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Salīm Barakāt's Intermediary Existence: His Poem Maḥmūd Darwīsh

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Abstract

In January this year, with my first article on Salīm Barakāt, Empire, Split Ethnicities, and an Explosion of Poetry, I introduced Barakāt's early writings saying that guidelines to understanding the poetry of the Kurdish poet Salīm Barakāt (b. 1951, Qamishli, Syria) are to be found in a poem by his friend, Palestinian poet Maḥmūd Darwīsh (b. 1941, al-Birweh, Palestine – d. 2008). I now present guidelines to understanding the mature output of both these poets guided by Barakāt's poem "Maḥmūd Darwīsh" (1984 – 2002). Barakāt's multi-layered substantially surrealistic poem also serves as an 'index to the acts of the wind.' In the same period, Syrian Alevi poet Adūnīs (Ali Ahmad Said Esber, b. 1930) published his book *al-Sūfiyya wal Surriyāliyya* (Sufism and Surrealism) (Dar al-Saqi, 1995), and then his poem *Fihris li-A'māl al-Rīḥ* (Index to the Acts of the Wind) (1998) exemplifying the theories of the book. I have included translations of salient whole poems.

Key words: Salīm Barakāt, Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Adūnīs, Modern Arabic Poetry, Sufism, Surrealism

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MOTTO

He pushed through rainbows to the fountainheads

- Salīm Barakāt, 1989

Introduction

Salīm Barakāt (Selīm Berekat) wrote his poem *Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, actually a series or chain (*silsila*, *silāsil*) of poems (in three sections) over a long period of time, that is, from 1984/5 to 1986/7/9, with Section III at the end dated 1985 to 1989/2001/2.² In his long poem *Maḥmūd*

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² In Salīm Barakāt ((2007). *al-A' māl al-Shi'riyyah Salīm Barakāt* (Works of Poetry by Salīm Barakāt), 412 – 424. See Appendix III for a translation of the entire poem from the original Arabic.

Darwīsh, he alludes to and corresponds with Darwīsh's output of especially the 1980s and early 1990s, Darwīsh's mature period. In the 1980s, Barakāt was in close touch with Darwīsh since at the end of the 1982 Lebanon War, Barakāt went with Darwīsh to Paris; then on leaving for Cyprus, where he carried on with his own writing, Barakāt edited, along with Darwīsh, the literary journal founded by Darwīsh – *Al-Karmil*.

Section I of Barakāt's poem *Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, opens with a series of short descriptions of the steps involved in the process of creativity; that is, the poet indexes what is involved to process "thought" so that it becomes a poem that is expressed in words. And so, we find a *Description of the Wind* that is "dragged into their destinies. . . arrives at immersion / Into their roads. . . and takes off." Barakāt's diction is a combination of Darwīsh's and his own. Next we have a *Description of the Shadows*. This short poem is loaded with Barakāt's characteristic symbolism as seen in his long poem *al-Mu'jam* (The Obscure) on the subject of good and evil.³ That is to say, Barakāt's poem *Maḥmūd Darwīsh* relates back to his longer poem *The Obscure*, in much the same manner as Darwīsh's collection *Ward Aqall* (Fewer Roses) is dependent on and evolves from the latter poet's long poem *al-Hudhud* (The Hoopoe), which tells of a journey and a renewed tale of the road.⁴

It therefore does not come as a surprise that Barakāt would write his poem *Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, as a description of the Sufi-style shared journey of these two poets in which both ascend from sempiternity to the world of the transcendental. The poem is as much about Salīm Barakāt's creativity as it is about Maḥmūd Darwīsh's.

When we come to the short poem *A Description of the Point of Ascent*, we realize vis-à-vis the diction that the poet-protagonist Barakāt is on his way to visit his friend Maḥmūd Darwīsh. He takes the elevator, which "ascends," and the word "ascent" takes on multiple meanings underlying the poet's state of mind. Then in the fifth poem of this section, *A Description of the Outer Foyer*, Barakāt makes use of and alludes to his use of surrealistic techniques. Placing the decrepit old servant in an otherwise filthy and sordid environment, he equates the servant's mutterings "in tongues" with the creative process, automatism being an acknowledged method in surrealism to release the creative impulse:

³ In Salīm Barakāt ((2007). *al-A' māl al-Shi'riyyah* Salīm Barakāt, 559 – 592.

⁴ "Darwīsh's volume *Ward Aqall* (Fewer Roses) supplements his poem *The Hoopoe*. See more on this in Aviva Butt (2018) *Sacred Texts and the Poetry of Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, Prague: Archiv orientální (ArOr) 86, 53 – 72: 63ff.

*Two stretches, and the end of a staircase. Bits of old tobacco rolls escape the servant's besom
Clandestinely pitching dropped bits of paper from the flower pots. Many are the mutterings
Unnoticed by the entering and exiting. She feuds in tongues, gnawing at her nails, waiting for
The footstep that will open the door.*

Having opened the door to his friend's abode and the "place" where the two will "prevail over eternity's veil," the poet writes *A Description of Home's Gallery*. There is again a surrealist undertone, but now in regard to the graphic arts:

*Hangings in uninhibited genre. The images, multifaceted, resound with vibrant color.
It was as if some observer, alone in the concerns of their elegance, had raised his heart,
So that his eyes could prevail over eternity's veil.*

In addition to being an example of Barakāt's many times proven incredible powers of description, the poem *Maḥmūd Darwīsh* is exemplary for its modernistic surrealism merged with meaning through the usual symbolic presentation that characterizes Barakāt's writings.

