

The Poetics of Life-Writing Exiles: Negotiating Time, Place and Language in Mahmoud Darwish's "*Tuesday, a Bright Day*" and "*Counterpoint*"

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Abstract In contrast to biographies, as long prose narratives, Darwish harnesses the fragments of the poem and his poetic, lyrical voice to contest the exilic space as a site where elements of place, time and language conflate. While the “high art” concept of the writer in exile—depicting the image of a masculinised, solitary figure that reflects an anachronistic politics and history—is now exhausted, we argue that Darwish’s poetics of exile amounts to a conceptual shift into an enacted articulation of self-writing heterotopia in exile. This article explores the interplay between exile and self-writing in Darwish’s “*Tuesday, a Bright Day*” and “*Counterpoint*”, which came out in a form of self-narrative accounts of the poet himself and of the Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, respectively. This relationship is interwoven throughout the two poems, highlighting not only the ongoing tragedy of the Palestinian experience of exile, but also those with comparable experiences. By extending the concept of exile beyond space and time, Darwish draws parallels between the elements of poetry and self-writing to challenge the prevailing ways of presenting selfhood as an intact individuality within the boundaries of nationhood. Hence, Darwish transcends the limitations of national boundaries through his poetic self-narrative accounts, rendering the exilic experience both universally comprehensible and humanistically experienceable.

Keywords Palestinian poetry; Mahmoud Darwish; Edward Said; exile; self-writing.

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Introduction

I jumped from the bed of my childhood onto the path of exile. I was six. My entire world turned upside down and childhood froze in place, it didn't go with me. The question is whether it's possible to restore the childhood that was taken by restoring the land that was taken, and that's poetic quest that gives rhythm to the poem itself. Finding the child Mahmoud Darwish who was one is possible only in the poem. Not in life. (Darwish, *Memory* 32)

In this quote, Darwish poses an intriguing question: what could possibly restore the lost selfhood in a state of a lifetime exile? The response raises even more thought-provoking impasse than the original query since the self and place move in opposing directions; while the place is fixed in childhood memories, the selfhood marches ahead in boundless and nonlinear timeframe. In Darwish's view, the sole resolution for such a state of being comes through language and poetry where the current selfhood can be redeemed and reconstructed. When Darwish talks about poetry as the source of his being, what at stake here is the notion of language since it grants space precisely through its delimitation of the space itself, which resounds Heidegger's endorsement of language as "the house of being" (245). Malpas notes that Darwish's idea of being as existing in language is heavily influenced by Heidegger, who held the view that "place, language, and poetry are tied together" (2). Yet although obviously influenced by Heidegger, as Williams argues, Darwish's putatively "Late" poetry both confirms and challenges Heidegger's idea of none-reconciliation wherein the aesthetics' primacy, not the political, identifies the being of the poet (24). In Said's perspective of "Late Style", Darwish's final stage of poetry has become a space where "the historical and the transcendently aesthetic

combine” (Williams 24). For Said, “Late Style” is a persistently transformational state recapitulating a life’s themes while reflecting on questions answered and alluding to others beyond understanding (Rothstein 1). These themes of place, time, and the very quality of language that is invoked here, are directly connected to Darwish’s late poetry as exemplified by the two poems under discussion: *Tuesday, a Bright Day* and *Counterpoint* included in the last chapter titled “Exile”, of his Diwan, *Almond Blossoms and Beyond*.

There is hardly a moment in Palestinian history that Darwish fails to treat in his poetry that chronicles the Palestinian cause from the Nakba¹ until the time of his death. However, in *Tuesday, a Bright Day* and *Counterpoint*, Darwish presents a poetic self-writing² that demonstrates how the narratives of exile are told in ways that simultaneously delineate models of selfhood within the framework of the Palestinian people’s protracted uprooting as well as offering a humanistic perspective that cuts beyond nationalistic lines. As Moore-Gilbert observes, the aesthetics of exile in Darwish’s poetry is by foremost a collective accounting to rectifying the invisibility of the oppressed against the hegemonic discourses that distort their reality (8). Such an aesthetic move necessitates further investigation in accordance with the development of Darwish’s rich poetic experience that is characterised by its permanent transformations and flux. Markedly, Darwish creative aesthetics atones between the seemingly incongruous narratives of universalism and nationalism (Williams 26). It is argued that Darwish projects is dual in nature: concurrently anti-colonial that seeks to establish a self-determined Palestine and universal that transcends identity defined terms (Nassar et al. 3). While Darwish is considered the poet laureate of Palestine, his “work contains a universality born from specific suffering that reaches across the boundaries of language and nation to ‘inscribe the national within the universal’” (Mena 111). Such a duality of perspectives becomes a kind of agency that reconstructs the self as globally exiled figure allowing the political and the post-national to interact. It becomes a “reflection of and on the changing self on the changing world [...] a construction of, and a response to, this time and this place in the world, by the self (Good 23). This, as Mena argues, “occurs especially through poetry: narrative forms, as context-driven,

1 Nakba (the catastrophe) describes the violent persecution and displacement of Palestinians in 1948. Identifying the Palestinian culture, the term also becomes a foundational symbol of Palestinian exiled identity (Masalha 2012).

2 The authors opt to use of the concept of ‘self-writing’ and its variants (e.g., self-narrating, narrating the self, self-account) instead of ‘autobiography’ since the latter, according to Whitlock (2015), carries with it the residues of exclusionary canonical modernist connotations.

reproduce cohesive communities, while poetics, as context-generative, produce ruptures leading to new possibilities” (112). In *I Belong there*, Darwish attests to this fact about his poetic project: “To break the rules, I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood. /I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: *Home*” (Darwish, *Unfortunately* 7).

