"The Poem Is What Lies Between A Between": Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement

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Abstract: Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish grew up in Israel as an internal refugee living under Israeli military rule, legally classified as a "present-absentee alien." This article focuses on his 1995 volume of poetry, *Limādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan?* (*Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?*), to study the manner in which Darwish's cultivation of the musical and aural aspects of poetry serves as a means of poetically attending to the effects of dispossession and displacement. Through a discussion of the poems in the collection's fourth section, *Ghurfa l'il kalām maʿ al-nafs* (*A Room to Talk to Oneself*), this article traces how poetry becomes explicitly delineated by echoes, rhythm and rhymes—forms of reiterating sound that displace the original source and create a domain of generative resonance between source and its modified repetition. As I argue, these auditory effects of betweenness function as a means of disrupting the idea of a set and bounded identity with its displacement, such that an original identity is transformed into an interval of otherness that is nevertheless claimed as that which is not exile. Ultimately, this article claims that the aural possibilities of displacement showcased in Darwish's work fundamentally assume the task of writing a non-sovereign form of identity, wherein unified norms of selfhood are continually dismantled through a repeated and willing submission to others and otherness. Darwish's texts invite Israeli readers of the present and future to seek these acoustic and psychological displacements that he writes into intervals of possibility and coexistence.

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 2 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

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"It is impossible for me to evade the place that the Israeli has occupied in my identity. He exists, whatever I may think of him. He is a physical and psychological fact. The Israelis changed the Palestinians and vice versa. The Israelis are not the same people that came, and the Palestinians are not the same people that once were. In the one, there is the other."

> Mahmoud Darwish, "Exile," Interview with Helit Yeshurun, translated by Adam Yale Stern, 68.

I. Drawing Close Together

What does it mean to include an essay on the renowned Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) in a special issue, dedicated to examining the ways in which poetry in Israel reflects the complexity and diversity of Israeli identity? Consider that Darwish is a Palestinian born during the British Mandate of Palestine in 1942, whose family escaped to Lebanon in the wake of the *Nakba*—the Arabic word for "disaster" that refers to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. As they were absent during the state's first census (November 11, 1948) when they returned a year later, the family was denied Israeli citizenship and classified as "present-absentee aliens" (Darwish, "Ha-galut" 322). Though Israel's 1952 Citizenship Law conferred citizenship upon internally-displaced Palestinians who had remained within Israel, Darwish and his family were considered residents rather than citizens, eventually granted ID cards but never passports (Jaggi, "Poet").

Darwish's poem "Ābadu al-Ṣubbār (The Eternity of Cactus)," published in his 1995 volume of poetry *Limādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan? (Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?)*, is a poetic retelling of this formative autobiographical experience of his family's flight to Lebanon. In this poem, Darwish's cultivation of the musical and aural aspects of poetry (meter, echo, rhythm and rhyme) serves as a means of poetically attending to—and reconfiguring—the effects of dispossession and displacement. For Darwish, the music of poetry can escape both the confines of prison cells and the self's boundaries, creating a zone of liminality in between historical loss, literary tradition and horizons of psychological liberation. This domain of betweenness that the music of poetry creates (described in his poem "Poetic Arrangements") is how Darwish engages and redefines his own experience of displacement. In the poem, an unspecified father and an anonymous son flee gunfire and soldiers for mountains in the north, as the father repeatedly entreats his son to be steadfast and remember the details of the terrain they are temporarily leaving. While each stanza orients itself around their journey and the historical sites of conquests and defeats they encounter as they flee, each question that the son poses to his father returns the poem to the remains of his house and village destroyed during the war, revisiting the *aṭlāl* (ruins) that are the quintessential beginning of the pre-Islamic and classical Arabic ode. For every ode or *qaṣīda* commences at the site of destruction, where the poetic speaker visits the ruins and ashes of past encampments. In the third set of dialogue, the son asks his father: "Why did you leave the horse alone? / To keep the house company, my son. Houses die when their inhabitants are gone…" (30).

Horses in pre-Islamic and classical Arabic poetry are symbols of masculinity, sexuality and power. Used as mounts in war, they evoke themes of pride and survival in tribal society, as well as embodying a form of identity. In this sense, then, to leave one's horse behind is a form of surrender. Yet, in another sense, populating the ruins of their house with their horse is a strategic claim to what they must flee, a means of leaving oneself behind and thus a refusal to recuperate after the devastation of loss. This is, therefore, an act of resistance, as leaving the horse behind marks the animating force that may be garnered by means of self-dispossession.

As in other Semitic languages, the word for house, *bayt*, also signifies a verse of poetry and in the father's response, the plural, *buyūt*, rhymes with the following verb, *tamūt* (die): "*Fa-l-buyūtu tamūtu idha ghāba sukkānuha*." In the reverberation of this internal rhyme, the meta-poetic implications of the exchange between father and son begin to show themselves. When poetic ruins (*al-buyūt*) are no longer inhabited by their inheritors, their forms can no longer guard against the effacement of what they had housed. The father and son's poetic dwelling remain animate and alive so long as it is kept company by the horse, who is marked as remaining alone. Kept company by the power of a poetic tradition unleashed

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 3 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

from its authors and fathers, these structures of loss (*al-buyūt*) survive through attenuated forms of authority that bequeath their tradition by leaving behind signs and mechanisms of self.