Surrealism became a sort of cultural movement in times when psychological theories seeking to overcome inhibitions and reach into the subconscious came to the fore, especially Sigmund Freud's theories concerning repression and so on. Such theories were initially experimented with in the graphic arts, and only then passed on to writers for experimentation and inclusion in literary theory. Thus, Barakāt's technique of the ordinary serving as background for the extraordinary told by way of subjective experience springs from the existentialism and surrealism in post-World War II times. Perhaps because of his coming from a younger generation than Darwīsh, or because of his ability to write stories and novels, only Barakāt feels comfortable using existentialist distancing and modern techniques of writing suspense, as well as in addition being able to avail himself of surrealist techniques. By way of further comparison, the Syrian poet Adūnīs (b. 1930 in Latakia), despite his having written very knowledgably on what surrealism has in common with modern poetry (*shi'r ḥadīth*) does not write a poem which exemplifies surrealism.

In the last short poem of Section I, *A Description of Home*, we become aware of Darwīsh's presence with mention of his seashells, bags and maps, and significantly Barakāt tells us about "the bags' ghosts gazing at their parched maps," and continuing inserts his own message, "rapt in their debates on how to contrive the possible, on their own."⁵ The type of wrongdoing, the Palestinians' mistake as it were, is spelled out in detail in Barakāt's aforementioned poem *The Obscure*, a poem on the subject of good and evil.

Section II: Volition Composes the Spectacle:

In Section II of his poem, Barakāt provides us with an overview of the familiar and salient physical characteristics and everyday habits of his friend in the titles of each short poem, which stand in stark contrast to the subjective experience that follows in the descriptive material.

It is only in the short poem *His Eyeglasses*, the last of this section, that we (Barakāt, Darwīsh and we the readers) are confronted with a spectacle that would most likely have occurred more than once. We do not see the Darwīsh we might expect to see, the man with the spectacles, but rather we see Darwīsh's latescent body, his second body, in Darwīsh's own words "the other" – we see the body or specter from which the poet's creativity emerges:

And he

*He would grope about for his eyeglasses, not seeing all this; rather his glance encounters The specter of a scholar, over the couch – his transmigration that anthems bombard.*⁶

Barakāt presents us with his accomplished and polished poem, but as ever without offering a theoretical treatise. Therefore, for the sake of his readership, it seems in order to clarify the possibility or at least to remove the improbability of such event as presented in the above lines. For an explanation of the phenomenon of "the specter," let us then turn to the theoretician of Arabic modern poetry and the neo-Sufi trend, the Syrian Alevi poet Adūnīs . Adūnīs envisages modern poetry, which emerged with the writing of free verse (*shi'r ḥurr*),

⁵ *The Obscure* was written from 2003 to 2004, and as mentioned above published in Barakāt's volume of 2007.

⁶ Throughout the writings of the poets under discussion, there is nothing of "pantheism" or so-called "metaphysics" with its concepts of "the soul." Here we are talking of a "specter," a diaphanous "body."

as being a continuation from the Sufi medieval poets, but with a modernity that provides a decisive turnabout. Barakāt, on the other hand, finds his roots directly from quranic *tāwīl*, especially Ismaili *tāwīl*. Nevertheless, despite the disparity between the two poets, it seems appropriate to quote Adūnīs' explanation. Adūnīs bases his theory in the writings of the Muslim scholar Ibn 'Arabi (b. 1165 – d. 1240). In his book *Sufism and Surrealism*, Adūnīs writes that “the body becomes an ecstatic, radiant entity, and the matter becomes diaphanous, and the obstacles between man and the unknown or the ‘true and absent life’ vanish.”⁷ The diaphanous second body, gossamer-like, appears through setting aside reason and thought; inspired by the imagination, the second body or as referred to in both Adūnīs' and Barakāt's poetry, “the specter” is actualized as a physical phenomenon.

Adūnīs writes that according to Ibn 'Arabi “this transmutation is the intelligibility of imagination [image-ation]. The world itself is imaginary [full of images] as it is revealed or made manifest. Created existence is no more than imagination [image-ation] made manifest.”⁸ Darwīsh in his poem *Ān Lil-Shā'ir an Yaqtul Nafsaḥ* (It is Time for the Poet to Kill Himself) accepts the same concept as Adūnīs does, as seen when for example his “other,” that is his “specter,” argues with him, saying: “There is no image excepting of images.”⁹ Looking for another opinion concerning the image, the specter – the present writer turns to the book of the physicist Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind* (1995). Zajonc tells us that light itself is always invisible and has to fall on an object, which is to say “a body,” in order for us to see light. Moreover, without there being an image in the mind of the spectator, the eye will be blind. On the subject of day and night, Zajonc writes: “The light of day makes way for the light of night, of blindness, of inner sight. As Plato writes: ‘The mind's eye begins to see clearly when the outer eyes grow dim.’”¹⁰

Adūnīs does more than theorize. He carries out his theories in his poems. Thus his poem *Jisd* (A Body), included in the appendices, presents us with some of the notions in Barakāt's poem.¹¹ The poem *A Body* serves as a prologue for Adūnīs' work *Fihris li-A'māl al-Rīḥ* (Index to the Acts of the Wind), published in 1998, in the poet's handwriting. The work, in its entirety, is a series or “chain” of poems telling the story of creativity from the poet's

⁷ Adonis (1995), trans. J. Cumberbach (2005). *Sufism and Surrealism*, 141.

⁸ Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 64. The insertions in brackets [] are my own comments.

⁹ See Appendix II for a translation of Darwīsh's poem.

¹⁰ See pages 2, 3 and 12.

¹¹ See Appendix I below for the entire poem, the first of a series of poems in Adunis (1998). *Fihris li-A'māl al-Rīḥ*, 9 – 14.

viewpoint. One cannot help but wonder what if any is the relationship of Adūnīs' index to Barakāt's index, the poem *Maḥmūd Darwīsh*. After his short poem *A Body*, Adūnīs writes a longer poem with the title *Day's Head on Night's Shoulder*. As the title suggests, this poem is about that pair, presence and absence. "The absent/the present is the domain in which man's visual and visionary powers operate. It is the area of illumination on which the Sufi aesthetic is based. . . ." (*Sufism and Surrealism*, 116).

