

## **Mahmoud Darwish, A poet who attempted to be**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the attempts in Mahmoud Darwish's poems to realize his existence. For this purpose, the analysis is based on Darwish's poems and does not rely on other studies about the poet. The study of his poems, which are a representation for his reality, shows the development of the concept of "being" since his early works until his final poems. The existence attempts are voiced first through the young poet's call to rebel and resist occupation, and later, after building a comprehensive perspective of the political and historical surrounding, through the mature poet's demand for justice. In his final stages, the poet seems to contemplate on life and death and appreciate the meaning of his existence. The paper finally explains how Mahmoud Darwish used imagery and symbolism to guide Palestinians to the path of reconciliation with the world through his calls of action.*

### **Introduction**

The title of this study does not imply an introduction to a prominent Palestinian poet whose fame has exceeded the boundaries of the Arab world decades ago. This title is the result of a careful reading of Darwish's entire poetry work and contemplating the relationship that exists between the human, the poem, and the world. We believe that writing poetry is in one of its aspects an "attempt to being." We also believe that Mahmoud Darwish, who considered writing poetry as an "attempt", and chose for the title of his 7<sup>th</sup> book of collected poems: "Attempt No. 7," was not attempting to write as much as he was attempting to be. Consequently, what does it mean to "attempt to be"? and how did Mahmoud Darwish experience it?

The "attempt to being" is associated with the attempt to do or to change. It means trying to take an action through which one can fulfill their potential and declare their human existence. When a person attempts to be, they actively try to move from a state of nothingness and abolition to a state where their sense of existence and presence is solid. How did these attempts show in Mahmoud Darwish's poetry?

Mahmoud Darwish has lived a variety of experiences, witnessed the major events that shook the Arab world, and perceived the Palestinian tragedy from different angles. To a better understanding of his writing, it is useful to glance at some areas of Mahmoud Darwish's life that most influenced his vision:

When the "Nakbah" of 1948 occurred, Darwish was six years old; he left Palestine with his family to Lebanon.

Later they infiltrated back to his village to find it all ruins. Darwish underwent the experience of being exiled in his homeland. He witnessed the cruel actions of the authoritarian Jewish policy that kills, imprisons, and destroys homes. He, himself, was subject to prison and was sentenced to house arrest several times in his life. He also witnessed the 1967 "Naksah" and wrote five books of collected poems from within the Palestinian land. Those books granted him vast public recognition that the Palestinian poetry became associated with three Palestinian poets on top of whom was Mahmoud Darwish<sup>1</sup>.

In his first book of collected poems "Olive leaves" (1964), the poet reveals the lived reality of persecution, and declares his belonging to Arabs.

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<sup>1</sup>Ezz Eddin Manasrah stated in his introduction to Tawfiq Zayyad's book of poems entitled: Tawfiq Zayyad, "The poet of the people and the cause" that three poets of the occupied Palestinian territories shined in the pre and post 1967 defeat. Those were: Mahmoud Darwish, Samih Al-Qasim, and Tawfiq Zayyad, and are usually mentioned in this order. The reason was perhaps due to the fact that Darwish has achieved the conditions of art and commitment to the cause, while Qasim balanced between the two, and Zayyad committed to the content. Source: *Poetry of Tawfiq Zayyad*, Dar Al-Awdah, Beirut.

His phrase "Write down, I am an Arab" which he repeats in the poem "Identity Card" did not identify him alone; many Arabs identified with it and considered the Israeli aggression aimed at the Arab land and people not only at Palestine and the Palestinians. Mahmoud Darwish left Palestine in 1971 after the Israeli authorities made his life unbearable. He resided and worked in Cairo for two years. Later he moved to Beirut where he saw the Palestinians' sufferance in refugee camps. In the years he lived in Beirut, many tragedies occurred; most flagrant of which were the massacres of Sabra and Shatila Camps (1982).