Following Vered Shemtov's work, in which she demonstrates how ideology informs a poet's use of prosodic forms (12-15), this essay perceives prosody as indicating Darwish's selections of metrical structure and his emphasis of other aural aspects in language, such as assonance, echo, and rhyme. Shemtov looks at the way in which ideological beliefs are embedded into prosodic forms in Hebrew poetry during Zionist nation formation, theorizing concepts (126) such as "metrical hybridization" (in which different voices and rhythms in a poetic text become "a dialogue between self and other") and "rhythmic intertextuality" (in which metrical intertexts are invoked) Of course, "rhythmic intertextuality" is far from a new concept in Arabic poetry—muʿāraḍa, literally meaning "opposition" or "resistance," refers to imitative poetry in which a poet uses the same meter, rhyme and subject matter as a previous writer to both honor and surpass the chosen text (Gelder). This essay follows Shemtov's lead in emphasizing how prosody is more than merely a formal issue, studying the way in which Darwish's poetry writes its own theory of prosody and aurality.

Darwish's prosodic choices, I propose, reveal themselves to be central to the meaning of the poetic text; indeed, the auditory effects that he cultivates not only perform the poem's implication, but also emphasize an underlying and salient component of its content. Darwish has distinguished himself through his continued engagement with free verse, which in Arabic poetry entails the free repetition of a single metrical foot (*tafʿīlah*) in lines of varying length. These poetic feet are taken from the sixteen meters of classical Arabic poetry that were codified in the eighth century. Thus the poem "The Eternity of Cactus" is written in the *mutaqārib* meter, which literally means "drawing near together," and is named as such because similar structural units of its metrical feet are kept close together (Lane's Lexicon, 2567; Lisan al-ʿArab, 3568). The poem thematizes this prosodic adjacency in many ways—in the proximity between the poet's autobiographical experiences and his poetic rewriting of them; in the intimacy of father and son, and the contiguity of personal history and literary inheritance; in the connection between the life of poetic heritage and the diminishment of traditional forms of authority; and, not the least, in the juxtaposition and entanglement of Palestinian and Israeli narratives and signifiers. Drawing together many and varied aspects—the memory of the Nakba and its aftermath, the poetic ruins (*aṭlāl*) of the Arabic literary tradition, attenuated forms of authority and of self—the poem's meter and internal rhyme present this encounter between disparate and interrelated elements as the middle zone that is the eternal endurance of cactus.

Darwish and his family ultimately settled in the village of al-Jadīda, where he lived until he moved to Acre and then to Haifa. In Haifa, he joined the Israeli Communist Party, working for its Arabic newspaper, *Al-Ittiḥād*, as a journalist and editor (Abu Eid 28-30). During this period (1960-1970), Darwish was arrested and imprisoned five times, in addition to long stints of home arrest, for traveling without a permit and on various suspicions of hostile activity that were never proven (al-Naqqāsh 110-13). As Darwish writes: "Ten years trapped in Haifa, of which three I spent imprisoned in my house. Every year one or two times in prison" (Dayan 13). This, along with the split in the Israeli Communist party, influenced Darwish's decision to leave Israel and assume a life of exile (Abu Eid 34). The majority of Darwish's work was thus not written in Israel. At the same time, as Muhammad Siddiq has emphasized, Israeli personas have been a continuous presence throughout Darwish's oeuvre: the unambiguous enemy official in his early poem "Identity Card"; the Jewish-Israeli beloved Rita, who appears in "Rita and the Rifle"; the humanized and disenchanted Israeli fighter in "An Israeli Soldier Dreams of Daffodils"; and the anonymous representatives of the Israeli military in "State of Siege." Moreover, Darwish's love for the Hebrew Bible as a literary text has meant that it has been a strong intertextual source throughout his collections (along with the Qur'an, the Christian Bible, and classical Arabic poetry).

Essays in the vein of the one I am writing are fond of quoting the declaration made by Yael Lerer, Israeli publisher and political activist, who stated that "[Darwish] wrote for us too. Many of his poems are a direct appeal to us: the Israeli Jews" ("Read," my translation). Darwish, as Lerer notes, could never refuse their requests to translate his books even as he himself could scarcely see the objective: "What's the point now? It's too early. They won't read it" (qtd. in "Kar'u"). Nevertheless, Darwish was intimately acquainted with translations of his work into Hebrew. Questioned about the selection of his poetry available in Hebrew, he responds that he would have wanted to be known by the Israeli reader as a writer of love poetry, to be recognized as a poet who asks aesthetic questions rather than as a Palestinian whose work is judged by its subject matter (Darwish, "Ha-galut" 357). Darwish is to date the most translated Arab poet in Hebrew. Attaining widespread and devoted readership in the Arab world, and increasingly in the West, he was acknowledged as the voice of the Palestinian consciousness until his death in 2008. Yet what does it mean to write to another audience alongside those attentive

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 4 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

eyes and ears, one who is not listening right now but who might possibly in the future? What does it mean to write to possible future readers—those others who may yet choose to attend to you—in a language they cannot yet understand? This article looks to how this horizon of possible future attentiveness figures poetically, in the prosodic materiality of the poetic text itself.