Section III: *It is, with the Same Certainty*

In the last section of his poem *Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, Barakāt tells of the world of the transcendental, greatly in context of his poem *The Obscure*. He opens by corresponding with Darwīsh's well-known and well misunderstood poem *It is Time for the Poet to Kill Himself*. About the latter poem, Professor Reuven Snir writes:

In the poem *It is Time for the Poet to Kill Himself*, the divide between the speaker and the poet's latescent body expresses a split in Darwīsh's heart: "Some thirty years / He writes poetry and forgets me. We toppled from all the horses / And found salt in wheat and he forgets me. / We forfeited possibility / And he forgets me. I am the other in him." From one viewpoint, this poem is autobiographical; after thirty years of writing poetry, it seemed to Darwīsh that he had come to a halt. He writes poetry and builds a world that collapses around him. In a situation where 'the earth tells lies' and the nation in whose name he speaks disappoints, he cries out: "Enough is enough, where is my humanity?" The conclusion is unambiguous: . . . "It is time for the poet to kill himself / Without more ado / Just like that to kill himself."'¹²

In the 1970s, Darwīsh assumed that the Palestinians would find a way to return to Palestine, and that his task as Palestinian National Poet would end. His poem *Qasīdat al-Raml* (The Poem of the Sand), published in 1977, tells us that then the poet will no longer be needed and will vanish. He writes: "And my blood is the song of the pomegranate. I am walking / And now I am disappearing into the tempest of the sand, / The sand will come sandy / And you will come to the poet in the night, and you will not / Find the door and the blue."¹³ In these

¹² Reuven Snir (2015). *Maḥmūd Darwīsh: Hamīshīm Shenōt Shīrah*, 85. Snir continues: "The same poem served as a prologue for the autobiographical book he published initially in the periodical *Al-Karmil* in 1986 with the title *The Time: Beirut. The Place: August*. When published as a book, the title was changed to *Dhākira lil-Nisyan* (Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1987) in English translation known as *Memory for Forgetfulness*.

¹³ *Dīwān Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, 3rd edition, 1980. The first edition was published in 1977. See Aviva Butt (2013). *Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Mysticism, and Qasidat al-Raml [The Poem of the Sand]* in *Poets from a War Torn World*:

lines, there is complete identification between the figure of the poet, and his message. The poet is nothing more than his commitment to the Palestinian people.

In the 1980s, Darwīsh underwent a change of direction marked by his poem *al-Hudhud* (The Hoopoe), first published in 1990. This long poem, with its long lines, reminiscent of Barakāt's long line, makes use of Adūnīs' compelling diction in the opening lines:

Before we draw near to the land of our distant star, the poem takes hold of us

Through a needle's eye our body spins to absence, a new horizon's robe...

"Robe," for example, in Adūnīs' poems, signifies "garments" that are actually words, language. Here, Darwīsh says that the poem will take us in a new direction and redefines Adūnīs' symbol as being a new "robe" for "our body spinning to absence."¹⁴ Darwīsh's message to the Palestinian people undergoes a drastic change.

The changes in Darwīsh's outlook and poetry could only have been possible due to his close association with his friend Salīm Barakāt, a Kurdish poet with a heavy burden of grief and suffering – a poet with a deep knowledge of the Qur'an, and also of the history of both the heavens and the earth from the time of Indo-Iranian civilization, as well as somehow having accumulated by the by an extensive in-depth familiarity with techniques in mainstream literary writing.¹⁵

Thus, in the short poem *His Inkwell* in the second section, Barakāt, responding to Darwīsh's passionate outcry as adamantly expressed in the above poem *It is Time for the Poet to Kill Himself*, encourages his friend to go on writing:

O most copious fever;

O fever with the shackles that exude thyme,

Four Essays by Aviva Butt with Introduction by Reuven Snir, 8 – 15. See Appendix II below for an English translation of the whole poem.

¹⁴The symbols "the land of our distant star," "through a needle's eye," "our body spins to absence," and "a new horizon's robe" seem to be an assemblage of Adunis' symbols strung together. The first corresponds with the poem *Marthiyyat al-Ḥallāj* (Elegy for al-Hallaj), "O star rising from Baghdad." The rest are to be found here and there, especially in the poems of Adunis' collection, entitled *Fihris li-'Amāl al-Rīh* (Index to the Acts of the Wind). For more on Darwīsh's poem, see Aviva Butt (May 2018). *Sacred Texts and the Arabic Poetry of Maḥmūd Darwīsh* (article), 57ff.

¹⁵ Darwīsh was handicapped by his interrupted childhood education. When he did attend school, he was subjected to the cultural cleansing under Israeli military rule. He had no access to the surrounding Arab world and its extensive literature.

Put stalk after stalk into your sublime disability,

And stand in the arena, in the shadow of the golden;

And, with his opening lines in section III, Barakāt lauds Darwīsh's great achievement:

His clamor is the jujube's clamor. His limbs are the jujube's limbs,

His solitude is why roses offer excuses to roses, and the place is an anklet in his hands.

Whenever he rests his elbow on a cushion, the concept rests there too, intensified

By the travel that is for its sake. And its estuaries whisper to him in clouds migrating

Under blades of spray that vaporized as he pushed through rainbows to the fountainheads,

Meanwhile he enjoys the acclaim – the being unrivaled like al-Sammani in his sphere

Unswerving – due to his predestinations.

Conclusion:

Barakāt has presented us with a surrealistic description of what he experienced on his visits to his friend Maḥmūd Darwīsh – their shared journey to the world of the transcendental, beyond the veil so-to-speak. Like Adūnīs, he tells us of “a body,” a second body, and accepts Sufi notions concerning light and darkness, “the sempiternity of light that obscures.”¹⁶ It is clear that Barakāt and Darwīsh did more than inspire each other. To achieve the heights of maturity in their poetic output, they worked from similar premises due to their shared experiences. Therefore, it stands to reason that there must be multiple intertextual connections to be found in their poems, waiting to be explored.