In the poems at hand, Darwish’s life narratives create a fictional space that resides outside of temporal and geographic bounds, upending the metaphysics of presence in a fixed location. Since, in certain ways, the two poems represent a startling direction in Darwish’s late poetry, this article is set out to examine the complex relationship between exile and poetic self-writing. It also examines the outcome of this relationship in terms of how it affects the assertion of the self as a counter-hegemonic narrative to alterity and invisibility. While highlighting the artistic milieu in which the two poems are embodied, the article highlights Darwish’s embryonic approach to poetry as a genre of self-writing to produce a reflective account of exile while creating an imagined construct that defies the restrictions of nationalism. To substantiate these claims, the article employs intertextual analysis to examine the poetic dramatisation of self-writing Darwish employs in these two poems in terms of their poetic and aesthetic structure including their semantic and syntactic peculiarities, lexical choices, lyrical voice, imagery, and contemplations.

Exile’s Self-writing

Exile has served as a seminal motivator for writers, poets, thinkers, politicians, and others to institute poignant self-written narratives related to a lost homeland. Said believes “exile is one of the saddest fates”; it is ‘restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others” (Said, *Exile* 47; 53). Nonetheless, exile is inevitably productive, Said argues. Given the pain and pressures it may cause, exile can also be a stimulating incentive and a desirable option that many writers seek for creativity and inspiration. For Said, exile is liberating since the intellectual as someone who stands as a marginal figure outside the comforts of being-at-home grows to have a dual perspective that prevents them from ever seeing things in isolation because of their marginalisation (59). As stated by Said, exile is also an experience that is always contrasted with another presented in unexpected and original way. This juxtaposition provides a better, possibly even more universal, understanding of how to think (60). The intellectual in exile, Said concludes, tends to see a situation as contingent upon a series of historical choices made by human beings rather than inevitable occurrences, not as natural or God-given. Writing the self in exile, Gilmore argues, is useful to avoid the possibility of stifling the

painful experience of the displaced since it imposes a legalistic interpretation of truth on a larger readership (Gilmore 3). Additionally, exile can significantly impact a wider audience, enabling self-psychoanalysis while disrupting the self-writing pact between author and reader (Grell 223). a significant impression on a broader audience enabling psychoanalysis of the self while breaking the self-writing pact between the author and the reader (Grell 223). Through poetic lenses, Darwish's self-writing enlarges the voice of the exiled self to become that of others; his "autobiographical private self and public poetic self are merged to deliver an uncomplicated message—albeit with a complicated texture and with much prosodic innovation—due to the small creative space in which he is allowed" (Mattawa 79).

Darwish's poetry is eminently linked to exile. However, in the poems at hand, he takes the notion of exile a step further by relating it to a poetic genre of self-writing where place and time undergo a process of destabilisation. While conventional modes of narrating the self (e.g., modernist autobiographies) rely on a set of aesthetics that privilege the writer as an individual who freely moves around the world at will in the service of art, the emergence of different historical contingencies and cultural conventions liberate such an aesthetic practice (Wanner 123). Modernist exile autobiographies, as Whitlock argues, count upon place and separation while an irreducible opposition between home and away is maintained (65). Darwish's aesthetics of self-writing exile, we argue, departs from these conventions by shifting time and space from a set of relations between the individual and specific place to utopian "heterotopias" of multiple sites "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 223). While Darwish never forsakes his cause, he travels with his homeland in his mind, an imaginative construct born out of necessity. This metaphorical journey of exile is extra-temporal, and existing only through his poetic language as both eternal and changing (Mena 113). As Mena argues, "his [Darwish's] writing is significantly concerned with building a community that is independent of national borders and outside of linear historical progression in order to enact simultaneous anti-colonial and post-national agendas" (114).

The Palestinian Nakba may be considered one of the most representative examples of how self-writing and exile intersect, whether at actual or artistic and creative levels. The Palestinian life writing in exile may be regarded as the longest and richest literary production, spanning from the early years of the first generation of people who experienced the Nakba of 1948 to those born as fourth-generation Palestinians in their parents' adopted homelands. Diverse geographic contexts, temporalities, imaginative scopes, and frames of reference have contributed to the

richness of these literary productions. In addition to Darwish, there are numerous other authors and poets who have used exile, in the Palestinian context, as a subject for a self-written literary and non-literary works such as Edward Said's *Out of Place: A Memoir*; Ghada Karmi's *In search of Fatima: a Palestinian story*; Rema Hammami's *Home and Exile in East Jerusalem, Waiting for Godot at Qalandya: Reflections on Queues and Inequality*, Raja Shehadeh's *Diary of an Internal Exile: Three Entries* and Rana Barakat's *The Right to Wait: Exile, Home and Return*. This list is by no means exclusive since as many Palestinians remain dispersed across the world, the self-writing of exile remains an inevitable stance for writers to articulate their selfhood.

Probably, Mahmoud Darwish's (1941–2008) personal and professional life trajectory makes a good example of a none-reconciled poet of exile resounding Said's "Late Style". Williams believes that "a late style would reflect a life of learning, the wisdom that comes from experience, the sadness that comes from wisdom and a mastery of craft that has nothing left to prove" (28). Nonetheless, as Williams argues, Darwish's lateness reflects hard-earned knowledge through opposition that displays "intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction" (26). It is argued that Darwish's poetic oeuvre has witnessed significant intellectual transformations consisting of three phases: before 1969, primarily focusing on homeland; Beirut stage until 1982, centred on his exile; and the final stage coinciding with his migration to Paris until his death, engrossed in a more lyrical and universal poetry (e.g., Jubran 35). Since the last two phases are thought to be the richest, his poetry is blatantly replete with notions pertinent to exile. He almost never left out a reference to exile in any of his poems (Saleh 25). As Saleh puts it, Darwish's poetry comprises an "extended metaphor for exile" (25). In Said's words, "Darwish's poetic heritage amounts to an epic effort to transform the lyrics of loss into the indefinitely postponed drama of return" (124). In his poem *A Lover from Palestine*, Darwish portrays exile is an endless list of fragmentations and discontinuities: "But I am the exile. / Seal me with your eyes. ... / Take me as a relic from the mansion of sorrow. / Take me a verse from my tragedy; / Take me as a toy, a brick from the house/ So that our children will remember to return" (Darwish, *A Lover* 42).