II. Sounding the in-between

This section continues to focus on Darwish's collection *Limādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan?* (*Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?*), a volume written in Paris before his return to Palestine after the Oslo Accords. Combining elements from collective Palestinian history with narratives from Near Eastern and Greek myths, the Qur'an, as well as the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, this volume revisits his family's 1948 flight to Lebanon and their 1949 return to the new state of Israel. Darwish himself refers to it as "an autobiography that is both personal and poetic" (Beydoun 59, translated in Rahman 86): "It not only retraces the dispersal of self from loss to place of exile, but it also performs the poetic development of the poet, from influences to changing techniques" (Rahman 86). The volume is divided into six sections that could be taken to represent stages in Darwish's life, even as they write a new form of epic that strives to safeguard Palestinian history and presence from erasure. It is the fourth section, "A Room to Talk to Oneself" (*Ghurfa l'il kalām maʿ al-nafs*), that is the focus of this essay, in which the memory of prison cells shifts into a site of aesthetic engagement with language and literary heritage.

Interweaving the mythic and historical into the personal and mundane details of daily life, the poems in this section orchestrate destabilizing encounters among diverse voices, genres and registers that occasion scenes of self-dispossession for the poetic speaker. Through a discussion of these poems, this article will trace how Darwish defines poetry through thematic figures and auditory effects of betweenness. For Darwish, this entails disrupting the idea of a set and bounded identity with its displacement, such that an original identity is transformed into an interval of otherness that is nevertheless claimed as that which is not exile. In this sense, Darwish writes the historical condition of 1948 Palestinians into the very sound of his poetry. Indeed, in this section, poetry is delineated by aural aspects of betweenness, surfacing as echoes, rhythm and rhymes—forms of reiterating sound that displace the original source and create a domain of generative resonance between source and its modified repetition. The sound of the in-between that Darwish composes in these poems is reinforced by his choice of meter. Darwish's aurality links the recovery of Palestine to a displaced notion of both text and self, a prosody of displacement that also serves as a figure for future attentiveness, for the capacity of his poems to resonate on to Jewish Israeli readers reading him in translation or in acquired Arabic. Ultimately, this article claims that the aural possibilities of displacement showcased in Darwish's work fundamentally assume the task of writing a non-sovereign form of identity, wherein unified norms of selfhood are dismantled through a willing submission to others and otherness.

The section's first poem, "Tadābīr Shiʿriyya" (Poetic Arrangements) establishes the centrality of betweenness to Darwish's notions of poetry and agency, laying bare how interstitiality relates to both what the poem encompasses and what it can do:

> The planets did nothing
> except
> teach me to read:
> I have a language in the sky
> and a language on the earth
> Who am I? Who am I? …
>
> The poem is above. It is able
> To teach me what it wants
> Like how to open a window
> Or put my household affairs in order
> among myths. It is able
> to wed me to itself…in time. (*Why Did* 108)

The poem begins with a scene of celestial instruction—the speaker declares that the planets taught him a mode of reading premised upon a duality of languages, a binary that does not allow for a stable sense of identity. The speaker locates the poem "above" or "*fawq*," a spatialization that indicates the poem's ability to establish and safeguard conditions of possibility. Rather than merely aligning the poem with celestial language, the poem is above and beyond, encompassing heavenly and terrestrial registers of expression. Because of this comprehensive scope, the poem is able to teach the speaker how to secure a middle ground between mythical and domestic domains, "like how to open a window / or put

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

page 5 of 12

household affairs in order / among myths." Imbuing grandiose and mythological symbology with personal and ordinary import is vital to the poem's theorization of restitutive recreation. The poem teaches how to do exactly that, which it equates or relates to opening a window. This opening poem thus evokes the section's title— "A Room to Talk to Oneself," a heading that summons images of prison cells on the one hand and creative freedom on the other as it recalls Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. The duality between these interpretations, which is perhaps echoed in this text's pairing of celestial language with terrestrial, is borne out explicitly through other poems in the section.

The poem is increasingly spatialized and materialized as its capabilities are delineated, which indeed the title indicates. "*Tadābīr*" means "steps," "measures" or "arrangements," but its singular form "*tadbīr*" is often paired with the word "*al-manzil*" and signifies housekeeping or household management. Thus, the poetic measures of housekeeping entail the handiwork that makes mythical registers of meaning material, palpably present and part of the ordinary rhythm of domestic life. Once these measures are taken, the windows of restrictive spaces can open, as is seen in the penultimate stanza:

> The poem is what lies between a between. It is able
> to illuminate the night with the breasts of a young woman
> It is able to illuminate, with an apple, two bodies
> It is able to restore
> with the cry of a gardenia, a homeland! (*Why Did* 112)