Appendix I:

ADŪNĪS ¹⁷

¹⁶ A line from his poem *Ḥaza'in Manhūba* (Glimpses of Spoliation). See Aviva Butt (2018), *The Unimaginative Symbols of Salīm Barakāt* (article).

¹⁷ Adūnīs (1998). *Fihris li-A'māl al-Rīḥ* (Index to the Acts of the Wind), 9 – 14. My translation from the original Arabic was done in conjunction with the Hebrew translation in Reuven Snir (2012). *Adūnīs: Maftaḥ Peulot HaRuḥ* (Index to the Acts of the Wind), 111 – 113. Any mistakes are my own, since the above translation reflects my own understanding of the poem. I wish to mention at this stage that there is a proposed updated English version of Snir's book.

A Body

Your body is the blossom of your path,

A blossom that opens and wilts all at once.

Did you ever sense

A morning too narrow to sustain your pace?

If so, for sure you awoke

Your body full of love.

What is beautiful and pure of the rains

What nourishes the wells of the specter¹⁸

It is the rain that flows from the body's clouds.

Every morning has

A secret body

For your sake opening a child's arms.

Saying:

The body is the start of meaning.

The specter's close friend

Light,

The body's close friend

Shade.

Love is a body

Night gracing its garments.

¹⁸ Specter (rūḥ): the diaphanous body, which appears at the time of creative productivity.

My body – words

Dispersing into the notebooks of my days.

There is nothing denser than me,¹⁹

The body says –

And there is nothing more transparent.

This says:

Day is the body's idol,

And night a sacrifice.

He said:²⁰

No, its body never ceases to wander

In the mazes of my body.

And he said:

The body's mother tongue

Is desire.

This says:

The body writes

Only the body!

And he said:

With words – a space²¹

That does not sustain the body's splendor.

¹⁹ This is the beginning of an argument between the poet and himself.

²⁰ "He," i.e. the poet -- the argument between the poet and himself on the nature of a body continued.

²¹ Space (*faḍā*), i.e. space as part of "presence." Without presence there is no "space."

The body is a book

Read in two directions –

From end to start

And from start to end.

Days –

Horses galloping in the body's willows.

His dreams are birds fluttering over his body

And whispering: The space is too narrow!

At times,

To grant to poetry the body's color,

He erases the color of the words.

Still not

Yet has he opened his body to host death.

Is it because he has yet to know life?

The body's book is

The width and the height in the void

For the abstraction of desire.²²

Sex is a navel

That unites day and night

In one body.

²² Abstraction into the mind and heart. The Arabic original reads: "For the alphabet of desire." This is misleading in English, since the ABC of desire means the basics of desire. Here, the "alphabet refers to the invisible world in which divine abstraction takes place" (*Sufism and Surrealism*, 164); hence my translation "for the abstraction of desire."

The mind is an accretion

And the body the start.

The body – at once

A daffodil and a lake.

Appendix II:

MAḤMŪD DARWĪSH ²³

The Poem of the Sand

Verily it is the sand

Expanses of notions and the woman,

Let us go with the rhythm unto our death

In the beginning the high trees were women

There was water rising, there was language

Will the earth die like people

Will the bird bear it in its form to the void?

I am the beginnings

And I am the endings

And the sand is form and possibility

An orange-tree is oblivious to my first desire.

I see in what I see the oblivion that could devour the blossoms and wondrous.

²³ *Dīwān Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, 3rd edition, 1980. The first edition was published in 1977. Translation from the original Arabic by Aviva Butt.

And the sand is the sand. I see an epoch of the sand eclipsing us,

And hurling us out of time

I have lost my reason and my woman is lost

And the sand was lost in the sand.

I am the beginnings

And I am the endings

And the sand is the substance of the coming tree.

Clouds looking like the countries.

A single color,

And for the lovers there is a single face,

And we shall get used to the Qur'an for interpretation of what is happening

And we shall cast a thousand rivers into the flood of waters

And the past is the past, it will come with the elections of the mirrors

Lord of time

And the date-palm is the mother of eloquent Arabic.

I see, in what I see, the kingdom of the sand upon the sand

And the fallen will not smile on the holy days of the drums

And farewell to the distances

Farewell . . . to the expanses

Farewell to the changers who replace "the law" with the law in order

To cleave with the sand..

"Well done" to those afflicted by my vision and "well done" to the floods.

I am the beginnings

And I am the endings

I go to the wall of my execution like a stupid sparrow,

Thinking the arrow is my rib

And my blood is the song of the pomegranate. I am walking

And now I am disappearing into the tempest of the sand,

The sand will come sandy

And you will come to the poet in the night, and you will not

Find the door and the blue,

And it will come . . . two lovers shall come

They will take the fleeing lily of our time

And they will say before the river

How coercive was the time of the sand

And they will not be separated

And I am the beginnings

And I am the endings

MAḤMŪD DARWĪSH ²⁴

It is Time for the Poet to Kill Himself

It is time for the poet to kill himself

Without any excuse, just like that, to kill himself.

²⁴ *Hya Ughniyya, Ughniyya* (1986), also in *Dīwān Maḥmūd Darwīsh*, 3 vols. (2017): Open library: Riyad El Rayes Books. Online: <https://www.aldiwan.net/poem9102.html> .

My translation from the Arabic was done in conjunction with Reuven Snir's Hebrew translation in Reuven Snir (2015). *Maḥmūd Darwīsh: Hamīshīm Shenōt Shūrah* (Maḥmūd Darwīsh: Fifty Years of Poetry), 219 – 220. Any differences or mistakes are due to my own understanding of the poem. I wish to mention at this stage that there is a proposed updated English version of Snir's book.

He said: I won't tolerate the bee that sucks my blood.

He said: I won't tolerate that Allah takes vengeance on me.

He said: I won't tolerate the woman that disclaims me alive on her knees.