Darwish moved from Beirut to Tunisia and then to Paris where he spent around ten years in a travelling life style that lacks stability. The poems written in Paris expose Darwish's attempts to re-establish his identity and restore his broken self resorting to the strength of words and love. They also draw a transparent image of the self that is always surrounded by the wounds of past and the present and threatened by future wounds.

In a time after the self governance of Palestinian authorities has started, Darwish chose to return to a "part" of Palestine and not to "his personal part". His return, in his own words, was a kind of (patriotic and moral duty) and he kept dwelling between Ramallah and Amman. He was in Palestine in the period of the Israeli siege on most Palestinian cities in 2002 and wrote his book of collected poems "State of Siege." He was also aggrieved by the inter-Palestinian conflicts and expressed these wounds in his poetry. In the summer of 2008, he passed away preceding a heart surgery, leaving an incomplete book of poems that was published after his death.

With this brief introduction to the life of Mahmoud Darwish, the reader should be able to easily connect the incoming poetry sections to their historical and emotional context. In this study, the "attempt to being" will be the main focus; we will try to identify its traces through Darwish's poems in a systematic, chronological method.

In order to observe the attempts of being in the abundant work of Mahmoud Darwish, starting with his early blooming poems and ending with the last publishing, we intend to present poems and stanzas from different books. They will form a sequence reflecting the poet's perspective on life and on himself throughout the stages he lived. The sequence begins with Darwish's early books of collected poems.

### **Experiencing Pain and Trying to Understand Life**

Mahmoud Darwish began writing poetry when he was in Palestine. Due to his daily life there and his concern about conveying the image of the Palestinians' torment in their land, the human in him dominated many poems and over powered the voice of the poet. Meanwhile, the expression of such imposed tragedies and their direct impact on the soul leads to essential questions, which are the fruit of long, deep thoughts of the happening that compile in later stages to become a poem.

The poem "Weeping", from the first book of collected poems "Olive Leaves", consists of five short stanzas overshadowed by pain and grief. In this poem, the poet contemplates the meaning of "weeping" and tries to understand its causes through self exploration. The poet draws a simple image of his reality: "I weep" placed at the end of the first and the last stanzas. By comparing both stanzas, various levels of pain emerge. The poem begins as follows:

"It is not over the loss of a person I love  
Not over a memory of a figurine I broke  
Not for grieving over a child I buried  
I weep!"

The stanza is concluded by a declaration: "I weep." All the mentioned reasons are clearly worth crying and the poet did experience these tragic events but is not crying because of them. The last stanza of the poem clarifies the real reason:

"I leave early, before my time...  
Our time cannot withstand us,  
Our time is shorter... shorter  
Is it true, that death brings life?  
Will I bloom  
As bread in the hands of the hungry, or as sugar in the mouth of a child?  
I weep!"

It is the pain of loss at the beginning of the poem that led to the final questions. Being wounded incites revelation: When a person is bombarded with tragedies and trauma, he embarks on a journey to seek reason; he poses questions to understand his present and anticipate his future. Thus, the current wound caused by a specific event gains an existential aspect in the search for the meaning of life and death.

In this poem, the question was not a way for the poet to escape his wounds and change the facts, nor did it enable him to overcome the pain, but it added a new dimension to this pain, and the poem was concluded by an assertion of the persisting status quo “I weep”. Nevertheless, the poet did try to determine the cause of his weeping, and then he wondered about his ability to achieve a higher goal to give his short life a meaning. This contemplation, as we believe, is the key to endeavor and do; it holds “the desire to realize the being” in a destructive, depressing reality.

If we observe the titles of Darwish’s books of collected poems written prior the departure from Palestine: “Olive Leaves”, “Lover from Palestine”, “End of the Night”, “The Birds Die in the Galilee”, “My Lover Awakens from her Sleep”, we can identify three major themes: a confirmation on belonging to the homeland (as in the titles of the first, second, and fourth books), a description of the relationship with the homeland (passion), or what dominates this relationship (death), and adhering to hope (the day anticipated after the night, and awakening from sleep). A trill of emotions combining pain, love, grief, anger, and challenge dominated the poems of this phase... moreover, the poem inspired solidity and hope, and helped preserve the identity in the time of defeat and breakdown, in addition to being an important agent for inciting resistance and directing feelings of anger to revolt on reality.