The poem is "*mā bayna bayn*" ("what is between a between"), embodying that potential to find more space between walls or any other entities that the conjunction "between" puts into relation. As the poem reaches its conclusion, the sound of the in-between emerges in repeating dipthongs, the *ay* of *bayna* that also marks the endings of dual nouns: "*nahday fatāh*" ("the two breasts of a young woman"), "*jasadayn*" ("two bodies") and, in the final stanza, "*bayna yaday*" ("between my two hands"). As the penultimate stanza focuses on the centrality of between-ness to what poetry is and can do, it summons hints of Eden and the *Song of Songs*—the poem "illuminates the night with the breasts of a young woman" and illuminates "with an apple, two bodies." That which incites or excites desire, a portrayal that casts the poetic between as an interstice between bodies, is that which can return a homeland with the cry of a gardenia. In this smooth pivot towards the political context that saturates Darwish's work, poetry, exile, restitution and betweenness are juxtaposed and acquire new valences of meaning. Thus exile becomes the interval between a seized homeland that one must not relinquish and the present spatio-temporal location outside the territorial homeland of the past; the restitution of homeland becomes the ability to reside in that space of betweenness. Furthermore, poetry, that which lies between a between, is the technique that makes the ongoing between a space in which to dwell, as if this betweenness suddenly acquires walls, floor and ceiling through the artfulness of poetic creation.

The final stanza re-concretizes the relation between poetry and betweenness. Poetry, the potentially transformative space that lurks between pairs of binaries, is now itself placed between the speaker's hands:

> The poem is in my hands. It is able
> to arrange the affairs of myths
> with the work of hands. But I
> when I found the poem, dispossessed my self
> and I asked it:
> Who am I?
> Who am I? (*Why Did* 112)

As the scale and scope of this text expands and contracts, the poem's embodiment of betweenness takes on an explicitly material form—this qaṣīda now becomes a tangible object that the speaker holds, touches, and grasps. Rather than the ethereal activity of a wordsmith with pen and paper, poetry-writing is figured as a craftsman's physical engagement with the material object he transforms. Indeed, it is from within this corporeality of poetic action that poetry's interstitial dynamism is able to function. Thus, while the qaṣīda is between the speaker's hands, it is able to set in motion and conduct the affairs of myths with the manual labor of creative and ordinary life.

Encountering this dynamic facility causes the speaker to question his own ontological condition, culminating in the final question: "But I / when I found the poem, dispossessed my self / and I asked it: / Who am I? / Who am I?" The verb ṣarrda, meaning "to frighten, drive away, make homeless or dispossess" indicates the active destabilization of self that is crucial to Darwish's notion of

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 6 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

transformation: I drove my self away and made myself homeless, echoing the conceptually broad state of exile imposed on Palestinians. I dispossessed myself of my identity and any stable sense of being, asking my estranged self, "Who am I?" In this open-ended interrogative, one which recalls the window of the poem's earlier formulation, the "I" is skillfully prevented from acquiring a stable reference. As such, the "I," the linguistic placeholder of self, is made to remain between its pointing reference and its absent contextual referent, to occupy the indeterminate space of possibility in between. In the section's next poem, this interval resurfaces as an explicitly auditory form, that of an echo.

Indeed, "Min Rūmiyyāt Abī Firās al-Ḥamdāni" ("From the Byzantine Odes of Abu Firas al-Hamdani") begins with an echo that repeats: "An echo returning. A wide street in the echo." The first verse's auditory image previews the poem's topic: an original noise or utterance has traveled, rebounded, and traveled back, a trajectory that seemingly traces the walls of a prison cell even as it contains the spread of wide streets. In this introductory verse, the echo is figured as that auditory reverberation of language that both transcends and escapes the confines of cells. The rest of the poem, translated by Jeffrey Sacks, is as follows:

> …Steps exchange the rattle of a cough, approach
> the door, little by little, and draw
> away. Family will visit tomorrow
> Their Thursday visit. There's our shadow
> in the hallway and our sun in the basket
> of fruit. There's a mother scolding our jailer:
> Why did you pour out our coffee on
> the grass, you criminal? There's salt rising from the sea
> There's sea rising from the salt. My cell
> expanded an inch from the voice of the dove. Fly
> to Aleppo, oh dove, fly with my ode
> and carry a greeting to my cousin!
> An echo
> in the echo. The echo has its metal staircase, its transparence, its dew
> ringing with those who climb to their dawn…and those
> who descend to their graves through punctures in the horizon …
> Take me with you to my language! I said:
> what's useful lingers in the words of the ode
> which rise, like foam, to the surface of the skin of the drums
> And in the echo, my cell opens, a balcony
> like the dress of the young woman who accompanied me in vain
> to the train window. My father doesn't like you,
> she said. My mother does. So beware of tomorrow's Sodom
> Don't wait for me Thursday morning. I don't
> like thickness when it hides the movements of meaning
> within its walls, and leaves me, a solitary body,
> to remember its forest…The echo has a room
> like my cell: a room to talk to itself
> My cell is my image. I haven't found anyone around it
> to share my morning coffee with,
> Nor a bench to share my isolation with in the evening. Nor a scene
> to share my perplexity with to reach the right path
> So I'll be what the horses bid during the raids!
> a prince
> a prisoner
> or a corpse!
> My cell opened wider, a street or two. This echo
> is an echo. To the left and right, I'll leave my walls
> a master, like a free ghost leaves itself,
> and will walk to Aleppo. Oh dove, fly
> with my ode. Carry to my cousin
> the dew's greeting! (*Why Did* 114-17)