Some thirty years

*He writes poetry and forgets me. We toppled from all the horses
And found salt in wheat and he forgets me. We forfeited possibility*

And he forgets me. I am the other in him.

Everything is an image inside him, I am his mirror

Each death is an image. Each body is an image

Each journey is an image. Each country is an image.

I said: Enough is enough, where is my humanity? Where am I?

He said: There is no image excepting of images.

Some thirty winters

He writes poetry and builds a world that disintegrates around him

He picks up the carnage in order to draw a bird and a door to nothingness

Whenever a wall disintegrates around us, he builds homelands with language

Whenever dry land is weary of us, he builds a Garden, and draws a crowd

For thirty winters, he lives outside me.

He said: When at first we arrive in cities

And we are present in absence

And ruination

You don't believe it

You don't divorce yourself

From the street we walk on. . . and walk to

The land tells lies, but a dream that drops down from his hands doesn't lie.

Some thirty autumns

He writes poetry and lives and loves only an image

He steps inside a prison and observes only its moon

He steps inside love and culls only its date

I said: How about the lady in us?²⁵ He said to me: An apple for remission.²⁶

I came to: Where is my humanity?

Then he sealed off the door in order to watch me from outside.

Apropos an image, it screams in me

In a flash the lady appears, since we wait for her:

It is time for the poet to leave me forever

My heart is not paper

It is time to part

From my

perspective, to part from a nation of paper. It is

time for the bee to leave the flower towards twilight

It is time for the rose to leave the thorn and be consumed²⁷

It is time for the thorn to be embedded in my heart

So that I will see my heart, that I will hear it, that I will feel it.

²⁵ Darwīsh is talking about the 'lady of the land': he means Palestine.

²⁶ Remission, i.e. his prison sentence.

²⁷ Consumed, i.e. perish.

It is time for the poet to kill himself

Without more ado

Just like that to kill himself.

Appendix III:

SALĪM BARAKĀT²⁸

Maḥmūd Darwīsh

I.

The Place is in Keeping with the Work on Hand.

1—A Description of the Wind:

The morrow, it chews gum like a sulky lad opening the buttons of his cashmere jacket

Under an acacia tree. And it – like any tomorrow – is lean and serene, and has its inanities;

With field glasses that he raises to his eyes seeking clarification, like a coachman he finely

Combs its perfection. Indeed the metal pen – unawares drops, from between his fingertips;

Then he writes as if wiping away the languor of the scene and the radiance, the intricate

Preceded by the intricate – he is dragged into their destinies; he arrives at immersion

Into their roads. And the wind takes off.

2—A Description of the Shadows:

With pale certainty, the shadows thrust their pale light into those underground passageways

Where life assumes the form perception of the waiting, and the actuality is derived from

Glimpses of truth, the cane of the blind and the buffoonery of the clown. If eternity finds

Hard the length of time in carrying baggage on the roads then let him apologize,

Since he intertwines his volition with their image. In moments of eternity the family

²⁸ Salīm Barakāt (2007). *al-A ' māl al-Shi 'riyyah Salīm Barakāt*. Beirut: Al-Mu'ssah lil-Dirāsāt wa-Nashr, 412 – 424. Translation from the original Arabic by Aviva Butt.

From which they descend are the beacon of their lighthouse. The first rendezvous

With destiny strikes, there under the tree supporting daytime, with commiseration

*For camphor tree taps.*²⁹

3—A Description of the Weir:

*Thin rods of metal – unskillfully coated – the path cuts across the earth for the earth to fence
No doubt retaining. It was a little cold that day holding fast to rein in hours anointed with*

*The oil of divine leverage – contributing to the secret bliss, the wafting of the dahlia on the
Drowsiness of the air. And then – blithely drawing near – birds cut through air churning over
Their feathers, wetting the silent metal opulently exposed. As for the dangling lock of*

*The chain encircling the rods, the earth alone listens to its warming beat, and the subsiding,
From which the footings take on their skills.*

4—A Description of the Point of Ascent³⁰

At the bustling cubic meter, there is a perpendicular concrete foyer, its chiseled circles

*And triangles appraising the headlong gusto of visitors; and at its walls its anthem chanted,
Ascending and descending, in the mouths of pipes and wires. But it keeps silent – in accord
With its reticence in idleness – about its transient occupants leaving behind the last of their
Tokens³¹ that would thwart their feverishness, and the stray scents that would camouflage their
Bodies. Rather it directs its concerns to the thresholds of doors, the charm of the frivolous
Along with its mechanical convulsions – weight banging on the hush of weight,*

Darkness listens – from the coffee – to illumination that staggers with its long cough.

5—A Description of the Outer Foyer:

²⁹ The Arabic says “the tusks of Kapur.” The Kapur, that is, camphor trees, are being killed off by excessive tapping due to human greed, just as are the elephants that are killed for their valuable tusks. Such themes deploring humankind’s abuse of our precious animal and plant life are common in Barakāt’s writings.

³⁰ The fourth poem, the Arabic title is unvowelled, most likely deliberately. Barakāt is talking about the *elevator* that took him up to Darwīsh’s living quarters when he visited. It seems this poem is autobiographical. The poet describes his own psychological state, as he euphorically makes his way to what he feels as an *ascent* to a high mountain.

³¹ Toke: puff on e.g. a cigarette, maybe with marijuana in it.

*Two stretches, and the end of a staircase. Bits of old tobacco rolls escape the servant's besom
Clandestinely pitching dropped bits of paper from the flower pots. Many are the mutterings
Unnoticed by the entering and exiting. She feuds in tongues, gnawing at her nails, waiting for
The footstep that will open the door.*

6—A Description of Home's Gallery:

*Hangings in uninhibited genre. The images, multifaceted, resound with vibrant color.
It was as if some observer, alone in the concerns of their elegance, had raised his heart,
So that his eyes could prevail over eternity's veil.*

7—A Description of Home:

*The room lies opposite. Life lies opposite. Cogent unknowns hover round potted plants.
In corners. Sturdy ledges facilitate surreptitious passing of words from one book to another.
As for an array of fancy seashells by the sofas, it suggests water's silence about its anguish.
The only smoldering butt dropped into the brass ashtray is severed, as if spared from
Its doctrines of preparing a disbanding. There are bags too. And the bags' ghosts gazing at
Their parched maps, rapt in their debates on how to contrive the possible, on one's own.³²
He is the Lord over provision of possibility.*

II.