Confirming himself as a poet of exile, Darwish's poetry embodies multiple layers of exile which he treats at personal, political and collective levels evident in his testimony: "I made an effort to free myself through words while in internal exile. And while I was exiled outside the country, I tried to use words to return. Words evolved into a road, a bridge, and possibly a home" (Darwish, *Exile* 14). In short,

Darwish's poetic legacy is an expansive and humanistic endeavour that echoes the universal idea of exile. Forché and Akash remark: "Assimilating centuries of Arabic poetic forms and applying the chisel of modern sensibility to the richly veined ore of its literary past, Darwish subjected his art to the impress of exile and to his own demand that the work remain true to itself, independent of its critical or public reception" (xvii). In addition to his memoir that describes his ten years of exile in Beirut titled *Memory for Forgetfulness*, his poetry incorporates elements of life-references: "Every lyric poem I wrote is an autobiography ... everything I write, whether about love or anything else, stems from lived experiences" (Darwish, *Memory* 18).

Exile: *Tuesday, a Bright Day*

Exile: *Tuesday, a Bright Day* is a fragmentation of self-writing narrating Darwish's exile through a series of repercussions about time, place and language. While the poem opens with a voice that is pensive and fully appreciates nature and beauty, this voice eventually transforms into melancholic reflections that intermediate these three aspects. Such melancholy reflections become an aesthetic feature that unites the entire poem: "I walk along a side street ... I walk lightly, lightly..." (Darwish, *Almond* 49). Along with multiple present-tense verb sequences connected to the speaker's pronoun, the poetic refrain also conveys these melancholic reflections. Ultimately, the poem gradually conveys its profoundly depressing message, exile. Despite the apparent dynamic interaction and harmony with the place, the speaker's reflective estrangement overshadows the entire narrative: "Perhaps I will see a likeness between myself/ and the willow tree in this place/ But I can make out nothing here that refers to me" (49). While the features of this place are kept unidentified, it is not until the very end of the poem that it is identified as Palestine. Such a poetic technique is crucial to humanising Darwish's own experience of exile on a global scale while linking it to all Palestinians at the same time. Between the beginning and the end of the poem, the public and private spheres alternate, forming a dialogic vision between the selfhood and the outer world: "No land is as narrow as a flowerpot, /like your land. No land is wide/ as the book, as your own land. And your visions/ are your exile in a world where a shadow has/ no identity, no gravity" (49-50). Through a combination of deconstruction and reconstruction processes, the poem creates a singular relationship between the exiled selfhood and the elements of place, time, and language. We discuss each of these aspects on its own and in relation to self-writing as well as to the other elements that they interact with.

Darwish's depiction of place is telling in several ways. In general, Darwish

has a complicated and constantly shifting relationship with place. In *Unfortunately, It was Paradise*, place becomes contained within oneself rather than otherwise. It becomes a transportable entity that the exiled can carry with them in their journey of dispersion: “No land on earth bears me. Only my words bear me, / [...] The emigrated. They carried the place and emigrated, they carried time and emigrated” (Darwish, *Unfortunately* 9). Darwish’s poetic voice enables such a metaphorical manoeuvre between the physical and the metaphysical senses of place hence both meanings work simultaneously: “I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: *Home*” (7). It is a process of deconstructing the vocabulary of place that enables Darwish to link the two senses in order to create a combined sense of “home” reflecting both the physical and the metaphysical. Interestingly, the word “home” is emphasised and capitalised—in a sense, becomes a destination,—which reflects the possibility that all other words are subjected to the process of deconstruction in service of this word alone while “home” is located outside such a process of signification. Darwish remarks: “The earth is my mother. From there I was born and it is to there that I will return. [...] It is our actual sky. An inverted sky, one could say. [...] Since the earth was taken from me and I was exiled from it, it has turned into the source and address of my spirit and my dreams. These circumstances are outside the place that earth occupies in my work” (Darwish, *Exile* 50). In this passage, Darwish describes his understanding of the relationship between the selfhood, place and exile, one that combines the personal and the public. Thus, even though Darwish’s main concern is Palestine, his desire to create a community that transcends geography becomes equally important.

In *Tuesday, a Bright Day*, Darwish emphasises his reconfiguration of place through comparing it to overreaching objects; in one instance, it becomes a flowerpot, and in another, it becomes a vast metropolis, like London. At the outset of the poem, he establishes an ambiguous relationship between place and himself, one that simultaneously appears to harmonically interact with place while this very place engulfs his alienation: “No land is as narrow as a flowerpot, / like your hand. No land is wide/ as the book, as your own hand. And your visions/ are your exile in a world where a shadow has/ no identity, no gravity” (Darwish, *Almond* 50). In this excerpt, Darwish abstracts the notion of place, but instead of utilising worn-out jargon, he compares it to everyday objects like a flowerpot, a hand, and a book. Still, all of these objects are connected to the phrase “your hand”, which is at this stage of the narrative retained without a clear reference. Later on, in the narrative, it will become clear how this addressee relates to, Darwish himself, and to all Palestinians. At this stage of the narrative, Darwish consciously encapsulates place into two

contradictory images: the beauty and narrowness of a flowerpot. He then takes this comparison further by comparing the two elements—beauty and narrowness—to the hand of the anonymous addressee. Subsequently, he draws a closer parallel between the place and a book in which the latter embraces the former, yet this book remains a property to this anonymous addressee. Expanding on such dialogic similes, Darwish invites us to read this book where he envisions the relationship between, the place, which is now the world, and exile. It becomes clear that through this book both the world and exile are characterised. While it is possible that the book alludes to language, which we will address below, at this point, we wish to assume that the book refers to a self-written account of Darwish himself. In keeping with the speaker's vision, the book tells us that this world (place) is shadowy and devoid of both "identity" and "gravity", depriving it of its fundamental physical features.