The first few verses indicate the poem's prison-like setting—footsteps approach and leave the door, and family visits on Thursday are anticipated. The poem's title cues the four-year imprisonment of the 10th-century poet Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī. In addition to serving as court poet for his cousin the Emirate of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla, al-Ḥamdānī also fought actively in the ruler's battles against the Byzantine Empire. In 962, al-Ḥamdānī was captured by the Byzantines and subsequently spent four years as a

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 7 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

prisoner in Constantinople, where he wrote what is widely considered to be his best poetry, collected under the title *Al-Rūmiyyat* (The Byzantine [Poems]). While this is the first imprisonment to be referenced, the poem's following verses invoke a more contemporary and local scene—Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jail cells. Later verses make this scenario more explicit, evoking Darwish's own periods of incarceration in Israeli prisons.

Both contexts and experiences of detention echo each other—echoes which indeed widen the prison cell, as the poetic speaker's declaration attests: "my cell grew an inch from the voice of the dove." This reverberating dove references a short poem written by al-Ḥamdānī', in which the poetic speaker addresses a dove who coos plaintively next to him and beseeches it to share his grief: "I say to a dove, mournfully cooing nearby,/ Neighbor, is your condition indeed mine?" (Tayib 325). Darwish's poetic speaker asks the dove to carry a greeting to his cousin, echoing al-Ḥamdānī's many letters and poems imploring Sayf al-Dawla to secure his release. In the dual context of both prison scenes, the speaker's cousin may be understood to signify either his Israeli jailors or influential Arab leaders in neighboring countries who may secure his and his country's release. It also evokes Tamar Ben-Ami, Darwish's first lover, a Jewish Israeli woman he met at a political rally for the Israeli Communist Party when he was 22, and who formed the basis for a series of love poems he wrote that were addressed to "Rita" (Jubran). Tamar's surname in Hebrew, *Ben 'ami*, literally meaning "son of my nation," is a cognate with the Arabic word for "my cousin," *ibn 'ammī*. The echo of Tamar/Rita thus rings in the speaker's adoption of al-Ḥamdānī's calls to his cousin. This principle is then distilled in the next verse: "An echo/ in the echo. The echo has its metal staircase, its transparence, its dew/ ringing with those who climb to their dawn…/ and those who descend to their graves…/ Take me with you to my language!" One echo contains another, a rebounding regress that the poem spatializes into a tiered expanse that transcends life and in which poetic language may be found. The poem's meter emphasizes the apposition of this echo-chamber—the *mutaqārib* meter, literally meaning "drawn near to each other," indeed enacts the way in which disparate voices and contexts are brought together by the poetic text.

This echo that resonates back and forth amongst exiled poets writing in various forms of captivity swells through the reverberations of Arabic literary tradition. It reappears in virtually every verse of the poem, translated into a different image—the sound of "what's useful," lingering in the words of the qaṣīda"; the echoing expanse in which the speaker's cell widens into a balcony, "like the dress of a girl who accompanied [him] in vain to the train window." The echo then shifts into the girl's warning to the speaker. "Beware of tomorrow's Sodom," she says, a statement that recalls another poem written by Darwish, titled "A Beautiful Woman from Sodom." This poem is one of a group of love poems addressed to "Rita." "The one I love," writes Darwish in this poem, "has two faces:/ one outside of existence/ and one inside ancient Sodom/ and I am in between them/ searching for the face of truth" (*Al-'Ā'amāl* 290-94). Robyn Creswell has detailed how Rita's recurring figure embodies many of the normative characteristics of the classical beloved in Arabic poetry, not least her status as hailing from a warring tribe (72-73). In "A Beautiful Woman from Sodom," Darwish classifies the speaker's lover as half a being of complete transcendence and half a creature of ultimate destruction, a characterization that clearly relates to her status as both a beloved and an Israeli participant in the ongoing occupation of Palestine. Indeed, in real life, Darwish and Ben Ami's relationship ends when she joins the army. Notably, this representation of the lover reverses the biblical narrative that places Abraham and Lot on the other side of Sodom's sinners, as those whose virtue guaranteed their survival and safe-keeping by God (*Genesis* 19). Hailing from Sodom, the evoked lover is labeled a sinful oppressor and an unattainable desired in equal measure. In the present poem, an echo of this lover cautions the poetic speaker to beware of tomorrow's Sodom, as she accompanies him to the train station and announces she will no longer visit him on Thursday morning. Though she alerts him to imminent upheaval, her counsel comes with the announcement of her departure. A reformulation of the cycle of Rita poems, the lover's reappearance here thus reiterates their ultimate separation amidst the polarity of her two faces and the impossibility of their connection.