In his writings, Mahmoud Darwish hit new horizons and his perspective as a poet grew. When he moved away from Palestine, he felt the tight connection between the soul and the homeland. Because of his travels, he was reassured of his love and his sense of belonging, and his attempts for being took many forms. One of these forms was his attempt to reach his homeland and his essence in a journey travelled with strong wit.

### **The Quest for Homeland and for the Self**

Darwish left the occupied territories in 1971. In the poem “Psalms”, the first poem of the book of collected poems “Do I Love You or Not”, he insists on drawing the form of his homeland and he repeats the sentence “I want to draw your form” in the second part of the poem:

“I want to draw your form  
You’re scattered among the files and the surprises  
I want to draw your form  
You’re shredded on missiles’ shrapnel and bird wings  
I want to draw your form  
But the sky steals my hand  
I want to draw your form  
You’re entrapped between the wind and the dagger  
To find my form in you”

The quest for the homeland is not complete until it becomes possible to draw his shape. This search is a mean to find an image for the self in the image of the homeland, as indicated in the last verse: “To find my form in you”. The poet (cannot find) his form, as if his features were lost when the homeland was lost, when the people were denied the right of living in it.

The sought image of the homeland is absent. Darwish blames the “wind” for preventing the accomplishment of drawing its shape: “I want to draw your form/ But the sky steals my hand”.

The homeland has lost its sense of permanence; the sky “steals” the poet’s hand by the force of the wind. The wind wishes to keep the form of the homeland “shredded” in the air and conspires with the “dagger” over the homeland’s existence and identity, leaving it “entrapped” between the wind and the dagger.

The state of incarceration applies to both the poet and his homeland. In his poem “Another death then I love you” from the book “Attempt No. 7”, the symbol of “Chains” served to illustrate the new meaning of the relentless, spiritual siege: “The chains are closing around my blood”.

In the same poem, Darwish addresses his loved one and expresses his sorrow when she became a homeland to him: "Alas, a homeland in a body!" The body has become a nation in the absence of the beloved place:

"Where do I go?  
The keys to my house are not with me  
My house is not before me  
Neither is the back behind me  
Neither is ahead in front of me  
Where do I go?"

The themes of "deprivation" and "being lost" appear in the question of the lost, deprived man who no longer owns what is his, and no longer has the means to reach his destination. The poet rarely suffers from the absence of the place without mentioning "time" whose ravages displaced him... Time has no longer an external presence, feeling the present, just like feeling the homeland, is only materialized by feeling a body. As the poet said: "Alas, a homeland in a body", he says in the same poem: "Alas, a time in a body".

When the form of the homeland is altered, and the poet becomes distant from it, resorting to a body is a form of refuge (it resembles an identity). Darwish addresses the woman again –in the same book- as a replacement to a city. In his poem "Between my dream and its name, my death was slow" he confesses to her:

"You resemble the identity when I am a stranger  
You resemble the identity"

He continues:

"Three things never end:  
You, love, and death  
I kissed your sweet dagger  
Then I took shelter in your palms  
To get killed  
And yet, to escape from death  
This is love.  
I love you when I die  
And when I love you  
I feel that I am dying  
So be a woman  
And be a city!"

The title of the poem demonstrates that the poet, concerning his relationship with the female, refuses (to die slowly), he tries by the mean of love to find his stray soul that is lost between "name" of the missing homeland and the remote "dream" of reunion.

The poet is in pain because of the equation: "I love you when I die/ and when I love you/ I feel that I am dying". If "love" and "death" are endless, then the poet relies on the third entity that (never ends): "You"... He wants her to be a strong woman/city capable of (protecting him with her palms) and of (stopping him from dying) with her killing love. Perhaps this way he reaches the missing equation: (I love you when I love you).