Paralleling the trajectory of Darwish's self-writing, place is transformed into a space of perpetual travel rather than a predetermined destination that travellers seek to arrive at. Nevertheless, it is the poet inside Darwish who is subjected to such an extensional reality in its relation to place. This trajectory reveals the self-narrative strategy Darwish exhibits in the poem, which is split into three interconnected phases of the journey: endless motion of the self, a journey of remembrance and forgetfulness, and a no-destination end. For the necessity of consistency of discussion, we quote these sections in a linear order:

I walk, going to nowhere in particular,
 Without tomorrow's promises. [...]
 I forget the houses that have marked out my life;
 I remember the identity-card number. [...]
 I forget the paths of departing to nothingness;
 I remember the starlight in the Bedouin encampments. [...]
 And I walk down a street that leads to no destination.
 Perhaps my footsteps have guided me
 to an empty bench in the garden, or
 perhaps they've guided me to an idea about the truth lost
 between the aesthetic and the real (Darwish, *Almond* 51-2).

Irrespective of the ellipsis we made in this excerpt, the poetic text expands in a constant sequence of self-accounts through which Darwish attempts to recall and restore his lost sense of place. These repercussions emerge in an internal dialogic structure comprising an exchange of forgetting and remembering. Through this

process, which enacts as a centre of the poem, Darwish territorialises place as an extended space that can accommodate his childhood memories, first love, the road to his stolen house, his identity-card number, etc. It is intriguing however to note that the list of things he forgets and things he remembers involves paradoxes since while colossal occurrences are forgotten, incidental details are preserved in his memory: “I forget big events and a devastating earthquake; / I remember my father’s tobacco in the cupboard [...] I forget the whine of bullets in the deserted village; / I remember the song of crickets in the wood” (52). Such a state of remembrance and forgetfulness emphasises the conscious selectivity of Darwish’s memory demonstrated through his dialogic self-written account. Through this selectivity, Darwish disassembles the main components of place and memory into small, somehow insignificant details. Since, as Korel argues, “the binaries in time, in place, in how one relates to them, on exile’s inclination to remember or to forget are a dialectical process involving many binaries. Exile is never a case of ‘is’ but of ‘becoming’” (17). Employing such deconstructionist poetics, Darwish manages to avoid both fixed identities and the dialectics of binaries.

Additionally, as the excerpt above shows, the poem breaks down the self-narrative structure that Darwish presents in relation to place and exile. It starts with a state of loss, then a state of remembering and forgetting, and eventually a state of self-discovery. Such a structure resounds the constant movements of nomadic travellers who reject home-returning projects and pleas for nationalism. Nonetheless, Darwish’s journey is not towards nothingness. Instead, it is a persistent journey whose aim is to discover the true self that he seems to have lost, which he eventually finds in the aesthetics of the poem. By deconstructing and reconstructing the physical elements of place, Darwish blurs the line between what is real and what is imaginative. After all, as Darwish puts it, in a state of exile “the compensation comes with the creation of a world parallel to reality” (Darwish, *Exile* 50). Furthermore, from a life writing perspective, such a structure is not a straightforward autobiographical narrative, but a self-writing inflected text attempting to negotiate other narrative strands alongside the study of selfhood. Darwish affiliates his exile case by alluding to other imaginative and real individuals subjected to exile and dislocation. Notably here, the poetic movement slows down, beginning with three dots to represent the impact of loss that resides within the self and how it narrates the selfhood: “... And I walk heavily, heavily, / as if I had an appointment with one of the losses. / I walk with the poet in me, / preparing for his eternal rest/ in a London night. / My friend on the way to Damascus! / We have not yet reached Syria” (Darwish, *Almond* 53). In these lines, Darwish links

himself to another poet in exile, presumably, the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, since there are several clues that point to Qabbani's identity even though his name is not stated, for instance, London, Damascus, Syria, jasmine, Barada, etc., which are all connected to Qabbani. Darwish then searches for commonalities between himself and Qabbani: "Like mine, his heart pursues him, / Like him, I do not round off my will/ with my own name" (56). This analogy deepens the sense of estrangement that both poets experience when they travel through the spaciousness of metropolitan cities like London, which serve as asylum for refugees from all over the world.

Through this sequence of analogies, Darwish attempts to abstract the concept of place in an effort to universalise it outside its specific context. While this physical displacement of place does not diminish its original implications, it becomes evident that it connects not only to Darwish's own experience of exile, but rather to everyone else undergoing similar experience. While the physical features of place impose themselves on geography, drawing borders around it, Darwish's manner of abstracting place affirms the inclusive meaning of a place as a homeland. He believes that the notion of homeland is broader than any politics can accommodate. The larger sense of homeland, as Darwish remarks, is our quest for a particular "tree", "stone", or "window" rather than being a "flag" or an "anthem": "The symbol of the homeland to see only a place in it; it's also the earth of the world, and that is also foundational in my poetry. It's a synthesis. It's both the source of poetry and the material of poetry and language" (Darwish, *Exile* 50; 54). Given his emphasis on abstracting place and what makes it noteworthy, Darwish dismisses the specific landmarks of place such as names, monuments, or cultural signs while relying on the metaphysics of place that privileges the communal over the personal. As Rahman observes, in Darwish's post-siege of Beirut poetry, home is characterised by a plurality of voices within poetry itself rather than being connected to a physical space of nation or connected with his people (42). Additionally, by using this technique, he is able to establish the necessary space to articulate his position on humanistic liberation and resistance. That is how Darwish evokes a unique sense of place that all people can relate to: "It [distance] added a measure of sanctity and become a religion of beauty without obligations. The disappearance in distance is liberation" (Darwish, *Exile* 50).