The solitariness that is afforded by the prison of impossible love allows for a polyphony of poetic voices transcending spatial and historical borders. It propels the speaker to proclaim that he will choose to become one of the options offered to him by the horses in a raid: either a prince, a prisoner or a corpse. This selection of possible endings recalls another array of voices. It initially echoes one of Abu Firās' most famed qaṣīdas from the *Rūmiyyāt*, in which he attempts to persuade both his readers and Sayf al-Dawla about the value of his release. Describing the scene of his capture, the speaker declares:

My closest comrades said, 'Flee or die!';
What a choice I replied. Even the sweeter one is bitter.

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 8 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

'I would rather take the blameless path and fight;
        I'll take my chances and either be killed or better captured.'

…Death is inevitable, so choose what will augment your fame;
        For a man does not die as long as his fame still lives. (Stetkevych 116)

This staging of choices returns in concluding section of Abu Firās' poem, in which the poetic speaker addresses his tribe, the Banū Ḥamdān, in the third person. Offering them verses of boastful praise that were presumably intended to produce a sentiment of tribal loyalty and remind them of their obligation towards him, he writes: "We are men for whom there is no middle ground; We are either on the front line, before all other men, or in the grave." As Suzanne Stetkevych elucidates in her analysis of the poem, though it would seem that the poet sets out to provide a justification for his capture, he actually encodes a logical error: "Capture is surely nobler than fleeing, but fighting to the death is nobler than surrender and capture … eternal glory—that is death in battle—is preferable to life, but it seems that Abu Firās has preferred the eternal fame secured by poetry over that achieved by death in battle" (134-35). Though the poetic speaker stages these choices, he does himself occupy a middle ground that is neither fighting nor dying—in the poetry of imprisonment (or the imprisonment of poetry) he achieves a lasting fame which is preferable to all other forms of extinction.

Yet Darwish's list of options also rings with the words of a more modern Palestinian poet, 'Abd al Raheem Mahmoud, who fought against the British Mandate and was killed in battle during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Known for penning fiery calls to action, his 1937 poem "The Martyr" is a premier example:

I shall carry my soul in the palm of my hand,
And throw it into the cavern of death!
Either a life to gladden the hearts of friends
Or a death to torture the hearts of foes!
An honorable man's spirit has two aims:
To die fighting or achieve victory. (Jayyusi 209)

In this echo-chamber, the choices that al-Ḥamdāni stages to situate his own practice of poetry while imprisoned are inhabited by Mahmoud's categorical calls for resistance to the death. All of these voices and their assorted alternatives subvert the distinctions presented—which of course is the point. For ultimately, the impossible beloved becomes indistinguishable from the cousin-ruler, s/he who is both the cause of continued imprisonment and the only possibility for freedom. As this text reveals, liberation can only be occasioned by and in the echo-writing of poetry's middle ground—through the reverberating circulation of voices that both resonate and clash with each other, disturbing clear categorizations of authority, authorship, and agential choice.

The material between that surfaces as an echo in the previous poem shifts into yet another figure of aurality in the section's subsequent poems, becoming the rhythm that allows words to register materially. As the speaker declares in "Qal al-Musāfir l'il Musāfir: Lan Naʿūd Kama…" ("One Traveler Said to Another: We Won't Return As…"): "I feel the pulse of the alphabet in the echo." The formulations of betweenness throughout *A Room to Talk to Oneself* integrate in the rebound of this verse—the echo, the extra-textual between that is the medium through which the speaker's cell opens into a balcony, cannot be registered fully unless it is experienced as handiwork, when its pulses are borne out in the body. The poem is thus the material interval between echo and rhythm, "a window looking out in both directions," that catalyzes a process of forgetting and de-identification, ultimately resulting in a liberatory surrender to the exile of self-dispossession. The poem in full is as follows (with a slight adaptation of Sack's translation):

I don't know the desert
But I planted words at its edges…
The words said what they said, and I left
like a divorced woman, like her broken husband
I kept nothing but the rhythm
I hear it
and follow it
and lift it, doves
on the path to the sky
the sky of my song
I am a son of the Syrian plain

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 9 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

I live there, traveling or residing
among the people of the sea
But the mirage presses me eastward
to the ancient Bedouin
I lead the beautiful horses to water
I feel the pulse of the alphabet in the echo
I return a window looking out in two directions…
I forget who I am so that I can be
plural in singular and in time
with the praises of the foreign soldiers under my windows,
so that I can be the warring parties' letter to their families:
We won't return as we went
We won't return…even secretly!
I don't know the desert
however often I've visited its thoughts
In the desert absence said to me:
Write!
I said: There is another writing on the mirage
It said: Write and the mirage will become green
I said: I lack absence
I said: I still haven't learned the words
It said to me: Write and you'll know them
and know where you were, and where you are
and how you came, and who you will be tomorrow
Put your name in my hand and write
so you'll know who I am and will go, a cloud
into the open…
So I wrote: Whoever writes his story will inherit
the land of words, and possess meaning entirely!
I don't know the desert
but I bid it farewell: Peace
to the tribe east of my song: Peace
to the descendants, in their plurality, upon the sword: Peace
to my mother's son under his palm tree: Peace
to the ode that preserved our planets: Peace
to the passing peoples, a memory for my memory: Peace
to "peace be upon me," between two poems:
one that has been written
and another whose poet died of passion!
Am I me?
Am I there…or here?
In each you, me
I am you, the second person. It is not exile
for me to be you. It is not exile
for my me to be you. And it is not exile
for the sea and the desert to be
The song of the traveler to the traveler:
I won't return, as I went,
I won't return… even secretly! (124-28)