Volition Composes the Spectacle³³

1—His Inkwell:

*O most copious fever;
O fever with the shackles that exude thyme,
Put stalk after stalk into your sublime disability,*

³² "What you have brought is sorcery, Allah will surely make it of no effect," (Surah 10:81).

³³ Volition in psychology means the cognitive power by which a person decides on and commits to a particular course of action.

*And stand in the arena, in the shadow of the golden; it will prolong the stance until the
Buttresses emerge from their phase, and the terraced slopes rise up to where*

He sits in company.

And he will shake off the dust from the dust cap, with a brush of radiance,³⁴ mindful of

The locks. And the fans will flock to the familiar where the enticement gleams

From the hands of the liquor of their dictates. May a swift demise distract from the cotton

Strewn about, and the standing in the arena back up the sublime, the subverted altogether

The most subtle of comforts. And the morrow will excuse what he offers as excuse

Like with the gardener who neglected the parterre.

As for the chronicles that quarrel near his inkwell, like patrons mustering their forces,

They will not ever go back to their slumber.

2—His Packet of Cigarettes:

Who has a zest for the anthem even when the wind cuts out, and hailstones are pelting him?

Who, cigarette after cigarette, because of the lump in his throat, burns the curtain

To return the actors to seats that were stolen?

Ethereal gold oscillates rising higher and higher, and the smoke that emerges drowsily,

Upon slight stimulus from drowsy lips, rebuffs kings, as if – within a nook of

Chrysanthemums – a gaunt bystander is dividing up their principalities.

3—His Coffee:

So be it, the day of the blast will penetrate unto their winged monasticism;

Unto the dolphins, and unto the twitch of tigers' tails. Let it penetrate hibernation, bringing

His luminous throne, unless alarmed like gazelles they bound from the highest bulwark

³⁴ Radiance: the divine feminine. In this passage, Barakāt “concretizes” creativity through poetic writing that evokes the senses.

To the highest truth.

Let day put an exhausting thirst into the coffee grounds.

Sunset will accost before prophecy's siege.

4—His Morning Lethargy:

The wall with the crisscross of shelves reveals book after book, the curtain thrown back

By a lethargic hand, as its swish pulsates to set free the highest tree, and liberate

The architectonics.³⁵ And there is something of what he would put in order, afterwards,

What the night overlooked on the thrones of the ignorant,

Wars

Resolutions

Lamps

Ink

Returning with them to their lairs that ignorance took by force,

Wars

Resolutions

Lamps

And the ink is prolonged to oppose them in its diaphanous veil.

5—The Tale of His Heart

You rule, O blaze, yourself and you sob, sobbing your utmost,³⁶

Then the pain brings on gratitude for the familiar that is within you, and for

The woven lucidity at the fore spending the night with you in spellbound watchfulness.

³⁵ Architectonics, i.e. literary or artistic structure.

³⁶ Blaze (*al-ḥarīq*), usually translated as “the circle of fire” meaning the Divine essence.

And softly expanding, until the place has its velvety rugs, jugs, and charters, its space,

And its resources, that dazzle like golden teeth.

And for you the cast out wind is in the fray, and the lover withdrawn,

And the traumatized who seek the last strike from

The traumatized;

For you

O blaze;

For you

O blaze. . .

While the farthest improvising, scrutinize it, and send their falcons endowed with neckbands

To the scene – may the returning signal the resurrection of their fingertips

They whisper: “Ho! For al-Qiyamah.”

6—His Eyeglasses

In every corner of the wardrobe is the day's masquerade. And on the table – near the

Bottle of vinegar – are the presentations visitors left. And there lithe unknown regions ponder

Their adornment in the mirror, and a tour blends the aroma of the door's lubrications,

With gleaned garlic cloves and the plumage of the anomalous brew.

And he

He would grope about for his eyeglasses, not seeing all this; rather his glance encounters The specter of a scholar, over the couch – his transmigration that anthems bombard.

III.

It is, with the Same Certainty

His clamor is the jujube's clamor.³⁷ His limbs are the jujube's limbs,

*His solitude is why roses offer excuses to roses, and the place is an anklet in his hands.
Whenever he rests his elbow on a cushion, the concept rests there too, intensified*

By the travel that is for its sake. And its estuaries whisper to him in clouds migrating

*Under blades of spray that vaporized as he pushed through rainbows to the fountainheads,³⁸
Meanwhile he enjoys the acclaim – the being unrivaled like al-Sammani³⁹ in his sphere
Unswerving – due to his predestinations.*

And with the onrush like a boon the passageways lead to them,

As if they – he – whoever will mention the Garden due to their sharing the pain,⁴⁰

It is he who will submit the strongest pulsation to the most powerful wing.⁴¹

And with the onrush like the battlefield's calm freeing the night from distrust of actuality,⁴² he

Then joins forces with the watercourses, as if the watercourses were bathing his babies.

As for the butterflies,⁴³

Which activate cables of his forging

They are the last of his effectuations.

³⁷ The jujube tree is mentioned twice in the Qur'an, once in relation to Al-Qiyamah (The Resurrection), see Surah 36:28–32: "(They will be) among thornless lote [jujube] trees, / And among *Talh* (banana trees) with fruits piled one above another, / And in shade long-extended, / And by water flowing constantly, / And fruit in plenty."

³⁸ Barakāt is describing how Darwīsh created the primordial Palestinian homeland, which became "the homeland on paper."

³⁹ Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Sammani (d. 1775), Egyptian Sufi who paved his own way.