### **The Homeless and the Martyr in an Attempt to Arrive**

In another poem from the book of collected poems "Attempt No. 7" entitled "Blessed is the thing that hasn't arrived", Darwish reveals the states in which a Palestinian can be: the "homeless" and the "martyr".

"Attempt No. 7" is Darwish's second book written outside Palestine. The emotional stress associated with writing the first book away from the home land had substantially decreased with the second book. The relative stability in Beirut played two roles: first, to give the poet a chance to ponder on sensitive issues concerning the Palestinians and second, to express the exposure to the Arab world along with the associated shocks, all in a suggestive approach, rich with imagery.

In the poem "Blessed is the thing that hasn't arrived" the feeling of (endlessness) prevails. The poet begins with these touching verses:

“This is the wedding that never ends  
In a yard that never ends  
In a night that never ends  
This is the Palestinian wedding  
A lover does not reach his beloved  
Unless he be a martyr.. or a homeless”

The poem’s theme is “arrival”. How can the traits of the martyr be identified? and how does the homeless arrive? In the following stanza, the image of the martyrs is drawn through a series of actions they have performed, while the image of the homeless/ poet is depicted in the poem’s final verses:

“The mountain is larger than their arms  
But..  
They tried to climb  
And the sea is beyond their horizons  
But..  
They tried to cross  
And the star is closer than their homes  
But  
They tried to rejoice  
And the land is narrower than their expectation  
But..  
They tried to dream  
Blessed is the vague  
Blessed is the thing that hasn’t arrived  
They unraveled its mysteries and it ripped them apart  
So I marked the beginning along their footsteps  
And I belonged to their visions”

The verb “tried” has a specific, indicative value. The attempt is the greatest of what can be done in a stressful reality of chained freedom. The attempt to act in a time of defeat is a noble act that surpasses the act of resistance and “the attempt” in this case is not associated with weakness or failure. This meaning is indicated in the position of the verb (Try) after “but” which suggests recantation in four consecutive sections, formed according to one structure following this pattern: “The mountain is larger than their arms/ but.../ they tried to climb”. The sentence “They tried to climb” assumed a positive meaning when placed after “but” and not before it. If the locations of the first and last sentences were switched: “They tried to climb, but ...”, the image would have implied helplessness, failure, and difficulty in climbing due to the triumph of exterior factors: “The mountain is larger than their arms.” However, this negative implication is excluded; it is the use of “larger” as a comparative adjective to indicate greatness over the power of men, in the same structure along with the verb “tried”, that added a sense of challenge to the act. The challenge is further confirmed when we compare the rigors of reality that pulls down, to the power of will that thrives upward: the martyrs tried to ascend, which is usually aimed to reach the summit, and the cruel reality makes the mountain “larger” than their arms.

The traits of the homeless appear more clearly in a different location in the poem, in which Darwish explains the reason behind following the footsteps of the martyrs and belonging to their visions:

“...So I marked the beginning along their footsteps  
(Here are the trees blooming  
In my chains)  
And I belonged to their visions  
(Here is the port appearing  
In my borders)  
And the dream is always truer, there is no difference between the dream  
And the homeland behind it..  
The dream is always truer, there is no difference between the dream  
And the body hidden in a bomb shell  
And the dream is more real”

By belonging to the visions of the martyrs, the homeland starts to re-emerge. Therefore the poet chooses the path of dreams over reality. When he belonged to their visions, he started seeing and understanding the vague thing like them, he understood the vague mystery that renders a dream equivalent to the homeland, and to martyrdom. This “dream” was the reason for the martyrs to act or attempt to act in spite of the difficulties when reality became distant for not offering alternatives.

### **The Journey of Alienation in the Final Stages of Life**

In Darwish’s last book of collected poems, the theme of “exile” is strongly present with a feeling of chronic alienation and the loss of life of the exiled who awaits time, place and restoring the past. Darwish invited himself and those who suffer from the same distress to try to live again and to take the initiative to “walk” toward the other. Also, we notice in his last books repeatedly the call to “carry the road” and to trust the role of the will in achieving hopes.