The colon appears throughout the poem as a grammatical between, registering crucial moments of dialogue and exchange. The poem begins with the desert as its source—the symbolic and real placeholder of literary heritage. The poetic speaker cannot know it entirely as its vastness is unknowable, so he plants words at its edges. This act reads meta-poetically, as the beginning of what a poem is, words scattered on the edge of an inspirational unknown. Like a plant or seed of primordial matter, these words are alive, activating themselves in speech and causing the poet who planted them to leave them behind as both sides of a separated couple. From these words that he buries and is compelled to abandon, he preserves nothing but their rhythm, which he lifts as a dove to the sky of his song. The rhythm—*al-īqāʿ*—rings through the poetic speaker's actions, echoing in the sound of the three rhyming verbs that follow: "*asmaʿuhu/ wa-atbaʿuhu/ wa-arfaʿuhu…*" ("I hear it/ and follow it/ and lift it…").

Facing eastwards, the speaker feels the pulse of the alphabet in the echo, an incorporation of linguistic legacy that allows him to return as a window with two faces, looking out in both directions. This simile of mediation and transparency signals an ongoing circuit of not-knowing, transformation and betweenness: the speaker's embodied experience of a tradition he cannot know entirely is nonetheless

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between': page 10 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

the source and impetus of his own planted words. These words sown at the edge of his heritage compel him to journey forth and undergo a transformative experience of disintegration, a dissolution that leads him to return as a poetic as this ultimate image of interstitiality and poetic figure. Both the poem's title and first line— "We Won't Return As…" and "I don't know the desert"—reappear throughout the text, serving as a rhythmic reiteration of this relationality between not knowing and disintegration. The event of becoming poetic language induces a process of forgetting and self-evacuation for the speaker, yielding a profound exchange with the poetry of absence. The inaugural decree to write echoes the first prophetic words revealed to Muḥammad and recorded in Sūrat al-ʿAlaq (96:1-2): "Recite in the name of your Lord who created- (1) Created man from a clinging substance (2)." Usually translated as "recite," this imperative also means to "read," commanding the prophet to recite the Quranic message to his people and proclaim the path of Islam.

Referencing the first event of revelation, Darwish replaces the injunction to read or recite with an imperative to write. In this rewriting of divine interchange, prophecy becomes a form of transmission that unfolds via an act of creative genesis. If poetry is the material between in which the music of language can tangibly recreate worlds, then the revelation of those worlds comes about by means of writing rather than recitation. In place of the angel Gabriel, as God's messenger, it is the desert's absence that delivers the command, a figure that evokes the famed absence of the nasīb—the amatory prelude in pre-Islamic and classical poetry. Each ode begins with the beloved's departure and the abandoned site of her tribe's camp in the desert, such that this recurring scene of arid absence has been conceptualized to embody the founding site of Arabic poetry. Darwish's poem expands the beloved's absence in the nasīb to absence more generally in the desert. The conversation that ensues between poetry's activator (absence) and the poetic speaker echoes the hadith (narration of Muḥammad's first revelation, in which he protests that he lacks the knowledge to recite. Undeterred, the desert's absence tells the poetic speaker to write in order to know: "Put your name in my hand and write / so you'll know who I am and go, a cloud / into the open…" In this arresting exchange, the speaker's name takes the place of his hand, such that name/ language is formulated to be an extension of body. This linguistic form of corporeality is then commanded to be placed in the corpus of the poetic tradition's founding absence, a joining of language and body that yields a new experience of knowledge and convinces the poetic speaker to write his own prophetic words.

The verse Darwish finally composes is one of wide-reaching import: "So I wrote: Whoever writes his story will inherit/ the land of words and possess meaning, entirely!" This is not the first place that a territory of language appears in Darwish's work: "A country of words, *baladun min kalām*," is a central and recurring image in his collections. Yet his reformulation of the image in this poem is distinct from its previous expressions—here, he uses *ʿarḍ* (land, country, region) rather than *balad* (country, province, territory) or *waṭan* (homeland), which expands this figure from a purely Palestinian or political context. At the same time, the cognate of *ʿarḍ* in Hebrew is *ʿaretz* (land, country, earth) and, when paired with the definite article, *ha-ʿaretz* ("the country"), it refers to Israel. *ʿArḍ al-kalām* becomes the inclusive world that may be created and preserved via the ungovernable circulations of bodily-registered language—an elastic domain that transcends the nationalist imagination and its nomenclature. The power of this material genesis in language constitutes the entire possession of meaning. Its transmission, moreover, ensues as a kind of inheritance that is determined by the practice of writing rather than the biology of blood ties. This alternative prophecy proclaimed by the speaker offers a radically open vision of inheritance and by extension kinship that compels him to bid farewells to everything ranging from his literary heritage to his own person. These acts of renunciation then occasion the ultimate destabilization of language, as the speaker asks himself, "Am 'I' I? / Am I there… or here? / In each you, me / I am you, the second person." Indeed, the final few verses of "Qāl al-musāfir" pose a form of redemption via the self's exile in otherness through a play of sounds that, as Rahman has shown, overlays and disrupts *enā* (I) in the reverberation of its rhyme with *hunā* (here) and *menfa* (exile). Even as the sound of the "I" appears in these other words, it becomes unsettled by their meanings (105). In this final section of questions and prophetic responses, though the pronouns and deictic expressions have no fixed reference point whatsoever, the indeterminate boundlessness of relationality that unfolds is labeled as that which is precisely not exile.