In addition to place, Darwish has an anxious relationship with time. Therefore, he tampers with the linear cycle of time to establish ahistorical relationship between the self, time and exile. While political self-narratives mainly exhibit progression of events and depend on causal and fixed temporalities, Darwish's past and present occur instantaneously while interconnecting to the present. In general, Darwish's

poetry reflects this sense of time. In *Unfortunately*, he writes “An end like a beginning, like the beginning of an end” (45). Darwish’s sense of time here is a kind of overlapping reflecting a timeless and unchanging reality informed by perpetual exile existence. Darwish evokes: “Live your tomorrow now! / However long you live you will not reach tomorrow. / There is not hand for tomorrow. Dream slowly, / and whatever you dream, understand/ that the moth does not burn to give you light” (49). Similar to place, time here is also subject to deconstruction, hence both are not defined in relation to each other. The future, which is not possible for Darwish to reach, shifts to an undefined present while both—the present and the future—are disconnected from the past. The three elements however are recombined to create a particular sense of unity as time becomes placeless and transient. Yet in order to compel an agreement between the two, the future is projected back onto the present, inevitably distorting both. The deconstruction of time, as Wood argues, is primarily connected to its function rather than to idealised abstraction (13). He adds: “if time is an idealisation, it is also an idealisation that permeates the real” (Wood 13).

In line with Wood, we perceive that Darwish’s materiality of time is threefold: exile, space and the metaphysics of presence that privileges the present over the past and future. In his self-narrative, Darwish is in constant search for meaningful moments and bearings that seem to be increasingly out of his control. Ultimately, his exile remains enigmatic, incurable and full of events that require multiple perspectives in order to grasp: “I walk lightly, and grow older/ by ten minutes, twenty, sixty, / I walk and the life in me/ slips gently away, like a light cough [...] would I stop time? Would I upset death? / I laugh at my idea [...] And my day, Tuesday, was spacious and long/ and my night like a short encore I added/ to the play after the curtain was down” (Darwish, *Almond* 50-1; 57). Here, Darwish cuts portions of time through which he does not pay any attention to future believing that it carries no promises. For him, the present, not the past nor the future, that counts: “I don’t look back, for I can return to nothing” (51). Such a closure (or distortion) of time reflects Darwish’s destabilisation of his exile including its very existence in time. He perceives time as only reflecting an imaginative reality, the only thing that he can control. The deconstruction of time, as Wood argues, is primarily connected to its function rather than to idealised abstraction: “if time is an idealisation, it is also an idealisation that permeates the real” (Wood 13). Darwish’s exile here is timeless, but rather than being lost in time or projecting a predetermined linear progression of events, each moment of the present is independently regarded as reality on its own. ‘Tuesday’ is singled out from the cycle of the weekdays as “spacious and long” (Darwish, *Almond* 53) since it marks a worthwhile incident in his life, to meet his

lost love. While “Tuesday” is markedly bright, the night is endlessly and repeatedly prolonged very much like post-dramatic theatrical performance.

Darwish displays an utterly de-historicised sense of time in an effort to give his life a meaning that is imaginative and transitional beyond the confines of timeframes. Through this extra-temporality, Darwish articulates his humanistic perspective on exile by establishing an ahistorical space—namely, aesthetics—that operates on a global level. Writing about the exile experience, according to McClennen, reflects the fact that the exiles have been cast out of the present of their nation’s historical time, which results in a series of dialectic tensions between time as linear/progressive/historical and the exilic experience that is a suspension of linear time (15). “This suspension of linear time includes a sense that time is cyclical and primordial (linking exiles across ages) and a sense that time is relative and fractured (casting the exile outside of meaningful/monumental time)” (15). Eventually, as McClennen puts it, exiles often understand that they are in exile because of particular historical events, but after being banished from that history, they start to doubt the veracity of historical time (17). Darwish’s relation to time is not simply about someone addressing time, but rather he articulates his experience of existing inside the outside and to the sensing of time that emerges within his exilic experience. In short, For Darwish, exile is an interrupting experience of the continuity of time where the existence of the exile is suspended in the between.

Throughout Darwish’s work, the notion of language embodied in his poetry has been given immense priority as a signification of the Palestinian case including their exile. Located outside time and place, language, for Darwish, becomes a source of his being, home and self. He writes: “This is my language, my miracle [...] the desert idol of an Arab/ who worships what flows from rhymes like stars in his *aba*” (Darwish, *Unfortunately* 19). He also remarks that “I built my homeland, I even established a state, in my language. If there are no humanistic spaces in poetry that touch on the human, the text does [...] A presence that exists at the very core of my language” (*Exile* 52). In *Tuesday, a Bright Day*, Darwish emphasises his intrinsic relationship with language, not as a means of articulation, but rather as a mode of survival:

O my language, help me to learn/ so that I may embrace the universe [...]
 O my language, am I what you are?
 Or are you, my language, what I am?
 O my language, prepare me
 for the nuptials of the alphabet and my body.

Let me be the lord, not the echo!
 Cover me with your wool.
 O my language, help me to differ so that I may
 achieve harmony. [...]

If you are, I am, and if I am, you are.
 O my language,
 Call this new age by foreign names
 and invite the distant stranger to be your guest,
 invite the simple prose of life
 to ripen my verse (Darwish, *Almond* 56-7).