In order to compare between a feelings of the exiled in the beginning of the journey of finding the self and the homeland, and his feeling after decades of continuous research, we can use two images: the first is from the book «Attempt No. 7» (1973), poem “Another Death and I Love You”: «Behind is not behind me/ the front is not in front of me / where do I go?», and the second is from the «The trace of the butterfly» (2008) from a poem entitled «the destination of the exiled»:

«The exiled turns toward his destinations  
The words – the memories escape him  
The front is not in front of him  
Behind is not behind him  
On the right, there is a traffic light  
And on the left, there is another  
He asks himself:  
Where does life start?  
I need narcissus  
To be the owner of my image!  
He says: the free is the one who chooses his exile  
For some reason  
I am free, then  
I walk and the destinations become clear»

The poet is still searching for his image, but he is no longer a poet living the exile but an expert narrator who talks about «the exiled» (always definite), indicating that the image of the exiled is no longer limited to the self but is rather generalized. The narrator repeats the old sentences with which he started his journey «behind is not behind me / the front is not in front of me». The distance between the speaker in the first poem and the narrator in the second poem allows him to display the confusion held by the first question «Where do I go? ». We see him draw in his new poem two images of the exiled: the first is tangible through the verb «turns» which connects to the place and the second is abstract, indicated by the question about the other place, in which life itself begins. The exiled finally discovers how (directions become clear). The exiled is no longer confused; he acknowledges his belief in his freedom as a basis to make an action. When the exiled makes the adequate decision to «walk», his destinations become clear.

A similar invitation can be found in a poem from the book “Do not apologize for what you have done” (2004) where the poet addresses another exiled with similar conditions to his, in the poem “Remove, Here and Now”:

“Experience life now, and let life train you  
To live  
And remember less of women”

These verses depict an image of the exiled overwhelmed by his «memories», burdened with his past, escaping the “present” and life itself.

The imperative «experience» holds the importance of the attempt; it alone can ease the wounds and initiate life. The act of trying in this poem, like walking in «the destination of the exiled», maintains a connection with the present and protects the exiled from being lost.

The title of the poem: «Remove, here and now» holds another invitation and offers a new perspective on life. The expression in the title is repeated in beginning and the end of the poem. It begins:

“Remove, here, and now, off your shoulders, your grave  
Give your life another chance to retell the story  
Not all love is death  
Earth is not an eternal alienation”

The (story) of the Palestinian is scarred with wounds like his life, it needs to be rewritten. The imagery in the first two verses suggests that (the grave) carried on the shoulders of the Palestinian hinders him from (rewriting the story).

The speech Darwish uses when calling the other indicates that he primarily addresses his own person who became weary like the homeless other. The word “another” in “Give your life another chance to retell the story» shows that the homeless had previous attempts to recreate his story. Declaring that the grave belongs to the homeless highlights the pain of alienation; the carried grave does not only indicate despair of life, but also demonstrates a sense of being foreign to all places, as if carrying his grave on his shoulders foretells his body’s destiny after death. He does not expect the earth, too narrow to accommodate him in life, to embrace him in his death. As for the indicators of space and time: «here and now» in the first verse, they stress on the urgent need to clarify the vision and act upon it because the poet knows firsthand that the (life) of the exiled is wasted (waiting) the right place and the right time.

After using the imperative: (remove and give), Darwish turns to persuasion in an attempt to incite hope. But the scars appear again in the structure of his sentence: «Not all love is death» suggests that the Palestinian experience has created a rule that (all) love should be death and the poet seems to beg for an exception to the rule.

All love is death and earth is an eternal alienation... These are the set rules of the painful experience with the other/the enemy and with the other whom the Palestinian called "the friend". The latter’s image appeared after the massacres of Sabra and Shatila in the book of collected poems «Praise to the Tall Shadow»<sup>2</sup> (1983) «My friend resembles me and kills me». Two decades later, Darwish tries to reconcile (the friend) and the self, in the poem “Remove, here and now”:

“Accept the other/the friend  
Emerge from your visions to your path  
And build your bridges high  
The no-place is the conspiracy”

The state of eternal alienation and not belonging to any place forced the homeless to solitude and to take refuge in the world of visions; therefore the poet offers the solution he found in the poem «the destination of the exiled» which is to “walk”. He asks the Palestinian to (emerge to his path) and to undergo the trouble of building a “high” bridge to reach (the friend) who does not advance in his direction.