The compass of this language resoundingly evokes the texts of *Ḥusayn Ibn Manṣūr* al-Ḥallāj, a 10th century Sufi mystic, teacher and poet whose famous words "I am the truth," which many saw as a claim to divinity, led to his execution on the religious charge of blasphemy in 922 (Massignon and Gardet, "al-Ḥallādj"). While his preaching initially emphasized the innate capacity of believers to find God within their own heart, his final years in Baghdad were characterized by his public proclamations and written

Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between': page 11 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 22.1 (2020): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss1/9>
Special Issue *Poetry in Israel: Forging Identity*. Ed. Chanita Goodblatt

poems, which testified to his desire for annihilation and divine unification: "Between you and me is an I-ness interfering with me; Take away with your I-ness my I-ness from between us!" (324-25).

Darwish clearly echoes al- Ḥallāj even as he bids farewell to his text, writing "peace … to another whose poet who died of passion!"). Yet he tempers al- Ḥallāj's rebound with his use of exile in this last section, declaring that "It is not exile/ for my me to be you. And it is not exile/ for the sea and the desert to be/ the song of the traveler to the traveler: I won't return as I went…" An articulation of home as that which is not exile within alterity, the song of the traveler to the traveler expresses an inability for the speaker and his collective to return to an identity of sameness. This poem of dialogue and exchange searches for a form of encounter and junction between entities and interlocutors that differs from al-Ḥallāj's extreme formulations—not, thus, the annihilation that allows God to speak through the individual, so that "I" becomes the voice of God, as in his infamous declaration, "I am the truth." Rather, the poem's inability to return to sameness proclaims an identity of betweenness that leaves one in the middle of known and unknown, in a between of sound and echo that is precisely not exile. This interval of possibility and survival is the definition and inheritance of poetry, an interstice that Darwish's echoes invite his Israeli readers to seek. Darwish's body of work thus calls upon speakers and readers of Hebrew as well as Arabic to attend to the full intricacy of his texts' maneuverings; to follow how the music of poetry, "that which lies between a between," creates intervals of liminality that engender and invoke the experience of estrangement and self-dispossession.

Yet within mainstream Israeli society, Darwish is still regarded with more suspicion than consideration, as attempts to include him in the school curricula and radio programs were attacked (during 1999-2001 and 2016). Mirroring this political polemic is the shifting trajectory of Darwish's translations into Hebrew: the earliest translations of his work in the 1960s by Avraham Yinon were managed by the Israeli security forces and published in official collections specifically prepared for the Prime Minister (Amit-Kochavi 57). *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?*, translated into Hebrew by Muḥammad Ḥamza Ghanāyim (2000), was the first book published by Lerer's press, Andalus Publishing (2000-2009). Since then, Ghanāyim himself has translated several other full volumes of Darwish's poetry (*'Eres ha-nokhriyah* (The Stranger's Bed) in 2000, *Matsav Matsor* (State of Siege) in 2003, and *Tsiyur Kir* (Mural) in 2006), and the Israeli scholar Revuen Snir has published a compilation of his work in Hebrew (*Mahmoud Darwish: Hamishim shnot shira* [Fifty Years of Poetry] in 2015). Throughout, Darwish has implored his Israeli interlocutors to both read his work and engage more broadly with the rich legacy of Arabic poetry: "I just wish they'd read me to enjoy my poetry, not as a representative of the enemy" (Shatz 71).

Many Israelis are beginning to take him up on this request and challenge, and it should come as no surprise that the earliest among these readers are poets in their own rights—Yehuda Amichai, Haim Guri, Sami Shalom Chetrit and Almog Behar, amongst others, have all expressed their familiarity with his texts. It is, then, other poets who may lead Israeli readers of Hebrew towards the horizon of attentiveness that Darwish's texts both demand and create—a prospect that inheres in the Hebrew intertexts and Hebrew-Arabic cognates that Darwish invokes; in the historical and personal details that anchor his texts to the multiply claimed land of Palestine and Israel; and in the plural temporalities and liminal identities of the echoes, rhythms, rhymes and meters that he wields to reclaim past and future.

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Ayelet Even-Nur, "'The Poem is What Lies Between a Between':   page 12 of 12
Mahmoud Darwish and the Prosody of Displacement"
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