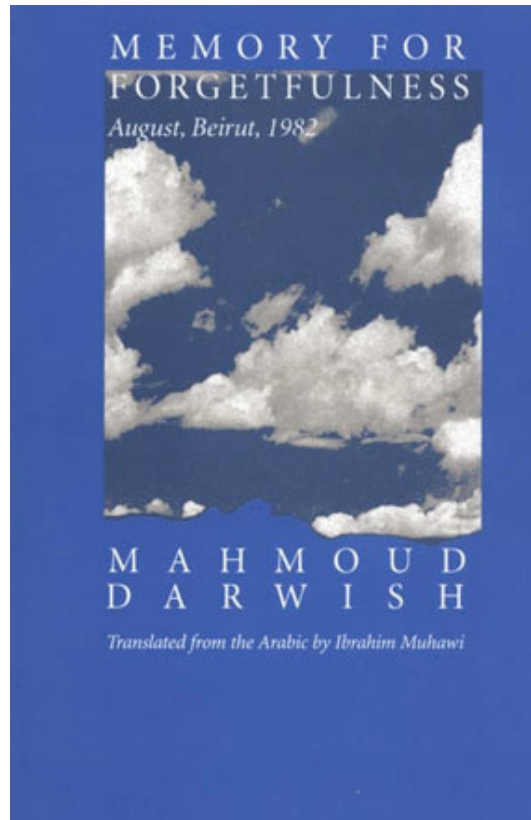


Rishma Dunlop

Notebook Fragments 2008

Reading Darwish: In Memoriam



My study has burned. A shell from the sea turned it into a charcoal warehouse. It burned a few hours before we arrived. Where are we to find another place to carry on with our prattle? Our eternal calling in war or truce—chatter. Where can we carry on with it?

How I used to love my study, threatened with destruction from the beginning! “What kind of present do you want?” Plants and roses. Flowers and plants. I made it into something like a nest. I wanted it to be like a text in a magazine: brown characters on yellow paper, and overlooking the sea. I wanted it to be a flowerpot fastened to the back of an untamed horse. I wanted it to be like a poem. But no sooner did we hang a painting than a car bomb exploded, destroying all the arrangements. And no sooner did I rest my head on my left elbow, waiting for my coffee, than I found myself outside. The roar of an explosion lifted me as I was, holding pen and cigarette, and left me safely in front of the elevator. I found a rose on my shirt. A minute later, I tried to get back into the study, which now, without its doors, had turned into a space full of broken glass and flying paper...

—Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut 1982*^[1]

When I learned of Mahmoud Darwish's death on August 9, 2008, I remembered the many poems I had read and loved by the Palestinian poet over the years. In 2006, my quest to seek out Darwish's works for publication in *Studio* as well as *White Ink: Poems on Mothers and Motherhood* led me to poet Fady Joudah, whose skilful translations of Darwish's poems in *The Butterfly's Burden* were published in [Vol. 1, Issue 2](#) of *Studio*. In the same [issue](#), poet Deema Shehabi reviews Darwish's book and Joudah's translations.

I also remember the intense beauty of Darwish's poetic memoir, *Memory for Forgetting: August 1982*, in which one of the most visceral, sensuous descriptions of the aroma of morning coffee during the 1982 bombing of Beirut leaves the reader with the sense that this rich, bitter Arabic coffee itself is equated with being alive. Poet Naomi Shihab-Nye has called Darwish "one of the most eloquent writers of exile and belonging." She writes: "What he speaks has been embraced by readers around the world-his is an utterly necessary voice, unforgettable once discovered." [\[2\]](#)

Gently place one spoonful of the ground coffee, electrified with the aroma of cardamom, on the rippling surface of the hot water, then stir slowly, first clockwise, then up and down. Add the second spoonful and stir up and down, then counterclockwise. Now add the third. Between spoonfuls, take the pot away from the fire and bring it back. For the final touch, dip the spoon in the melting powder, fill and raise it a little over the pot, then let it drop back. Repeat this several times until the water boils again and a small mass of the blond coffee remains on the surface, rippling and ready to sink. Don't let it sink. Turn off the heat, and pay no heed to the rockets. Take the coffee to the narrow corridor and pour it lovingly and with a sure hand into a little white cup: dark-colored cups spoil the freedom of the coffee. Observe the paths of the steam and the tent of rising aroma. Now light your first cigarette, made for this cup of coffee, the cigarette with the flavor of existence itself, unequaled by the taste of any other except that which follows love, as the woman smokes away the last sweat and the fading voice.

Now I am born. My veins are saturated with their stimulant drugs, in contact with the springs of their life, caffeine and nicotine, and the ritual of their coming together as created by my hand. "How can a hand write," I ask myself, "if it doesn't know how to be creative in making coffee!" ... I know my coffee, my mother's coffee, and the coffee of my friends. I can tell them from afar and I know the differences among them. No coffee is like another, and my defense of coffee is a plea for difference itself....The aroma of coffee is a return to and a bringing back of first things because it is the offspring of the primordial. It's a journey, begun thousands of years ago, that still goes on. Coffee is a place. Coffee is pores that let the inside seep through to the outside. A separation that unites what can't be united except through its aroma. Coffee is not for weaning. ...Coffee is geography.

—Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut 1982*[\[3\]](#)

Whatever our politics, Darwish translates historical experience through war, siege, exile, love, sensuality, in ways that present the work of art as an enactment of truth within the context of cultures and histories. The work of art becomes the act through which a historical humanity recognizes its own experiences of the world in a primal way. I discover again and again in Darwish's works the belief in writing as homeland, the pleasure in everyday acts, like making and drinking coffee, that affirm our aliveness and humanity amidst the forgetfulness and savagery of

history. I join multitudes of others who mourn the loss of this voice.

My mother lights up Canaan's final stars,

Around my mirror,

And throws in my final poem, her shawl!

Mahmoud Darwish, "Houriyah's Instruction," translation by Fady Joudah^[4]

In this issue of *Studio*, it is my pleasure to introduce an international selection of works by poets James Cihlar; Lorna Crozier; Robert Fisher; Samuel Menashe; Ann E. Michael; Jason Ranon Uri Rothstein; Ravi Shankar, and Nanos Valaoritis. In our Prose section, in his essay "Calling Valaoritis," Evan Jones writes about the work of Nanos Valaoritis, introducing global readers audiences to the unique poetics and history of this poet. Also in this issue, the poems of Marie Étienne, translated from French by Marilyn Hacker. Poetry and Education features the works of Damiela Gioseffi, Lisken Van Pelt Dus, and Betty Lynch Husted. Books reviewed are: *New Poems—Tadeuzc Różewicz*, translated by Bill Johnston, reviewed by Chris Doda, and *Innovative Women Poets: An Anthology of Poetry and Interviews*, eds. Elizabeth Frost and Cynthia Hogue, reviewed by Stacey Waite. Our Gallery features an exhibition of poetry and photographs by Margo Berdeshevsky, excerpts from her "Tsunami Notebook."

^[1] Darwish, Mahmoud. *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*. Trans. and Introduction. Ibrahim Muhawi. (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1995),

^[2] Shihab-Nye, Naomi. Cited in "Mahmoud Darwish." *Poets.org. Academy of American Poets*. <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/1062>

^[3] *Memory for Forgetfulness*,

^[4] Darwish, Mahmoud. "Houriyah's Instruction." Trans. Fady Joudah. *White Ink: Poems on Mothers and Motherhood*. Ed. Rishma Dunlop. (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2007), 98-100.