The poet who insisted on removing the (grave) off the shoulders in this poem and urged the Palestinian to walk toward the other and toward life, decided to carry the «road» on his shoulders in the poem «I, even if I were the last» - which is another poem from the book "Do not apologize for what you have done"- where he calls on the Palestinian indirectly to follow the footsteps of the Christ who «walks like all the people»; referring to the Christ/the way<sup>3</sup>, not the pain of the Christ on the cross. He says:

“... I will carry the Christ’s winter shoes  
So he can walk like all the people  
From mountain tops...to the lake”

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<sup>2</sup> “Praise to the Tall Shadow” is a book consisting of a single, long poem.

<sup>3</sup> In Gospel of John 14:5-6 Thomas, the disciple of Jesus asks him on the way: “5: Thomas said to him, Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way? 6: Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life”.

Darwish had lived, like Al-Ma'arri<sup>4</sup>, confined by two prisons, the homeland and exile. However, with his determination to carry the way and endure the walk, he creates a gateway to freedom:

“The way will carry me  
And I will carry it on my shoulder  
Until things regain their image  
Intact

And their original name” (Poem: *I, even if I were the last*. Book: Do not apologize for what you have done)  
Carrying the way on shoulders is not a burden to the poet; he seems content and confident that circumstances will help him. The verb (to carry) in the beginning of the quote predicts the future: the way will initially carry the poet and he will, in return, carry the way on his shoulders. This supportive process, strongly hoped for by the poet, will last until things (regain) what they have lost.

The quest to find (the form of the homeland) which was started by in the poem «Psalms» (1972) is still ongoing. The goal of the poet is to restore the things' (original image) as a step toward restoring the essence and the feeling of belonging and identity, including the (original name) of things.

Perhaps this confidence in life, in the «way» that will carry the poet, exists because the poet, in his quest, has «found» something. He continues in *I, even if I were the last*:

«I, even if I were the last  
I have found enough words»

However, his perspective changes in his subsequent book of collected poems «Almond blossoms and beyond» (2005). In the poem «now.. in exile», an image similar to carrying the way on shoulders appears, but Darwish does not contemplate life from the position of the poet who (has found enough words) as in the previous poem; he is the person on a quest who reached the age of sixty and started having doubts about (finding) enough time to see life, to carry it, and to get carried by it... He says:

“Celebrate with your friends the breaking of a glass  
At sixty you will not find the remaining future  
To carry it on the shoulder of an anthem ... And it carries you  
Say to life in a fashion that suits a skilled poet:  
[...]  
Walk slowly, so I can see you  
In full imperfection around me. How I forgot you  
Amidst you, searching for me and you. And the more I realized  
Some of your secrets you said harshly: Ignorant  
Tell the absence: You missed me  
And I am present...to complete you”

With this profound humanitarian sense and this language that flows to embrace life with great love, Darwish expresses the tragedy of an entire generation of Palestinians alienated inside and outside his homeland, who forgot to live while searching for his soul and the reason for his existence.

### **Preserving the Identity**

Darwish concludes his book of collected poem “The trace of the Butterfly” - the last book he published prior to his death – with two poems: the first entitled "You are from now on another" and the second "you are from now on yourself”.

In the first poem, the poet describes the change that occurred to the Palestinians and had catastrophic consequences as it modified the norm and turned the Palestinian brothers into enemies, fighting amongst each other. Darwish portrays this shift in thought, personality, and behavior by reversing the popular sayings and drawing new, inhumane values:

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<sup>4</sup>The title of Darwish's poem “I, even if I were the last” refers to the known verse of Abu Al-Ala' Al-Ma'arri: I, even if I were the last in time Will achieve what the elders could not

“The stranger and I against my cousin, my cousin and I against my brother, and my priest and I against myself.