⁴⁰ An allusion to the wound, the Nakba and loss of Palestine.

⁴¹ The air pulsates around the wings of birds in flight – Darwīsh uses this imagery in his poem *The Hoopoe*.

⁴² The obstacles are removed and to quote Adunis "thus the body becomes an ecstatic, radiant entity, and the matter becomes diaphanous, and the obstacles between man and the unknown or the 'true and absent life' vanish" (*Sufism and Surrealism*, 141).

⁴³ Darwīsh uses the butterfly as a symbol in many of his poems. One example is the line "*Butterflies guide us, on the journey*"— from *Fī al-Raḥīl al-Kabīr Aḥibbukī Akthar* (In the Mass Exodus, I Loved You More), the ninth poem of his volume *Aḥada 'Ashara Kawkaban 'alā Akhīrī al-Mashhadī al-Andalusī* (Eleven Stars over the End of the Andalusian Scene) (1992). *Eleven Stars* is of the same period as Darwīsh's *The Hoopoe* and *Fewer Roses*.

*And his clamor – after that – is the clamor of ravines that the dispossessed plunder,
 Beguiled by their splendor as well as by the beguiling pain. And what is in it of the
 Double reed pipe on marble,⁴⁴ that advances tranquility to their inheritance; it flits about
 The majestic ruins to their indignation. And that same pain is the grip in the painter's brush
 For him to portray minarets of the pasture and domes of the dewdrops. And he points out
 The witnesses, who retrieve the martyrs from the buttresses, at the site, wiping away the haze
 of fatigue from his eyeglasses, to smile so much the better:*

When the carnage

Contemplated—

Disrupts –

His commiserating –

Smile.

*There is no trench in his sentiments but that it shelters the marvel mesmerizing them, as if
 He would walk into the place to farther than the place extends, and into the ancient
 Reverberation to every certainty.*

*And he would honor as a solemn pledge – from the actuality that invaded the clinging blazes,
 Due to powerful narration – unto the far off inspired ambush, his own supervision of bakers
 Who would spin words into buns,⁴⁵ renouncing the convert – that inspired flashes*

Of lightening and flame for the biggest of snares, whereas anthems subdue their passions

⁴⁴ See Joachim Braun, trans. Douglas W. Scott, 2002. *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Online: <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=AXrHi31KN9YC&pg=PA140&lpg=PA140&dq=reed+pipe+Palestine&source=bl&ots=Ih6UKykJwh&sig=qtDxrudQ4dOam45JartTV4oLBMw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwig7ev1ioTaAhWKWLwKHVMFA60Q6AEIRjAF#v=onepage&q=reed%20pipe%20Palestine&f=false> [Accessed 24 March 2018]

⁴⁵ Here Barakāt uses the same diction as he uses in his own poems to describe how simple folk are deceived by inspiring talk into joining militia and finding themselves without food – Darwīsh denounced the suicide bombers (“martyrs”) by way of parallel.

Lest the ink be startled, and the evening disrupted by armature. And meantime

While the Gardens look on, showing forbearance,

*The ink*⁴⁶

Invents

Life

Inscribed

With their detached fingertips

On double reed pipes for subtly unveiling secrets.

Never mind his affairs, then –

Never mind meddling with the storm,

Or the springs that leap as if due to Salukis,⁴⁷ caught between

His bulwarks –

How often they sit opposite each other, he throwing his dice onto the board

And he throwing their dice;⁴⁸

How often do tales sit between them as with their puffing they relieve their drenched

Frustrations!

And he then, leans over his sofa to stroke the sleeping panthers next to

His conviction, and he polishes the taut chains, the series⁴⁹ on his shirt for the waterways,

It convolutes unto the volition within their nervous⁵⁰ caftans, whispering:

⁴⁶ Barakāt wrote only the pronoun “it.”

⁴⁷ The Saluki is a sight-hound also known as Persian greyhound (Tazi). It was originally bred in the Fertile Crescent.

⁴⁸ The dice are used in a game of backgammon.

⁴⁹ Chains and series in Arabic are the same word (*silāsil*). There is a shift from the “chains” that hold the “panther” of his conviction to the chains, the series of poems or anthems bombarding him.

⁵⁰ Nervous, “*nirōzi*,” a Kurdish word.

"Dear uncle, it is dawn."

And do not grumble, dear morning, if he shoves you into the comedy

Since heroism thwarted by its depiction and its palm-leaves,⁵¹ could preserve you from

*The retribution captive in its lungs,⁵² and from the bleeding twilight, sinking with the Absolute
certainty, that witnesses trundle past its wares, death's ruptured helmets.
Anyway, most of its witnesses are captured by storm for a death among the baked bricks.*

And the Penates passing through their squares, fugitives from their commiseration,

They are the greatest ladders

For panegyric.

And do not grumble if he shoves you into the roses,⁵³ and ties the evening

Onto his chair,

Since he will release the places from his diaphanous providence to freedom

For their madness;

Freedom for another pain, a familiar pain,

You will oscillate as is the wont with cocks; and this conjures up

The negative experience at the window of dawn.

Never mind;

Never mind his affairs;

Never mind the cry of the cherry-tree hidden in the shadow, its heart tormented so easily,

Step by step, degree by degree.

⁵¹ Palm leaves in Syria and Turkey are used as wrapping, similar to grapevine leaves in Greece, to prepare some food delicacies.

⁵² Retribution if *al-majāzāti* is taken as a Persian word, or "imagery" if taken as Arabic.

⁵³ Roses: Darwīsh's diction.

*Never mind us. How often will we encounter the story it decries and the passers-by already
Weighted by the wayfarer's ashes. How often will we share in the looting that befalls us,
With its pendant,⁵⁴ is diverted an epoch of our acceptance, the maw of the absent life . .*

*They whisper: "The defection of the hungry makes you commit an outrage. Your fingertips
Grove the heat of that misery, unyielding like firmament and summit, and maybe casualties
Like them were vigilant thus confounding the predestinations, so that they would squander
The vessels of argillaceous earth stacked on the shelves of the transcendental, and the earth
Would turn with ease from your place- of-travail to the sea near you, set free but lamenting".*

Never mind us.