In this excerpt, which could stand alone as a poem, Darwish immerses himself with language, not simply as a source of inspiration, but as an existential reality that identifies his identity including his search for the selfhood in the state of exile. To start his relationship with language, Darwish poses an ontological question about the unity of language and himself. In exile, this relationship is complicated since language is stripped of its capacity as a representational tool since, in a state of dispersion and loss, exiles lose the immediate connection with entities subject to representation (McClennen 120). What at stake however is building a different, essentially existence-based relationship between the exilic self and language. With these two perspectives in mind, Darwish develops a mutually reinforcing relationship in which the self and language nurture one another in exile: “Give birth to me/ and I will give birth to you/ I am your son sometimes, / and sometimes, your father and mother” (Darwish, *Almond* 56). In contrast to his approach to time and place, Darwish views language as a means of uniting the fragmented self and equipping him with the tools he needs to confront the challenges of exile. It is only through his poetic language that he can recreate a reconciled version of the self. As such, language for Darwish serves as a self-recuperation and a simultaneous effort to construct an identity that struggles against extinction. In exile that is overwhelmed by a state of loss and invisibility, language becomes the only means of reconciliation: “O my language, help me to differ so that I may/ achieve harmony” (56). Exile is a condition of invisible being, without language, the exile would not exist; just like a starving stranger coming from distance and looking for a life shelter.

Hence, for Darwish, the interconnection between exile and language becomes a mode of survival that prevents the personal and collective histories and identities from disappearing: “If you are, I am, and if I am, you are” (57). This line, as simple

in its reference as it is in its all-encompassing meaning, not only reflects the status quo of exile but stands deeper analysis, yielding a richer understanding of the existential relationship between, being, language, words, self, and exile. It bears an inherently ancestral genealogy of the moment of articulation and existence. Here, the self, in exile, exists in nowhere else except in an act of articulating difference that subverts the homogenising and hegemonic discourses: “O my language, help me to differ so that I may achieve harmony” (56). As McClennen argues, language functions as a means of intervention under the conditions of displacement to restore the loss of identity: “Language is the chemical connection between dream and reality: it is the key to connecting the physical to the mental” (McClennen 120). Additionally, Darwish survives death through poetry both literally and metaphorically; on the one hand, his poetry becomes a struggle against the extinction of his presence, and, on another, it endows the yet-to-come generations with means for knowing their lost land in their presumed inheritance of exile: “For who, if I don’t speak in poetry, / will understand me? / Who will speak to me/ of children longing for a lost age/ If I don’t speak in poetry? And who, if I don’t speak in poetry, / will know the stranger’s land” (Darwish, *Almond* 57). Here, Darwish not only challenges the absence of the self in the state of exile, but he also gives his poetry an enduring and timeless significance that transcends generations.

As discussed above, while Darwish’s self-narrative destabilises place and time, it exhibits language as a unity that amounts to an agency for the survival of the selfhood in exile. *Tuesday, a Bright Day* reemphasises Darwish’s faith in language as having a welding force of the loss of place and time as well as of the fragmented self. As Mena puts it, “language for Darwish is home and self—it is outside of place and time, because with it ‘they carried the place ... they carried the time’” (Mena 115). Added to this, unlike other Palestinian exile writers who produce their self-writing in other languages, Darwish writes exclusively in Arabic, his native tongue. Probably, he is best known Arabic language poet in contemporary Arab poetry. Therefore, rather than facing a crisis in using a foreign language, Arabic is quite adequate to articulate his living experience as well as his imaginative inspirations. As a writer in exile and in the absence of linear history and defined place, language is all that remains to link him to his cause, people and to his land. In fact, Arabic is deeply ingrained in Darwish’s poetry serving as a “*magic wand* that conjures up memories across time and place” (Nassar et al. 2). For Darwish, language has the power to resurrect all that has been lost including, home, time and place, hence he could forsake everything except his language: “Leave everything else as it is/ But bring life back to my language” (Darwish, *Unfortunately* 115). Inasmuch as

language occupies this momentous role in Darwish's poetry, it also serves as a central theme in *Counterpoint*, the other poem we address in this study and through which he narrates significant aspects of Edward Said's life and scholarship.

Exile: *Counterpoint*

In *Counterpoint*, Darwish creates a unique form of life-writing that blends autobiographical elements with reflections on another individual, specifically the Palestinian-American critic Edward Said. While the poem primarily adopts a linear narrative structure, overlapping dimensions such as language, identity, creativity, scholarship and the exile of both Said and Darwish frequently break up this linearity. To begin with the title of the poem, Darwish deliberately chooses the word, *Counterpoint* to resound Said's theory of *Contrapuntal* reading of the literary text. Derived from musical notes, Said's Contrapuntality is a polyphonic reading that allows different themes in a text to interact with one another while considering all voices instead of just the most prominent one. As Ashcroft and Ahluwalia uphold, "Contrapuntality emerges out of the tension and complexity of Said's own and identity, the text of self that he is continually writing" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 92). In his *Out of place: A memoir*, Said borrows Contrapuntality to explain how different currents interact to shape his identity: "they [currents] are off and maybe out of place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forwards, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme" (Said, *Out of Place* 295). It becomes evident that Darwish's *Counterpoint* reflects Said's Contrapuntality as he alternates between various aspects of his own life and that of Said throughout the entire poem.