This is the first lesson in new civic education of the dark cellars”

In the poem also there is the phrase: “There might be an enemy to whom your mother gave birth”. It reminds us of a similar phrase of Darwish’s describing the shocking attitude of the Arabs towards the Palestinians in the “Praise to the Tall Shadow”: “My friend resembles me and kills me”.

In the second poem “You are from now on yourself”, the human preserves his identity only when he attempts to be optimistic and sense the place with all its beauty and feel spiritually that he belongs: “I am here. Excluding this fact, all is rumor and gossip!”. This is the real reunion and the real sense of ownership; “the master of words becomes the master of the place” and the city embraces its dear person: “Haifa tells me: ‘You are from now on yourself!’”

After a long struggle and a quest for the meaning of the homeland and the self, Mahmoud Darwish dares to halt his mission for a while, to be fascinated by the real “light”, to feel the beauty of the place where he belongs before the final departure: “I walk adrift. Not searching for anything. Not even searching for myself within all this light” (Poem: *you are from now on yourself*. Book: Trace of the butterfly).

### The dream of realization

Observing Darwish's poems in their various stages, we find the combination of time, space, and emotion deeply rooted in his conscious and unconscious mind. In his «Mural»<sup>5</sup> (2000), the poet conveys his personal experience with life and death and depicts himself hanging in limbo: «On the door of the Resurrection»<sup>6</sup> and reveals to us in his own way the cause of the pain that haunted him throughout his life:

“Nothing hurts me at the door of the resurrection.  
Not time, not emotions.  
I do not feel the levity of things or the weight of  
Obsessions. I did not find a person to ask:  
Where is my existence now? Where is the city  
Of the dead, and where am I? There is no nothingness  
Here in the void ... in the no time,  
And the nonexistence”

The absence of pain at the moment of standing at the door of resurrection can be explained by the absence of a precise definition for the place. It seems unexpected not to feel pain, because the wounds were constantly there to make the poet feel alive. We can understand from the context that the inquiry about the place -the poet’s own place: «where is my existence»- is the key to understand the pain.

Unlike the questions asked by a regular person who awakens in a hospital after a coma: “where am I? ”, Darwish made this common question his third. His first concern was about the place he made his own (where is my existence now?) Then he mentions the word «City» to confirm its profound presence in his consciousness and unconsciousness. Finally, the awaited question: Where am I? holds a comprehensive and existential aspect for being asked last.

We note that the poet associated the (no pain) with the (no one) to ask about his right and his own place; which suggests that the answer to these questions is the cause of pain.

The question about being, which the poet sought and constantly attempted to achieve, bears many answers in his poems. We choose to conclude with an insightful dream from the “Mural”, drawn in words by a poet and man who wanted to become an idea to embrace the universe and be embraced:

“I will become someday an idea. No sword bears it  
To the wasteland, neither does a book...  
Like the rain on a mountain that’s cracked

<sup>5</sup> “The Mural” is book consisting of a single, prolonged poem that Darwish wrote after his recovery from a temporary death which occurred during a heart surgery. The marks of this experience are evident in the poem.

<sup>6</sup> Darwish has previously used this exact expression. He divided the poems on the book “Why did you leave the horse alone” into six partitions, and gave the third partition the title “Chaos on the door of Resurrection”.

By a burgeoning blade of grass,  
Neither the force triumphed  
Nor the stray justice  
I will become someday what I want”

Mahmoud Darwish experienced all the tragedies of an undecided destiny: “Neither the force triumphed nor the stray justice” and sent in his last sentence: “I will become someday what I want” a motivation to pursue existence, and a faith that the power of the will and the work will effect change. His last sentence also reflected his belief that he who seeks justice and truth will eventually get what he desires in a way or in another. Perhaps Mahmoud Darwish, the poet who spent his life in an attempt to be, he will one day become “the idea” that he portrayed with the most beautiful words.

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