*Behold he gathers up the locks with his hands as if gathering clues to the unrest,
And earmarks his delineation of jujube fruit for his rhetoric, tracking the trail of death,
That he himself hazards when he in fact rejects it. And he is indifferent, on passing by,*

*Concerning the scene recalled as evidence, the cutting edge of torture – in any case –
Concerning the trustworthiness. And he was able to turn from judge to judge⁵⁵ in regard to
Daytime's loathing of threshers,⁵⁶ and the tombstones over their faces in pale outline
Expound on the Gardens; in regard to the miracle you beseeched, he eternized the drowned,
And the birds find repose under the veils.*

Beware of him,

*He is able to acknowledge the great keys that disintegrate in the hands,⁵⁷ and to haul
The reserved dust cloud to decent diversion, with minerals precluded, and the frenetic glow
Is a hydrophobic glow, and the arrows and snares break up the quiver, the outer shell.⁵⁸*

As for the rest it is hopeful, too, there by virtue of the beseeching,⁵⁹ wet

⁵⁴ A pendant for the ear.

⁵⁵ The judges Barakāt mentions are arbitrators between parties, outside the legal system.

⁵⁶ Threshers, that is, sharks (people).

⁵⁷ The great keys, that is, the keys to the treasures of the Heavens and Earth, words used in the Sufi prayer by that name, a prayer that is supposed to invoke miracles. Here, Barakāt tells us that the poet has exceptional powers.

⁵⁸ Outer shell of origination (*al-khalq*, origination, creation) alludes to the Sufi *bātin* and *zāhir* (outward and inner, visible and invisible, esoteric and exoteric).

With loose saliva on jawbones, and the forbidden spilled over boots.⁶⁰

And he is able to withstand the instants, damp from the effect of the breaths,⁶¹ those meant

*For the master poet penetrating to obsolete fruits, and he strokes the golden glow, where
Legends intrude shivering at their mild triumph. Be*

Beware

Beware of him

*A share of the water on him, a share of the allotment on him for the far off to pave the way
For the assault of the far off, trampling on his concerns about the pain that could sink,*

Deep down, into ill-fated beauty.

A share of the comedy about him if he mourns the blast⁶² that shoves back the completion,

The savagery taking-off, as if – with the help of spikenards,⁶³

He would make the blast peter out.

. . . And likewise he will make the banter peter out even as for a dirham the beggars

Shove him back? Familiar with civil outrage, he estimates the gauge of a thief's humor,

One who takes from the treasures

Only their stories.

And he will keep count

Deed by

⁵⁹ The Arabic word *bi-Barakāt*, translated above as “By virtue of” could be translated as “through the spiritual energy of,” or “with the blessing of” – making it sound more specifically “Sufi,” but in general the present translator feels that here as elsewhere Barakāt writes a modern poem in a modern register, and uses words that in Arabic are visually the right choice for the subject on hand – and should be translated accordingly.

⁶⁰ The wine is poured out on their riding or marching boots and not consumed.

⁶¹ Breaths (*anfās*), i.e. breaths or instants. “Nafas is the indivisible moment in which every existent in the cosmos undergoes a new creation. The spiritual energy (barakah) of the Sufi Path is transmitted on the breath of the Murshid” (Murshid F.A. Ali ElSenossi, *The Language of the Future: Sufi Terminology*). Online: <http://www.almirajsuficentre.org.au/qamus/app/single/1487> (Accessed 10 April 2018).

⁶² Blast or wind (*al-rīḥ*).

⁶³ Spikenard is associated with the goddess Anahita.

Deed,

*With a tally of the fascination for the game, and he calculates on the same fingertips that
Incite divisions.*

*And do not entice him with the charters, since he is obsessed by the babbling of water,
Rushing off – effusive, out-of-touch – between songs, and around him are the spas of Alajar⁶⁴*

That certainty inspires; around him are the forgotten bones under the cushions of the kings,

*And the reality pinned to their blindfolded falcons. As for the comedy, that selfsame
Infuriating blowing of trumpeters, they fall out of step as when trophies become innumerable
Innumerable,*

Alongside the fascination of an account of solitude?

It is as if he had excluded himself when the earth counted him on her fingertips,

Fingertips that incite divisions.

As if,

Wherever?

What is the blowing of the blast of the Everlasting?

It is the distance bringing confusion to be demolished by its beauty.

1984/5 – 1986/7/9

What is the place, the captive one,

When you grip with your hand the blast germane to its keys?

What is the reverberation? What is the tale, what is its loss of blood?

What is the groan that shakes its authority in regard to the whim of the ink? A little pillage of

The secret roses, the scent of the coffee beans in the month he led

That garden

⁶⁴ Alajar in Andalusia. Andalusia was Darwīsh's way of referring to Palestine of the past as a paradise and homeland for the future.

To where the morning grumbles

Indeed it did not calm down, with both your hands forging gold it did not calm down,

And you readied the garden

For its roses, and you filched niceties from the thresholds

Crosspieces for it, parts of the place, and you wrote chronicles of the richness

In which the burgeoning dispelled your misgivings. Any misgiving would make you subject

To suspicions of weakness.

Lest it be seen from its heights that the blast might sow their suffering

Due to your hands.

As for their seeking shelter, and looking to you?

Any misgiving would take away your capability? Disappointment over a lily or a bee

It touches his anthems and makes you different

When his anemones become dissipated like the front

Then what you want grips. The scheming of the miserable, and the guardian blaze

Reproaching you would be his private matter

And the gale that you are in would be a gale for a sparrow.⁶⁵

1985 – 1989/2001/2

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⁶⁵ The sparrows that flit about in front of the Palestinian homes.

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