Darwish begins the poem with a personal meeting with Said thirty years ago in New York, when, "[t]he time was less wilful than now" (Darwish, *Almond* 76). As the poem develops, exile plays a contrapuntal role in linking the speaker and the addressee, establishing a sense of estrangement for both: "We both said: If your past is experience, / make tomorrow into meaning and a vision! / Let us go, let us go to our tomorrow confidently, / with the truth of imagination and the miracle of grass" (87). Both of Darwish's and Said's voices are articulated simultaneously, archiving a discordant concord between the two while the omniscient narrator meddles in the fate of the two personalities being narrated. The poem moves on registering different aspects of Said's personality and scholarship: "New York. Edward wakes to an idle dawn. / He plays Mozart. He runs around the university tennis court. / ... He curses the Orientalist who guides the general/ to the point of weakness in an Oriental heart" (88). Although Said's scholarship is far too complex to be summed

up in a single line, Darwish extracts a single piece of Said's intellectual heritage that is pertinent to both, exile enforced by warfare, which is originally informed by the orientalist who provide the war generals with moral tools to initiate their wars.

Nevertheless, Darwish underscores the complexity of Said's scholarship through the concept of Contrapuntality itself which appears through the recurrent use of contradictory connotations in Said's personal life. Among these connotations that lend themselves to a contrapuntal approach are the opposing dualities of place (there/here), name (Edward/Said), and language (English/Arabic):

He says: I am from there. I am from here.
 I am not there and I am not here.
 I have two names, which meet and part,
 I forget which of them I dream in.
 I have English for writing, obedient in words.
 I have also a language
 in which heaven speaks to Jerusalem:
 silver-stressed, and it does not obey! (88).

Using Said's voice, Darwish destabilises the notion of place in a manner reminiscent of his approach to place in *Tuesday: A Bright Day*. His counterpoint strategy is also demonstrated by the concurrent affirmative and negative allusions to place, which affirms his enduring belief that place is an element devoid of its geographic potential. More significantly, however, is Darwish's contrapuntal reference to language through which he addresses the duality of Arabic and English which comprise Said's academic and personal identity. Unlike Darwish, Said's relationship with language is marked by tension because it works to divide rather than to unite his selfhood. This is confirmed by Said himself as he remarks: "I have never known what language I spoke first, Arabic or English, or which one was mine beyond doubt" (Said, *Out of Place* 4). This tension is further intensified by the fact that Said's name is a combination of English and Arabic names, Edward Said: "I have two names, which meet and part" (Darwish, *Almond* 88). In Said's views, his name causes no less tension: "the travails of bearing such a name were compounded by an equally unsettling quandary when it came to language" (Said, *Out of Place* 4). Probably Darwish's recognition of Said's relationship to language is likely best summed up by McClellan's analysis arguing that conflict arises in exile writing when the writer feels compelled to imagine and express in words what she/he cannot physically experience (34). Nonetheless, also in Said's words, language could be a

strategic tool for resistance in academic work: “Knowing how to use language well and knowing when to intervene in language are two essential features of intellectual action” (Said *Representations* 20). Interestingly, Darwish encapsulates these two dimensions in his lines: “I have English for writing, obedient in words. / I have also a language/ in which heaven speaks to Jerusalem: / silver-stressed, and it does not obey!” (Darwish, *Almond* 88).

Furthermore, Said’s contrapuntal relationship with place carries both harmonious and oppositional implications through which he frees himself from bounded nationalism. Hence, this apparently conflicting state of being enables him to conduct unbiased research of human conditions. “He loves a country, and travels from it. [...] He loves travelling to anything, / and in free travel between cultures, / those who study human essence/ may find space enough for all” (89). This existential status of Said, as Darwish perceives it, is intact, unwavering, and constantly forward-looking: “I am what I am and what I will be. / I will make myself by myself/ and I will choose my exile” (90). Darwish alludes to Said’s own thoughts regarding the relationship between the intellectual and exile previously discussed. Added to this, Said conceives exile as a median state between nostalgia and creativity, a style of thought, where those who are skilled at exile survival liberate themselves from rigid ideological positions (Said, *Representation* 22). Therefore, such a status enables his critical views as always in defence of those poets who aspire for justice and freedom: “I defend the needs of poets for a tomorrow/ and for memories at the same time; / I defend the tree that birds clothe, / and as a country and a place of exile” (Darwish, *Almond* 90). This role also reveals Said’s commitment to legitimacy of resistance of the oppressed: “I defend an idea shattered by the frailty of its holders, / I defend a country hijacked by legends” (90). Darwish strikes a balance between Said’s desire to present a humanist position that is universally understood and his dedication to defending Palestine as his own case. In this, Darwish makes a reference to the myth of Zionism and the Jewish people’s right to Palestine: “a country hijacked by legends” (90).

Darwish portrays Said’s relationship with Palestine as becoming more intense and personal, which mirrors Said’s manner in addressing the Palestinian cause, yet maintaining a humanistic and touching voice of Said:

I stood at the door like a beggar.
Should I take permission from strangers
sleeping in my own bed,
to visit myself for five minutes?

Do I bow respectfully
 to the inhabitants of my childish dream?
 Would they ask, who is the inquisitive foreign visitor?
 Would I be able to speak
 of peace and war among victims,
 and victims of victims?
 Without contradictions? Would they say to me,
 There is no room for two dreams in one bedroom? (92).

Once more, this excerpt could stand alone as a poem by itself since it not only captures the conditions of those uprooted from their homelands, but also exposes the hideous reality of occupation. This emotional statement, on Said's own voice, sums up the plight of all Palestinians exiles to return home for even a brief visit: he is pleading for a mere five minutes to see his native country. More intriguingly, though, is how Darwish challenges the ideas of familiarity and foreignness by having the occupier—a foreigner—become the land's owner under coercive power, while the native is revealed to be a foreigner. This sense of foreignness is even more intensified as the native is warily asking for a permission to recall the memories of his childhood at his home. The narrative moves on taking turning points to draw attention to the theme of war and its traumatic aftermath. Despite the fact that war is a pivotal and crucial cause to the Palestinian prolonged catastrophes including the loss of land, displacement and genocide, the speaker seems powerless and even muted to inquire about war and peace. Darwish implies that Said has been subjected to a barrage of criticism because of his support for Palestine, which he is quite often cautious to respond to. As Armstrong argues, Said by far is a polarising figure whose critics and defenders alike miss the complications of his thought: "The heightened sensitivities on both sides suggest that much is at stake in an author's attempt to shape and control his or her persona in an era in which the authenticity of the author's subjectivity is sometimes seen as necessary for establishing the authority of her or his argument" (Armstrong 3).

