his heart: Do you feel angrier if I survive? brother...my brother! What did I do to make you destroy me?... I will never cease embracing you. And I will never release you."

Perhaps, the book's title is a bitter irony and lament that it is both the beauty and the "misfortune" that Palestine was indeed a paradise that made his land so desirable, so ripe for being occupied and appropriated for all its richness and significance and the center of so much bloodshed and destruction.

Reading Darwish's work in its non-native language, and not knowing details of the history of the people of this land makes me wonder how much of the texture and depth is lost in translation. Having limited knowledge of the many references made and significance of those references (eg: horses, hoopoes, mother's coffee..) probably means that this reader is missing out on a great deal of the nuances of his creation. But his poetry does offer the novice reader a window into Palestinian life, thoughts, emotions, sensuality, dreams, and the humanity that is purposefully made absent from/in US consciousness. Darwish offers us beauty, complexity, compassion, sensuousness, thoughts and images beyond war, violence and destruction that are the dominant images of Palestinians, stripped of their humanity by US media propaganda.

Holly says

A lot of the Middle Eastern poetry that I've read has been in a rhythm or voice that hasn't felt quite comfortable to me. It may be that something is missing in the translation, but I think it's probably just the influence of different tradition. This volume fit into that generalization. Very thick with oblique, sometimes mixed (?) metaphors. So this wasn't the easiest poetry to fall into, but when it struck me, it *really* struck me. As in, I would like to own this book. I might give it a reread next summer.

metaphor says

I will slog over this endless road to its end.
Until my heart stops, I will slog over this endless, endless road
with nothing to lose but the dust, what has died in me, and a row of palms
pointing toward what vanishes. I will pass the row of palms.
The wound does not need its poet to paint the blood of death like a pomegranate!
On the roof of neighing, I will cut thirty openings for meaning
so that you may end one trail only so as to begin another.
Whether this earth comes to an end or not, we'll slog over this endless road.
More tense than a bow. Our steps, be arrows. Where were we a moment ago?
Shall we join, in a while, the first arrow? The spinning wind whirled us.
So, what do you say?
I say: *I will slog over this endless road to its end and my own.*

Yasmeen says

Reread this about two years after the first time, and it's just as beautiful as ever. In fact, it might possible be more stunning this time around. Don't even know what to say, I love it too much.

Angela says

Best book title ever, no contest

Aunnalea says

Translated poems are difficult. I think most of these poems went over my head because I didn't understand many of the references. The few of them that I was sure I didn't understand were moving and beautiful.

Hayley Stone says

Transportive, evocative, hard, tender... All adjectives I would use to describe this anthology. If you're looking for a master of free verse, you can do no better than Darwish. Many of the poems do rely on some knowledge of the Middle East/Ancient Near East, but there's a helpful glossary at the back of the book to aid in understanding. This isn't an anthology you can breeze through in a few days; each poem demands to be mulled over and savored, not devoured all at once.

Hala says

I was very sceptical about reading this book. I wished I could read the Arabic poems but I knew most would be lost on me as Darwish's language is too strong for me to understand. I also thought the translation would kill all the beauty but I was wrong.

It could be that some of the beauty of his words were lost in translation, but most were still there and I was left in awe. Very beautiful, very well-translated, very moving.

Patrick Duggan says

Mahmoud Darwish is the somewhat official poet laureate of Palestine, and his recent selected poems Unfortunately, It Was Paradise is a dynamic lyric voice full of wild imagery mixed with the fury of scripture. His voice is calm poverty in a storm of mideast chaos, a man who lived through and mourns the first Israeli invasion of Lebanon, but was himself inspired to write by the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai. With Israel currently shelling the entire state of Lebanon into the ashes of history, and nobody (read: America) really seeming to care, it seems an appropriate and unsettling book for the current geopolitical situation. Three hours of your time you won't regret having spent.

Steve Moore says

Delicate, stained, and mottled from the Middle-Eastern sun, this collection is as beautiful as a desert dune swept into place one day, and out the next.

Naila says

The Owl's Night

There is, here, a present not embraced by the past.

When we reached the last of the trees, we knew we were unable to pay attention.

And when we returned to the ships, we saw absence piling up its chosen objects and pitching its eternal tent around us.

There is, here, a present not embraced by the past.

A silken thread is drawn out of mulberry trees

forming letters on the page of night.
Only the butterflies cast light upon our boldness
in plunging into the pit of strange words.
Was this condemned man my father
Perhaps I can handle my life here.
Perhaps I can now give birth to myself
and choose different letters for my name.

There is, here, a present, sitting in an empty kitchen
gazing at the tracks of those crossing the river on reeds.
A present polishing the flutes with its wind
Perhaps speech could become transparent, so we could
see open windows in it, and perhaps time could hurry along with us,
carrying our tomorrow in its luggage.

There is, here, a timeless present, and here no one can find anyone.
No one remembers how we went out the door like a gust of wind,
and at what hour we fell from yesterday, and then
yesterday shattered on the tiles
in shards for others to reassemble into mirrors
reflecting their images over ours.

There is, here, a placeless present.
Perhaps I can handle my life and cry out in the owl's night:
Was this condemned man my father who burdens me with his history?
Perhaps I will be transformed within my name, and will choose
my mother's words and way of life, exactly as they should be.
Thus, she could cajole me each time salt touched my blood,
and give me food each time a nightingale bit me in the mouth.

There is, here, a transient present.
Here, strangers hang their rifles on the olive's branches,
to prepare their dinner in haste out of tin cans
and rush hurriedly to their trucks.