Although Darwish extrapolates significant aspects of Said's scholarship, he emphasises Said's exile as a person who experiences the same painful effects of displacement, which invites him (Said) to side with the voice of the victim. Using dialogic exchange in this section of the poem, Darwish creates a closer look in Said's personality: "I said: And Identity? / He said: Defence of the person. Identity is the daughter of birth But I belong to the question of victims" (Darwish, *Almond* 88). Both Darwish and Said understand the question of identity is troubling

especially under the conditions of exile. As Armstrong argues, Said's identity as an American-Palestinian implies that he harbours a hybrid identity which contrasts his monolithic assertion of the identification of the oriental subject in *Orientalism*—a position he seems to disregard later on in his memoir *Out of Place* (5). In fact, Said recognises the tension that arises between his dedication to unbiased scholarship and the private realm of his own life hence perceiving his identity as “a form both of freedom and of affliction” (Said, *Out of Place* 12). Darwish alludes to such a profound ambivalence through Said's response to the question of identity that lacks straightforward national identity or coherent sense of belonging to a single community. Instead, Said's answer comes in a sort of affiliation with all those subject to victimisation and oppression. Interestingly enough, is how Darwish identifies those subjects to victimisation as the “victims of victims” (Darwish, *Almond* 92). Here, Darwish alludes to the Jewish people as once victims of persecution, but because of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which led to the Palestinians' dispersion, those victims now inflict victimisation on others. As Darwish remarks: “The occupier and myself—both of us suffer from exile. He is an exile in me and I am the victim of his exile” (Darwish, *Exile* 50).

The poem closes with a touching scene of Said's tragic death of cancer. While the poem opens with the first meeting between Darwish and Said, it ends with another meeting between the two thirty years later in a final farewell visit: “When I visited him in New Sodom, / in the year two thousand and two, he was resisting the war of Sodom against Babylon, / and the cancer at the same time. / He was the last hero in that epic, / defending the rights of Troy” (Darwish, *Almond* 94). Probably, in addition to its sentimental gloomy mode, these lines entail significant allusions as departing praise of Said's scholarship and personality. Before his death in 2003, Said's last battle was opposing America's war on Iraq in addition to his private battle with cancer. It is clear that Darwish intends to close the poem with a final scene that immortalises Said's image through the mythical heroes of the ancient epics: “An eagle bids farewell to its peak, rising, / rising, / living above Olympus” (95). Therefore, the insights of Said that Darwish offers through fusing his imagination with references to Said's academic background illuminates the processes involved in the formation of both the individual and his scholarly work. Since Darwish defies the conventions of life-writing narratives, he is able to authentically depict significant facets of Said's life and scholarship as well as the various ways in which his scholarship has been received. By fusing the self in the realm of the other, embodied by Edward Said, Darwish is able to draw parallels between the responses of both to key exilic questions such as language, identity, time and place. His poetic

contrapuntal approach to read Said's life, Darwish manages to offer an impartial reading of Said's life away from essentialism, exclusiveness or polarisation.

Conclusion

To conclude, in the two poems, Darwish sought to depict an instance of the exile through a poetic life-writing of his own and that of Said to demonstrate a deep awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of human beings including their capacity to reconcile with their exile. Breaking with the conventions of life-writing, he subverts many of the concepts he encounters in these narratives, time and place, in particular. While under the conditions of exile and coercive dislocation, it is tempting for writers to essentialise their nationalism and pledges to place and homeland, Darwish manages to transcend all of these ideas by offering a humanistic account of both suffering and resistance. As a poet of a post-national tendency, Darwish employs his aesthetics to balance between his private commitment to the Palestinian cause, but like Said, he unearths those underlying structures of a collective consciousness of the exiled people in general. For example, Darwish inscribes a rich intertextual tapestry such as religious, literary and philosophical allusions and references, including those to Said and Qabbani, to articulate his deeply inner world and how this world is related to other people.

At an aesthetic level, Darwish employs a set of poetic techniques that help narrating the exiled self yet liberating that self from being narrowly tied to a specific nationalist agenda. Drawing from a variety of cultures and religions, he uses intertextual allusions, symbolism, abstractions, and imagery to inscribe the national within the universal. These techniques also help to articulate and come to terms with the collective trauma that both Palestinians and dispersed people in general. As Nassar and her colleagues observe, Darwish blends allusions to demonstrate how Palestine is a confluence of cultures, mythologies, and histories that unite the oppressed from all around the world (12). Furthermore, Darwish artistically experiments with dramatic dialogue, drawing inspiration from theatrical conventions, which permit polyphony and contrapuntality of voices, hence the legitimacy of diverse and multiple points of view are granted. Furthermore, Darwish exhibits a stance of language that is equal to existence. He exalts language to serve a mediator in a process of self-discovery that culminates in constructing an intact selfhood under the conditions of exile. In fact, Darwish is truly considered a man of letters both literally and metaphorically as he spent his entire professional life transforming a lifetime of exile into poetry: "Do not mention us/ when we disengage from your hand/ to the large exiles/ we have learned the vast languages" (Darwish,

Unfortunately 213). Last, Darwish strings together a series of fragmentary reminiscences including loss of country and alienation, but also an intact confirmation of the presence of the self. Despite the fact that both self-narratives include many ellipses, the signification of these gaps and discontinuities grow into a record of the exilic collective experience of Palestinians reflecting the multifarious location of postmodern autobiographical writings.

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