Mahmoud Darwish, the world's most recognized Palestinian poet passed away in a US hospital Saturday, August 9, 2008 after undergoing complicated heart surgery. Darwish has published more than two dozen books of poetry and prose rooted in his experience of Palestinian exile and struggle in a career spanning nearly five decades.

Under Siege
By Mahmoud Darwish (1942-2008)

Here on the slopes of hills, facing the dusk and the cannon of time
Close to the gardens of broken shadows,
We do what prisoners do,
And what the jobless do:
We cultivate hope.
***
A country preparing for dawn. We grow less intelligent
For we closely watch the hour of victory:
No night in our night lit up by the shelling
Our enemies are watchful and light the light for us
In the darkness of cellars.
***
Here there is no "I".
Here Adam remembers the dust of his clay.
***
On the verge of death, he says:
I have no trace left to lose:
Free I am so close to my liberty. My future lies in my own hand.
Soon I shall penetrate my life,
I shall be born free and parentless,
And as my name I shall choose azure letters…
***
You who stand in the doorway, come in,
Drink Arabic coffee with us
And you will sense that you are men like us
You who stand in the doorways of houses
Come out of our morningtimes,
We shall feel reassured to be
Men like you!
***
When the planes disappear, the white, white doves
Fly off and wash the cheeks of heaven
With unbound wings taking radiance back again, taking possession
Of the ether and of play. Higher, higher still, the white, white doves
Fly off. Ah, if only the sky
Were real [a man passing between two bombs said to me].
***

Cypresses behind the soldiers, minarets protecting
The sky from collapse. Behind the hedge of steel
Soldiers piss—under the watchful eye of a tank—
And the autumnal day ends its golden wandering in
A street as wide as a church after Sunday mass…
***

[To a killer] If you had contemplated the victim's face
And thought it through, you would have remembered your mother in the
Gas chamber, you would have been freed from the reason for the rifle
And you would have changed your mind: this is not the way
to find one's identity again.
***

The siege is a waiting period
Waiting on the tilted ladder in the middle of the storm.
***

Alone, we are alone as far down as the sediment
Were it not for the visits of the rainbows.
***

We have brothers behind this expanse.
Excellent brothers. They love us. They watch us and weep.
Then, in secret, they tell each other:
"Ah! if this siege had been declared..." They do not finish their sentence:
"Don't abandon us, don't leave us."
***

Our losses: between two and eight martyrs each day.
And ten wounded.
And twenty homes.
And fifty olive trees...
Added to this the structural flaw that
Will arrive at the poem, the play, and the unfinished canvas.
***
A woman told the cloud: cover my beloved
For my clothing is drenched with his blood.
***
If you are not rain, my love
Be tree
Sated with fertility, be tree
If you are not tree, my love
Be stone
Saturated with humidity, be stone
If you are not stone, my love
Be moon
In the dream of the beloved woman, be moon
[So spoke a woman
to her son at his funeral]
***
Oh watchmen! Are you not weary
Of lying in wait for the light in our salt
And of the incandescence of the rose in our wound
Are you not weary, oh watchmen?
***
A little of this absolute and blue infinity
Would be enough
To lighten the burden of these times
And to cleanse the mire of this place.
***
It is up to the soul to come down from its mount
And on its silken feet walk
By my side, hand in hand, like two longtime
Friends who share the ancient bread
And the antique glass of wine
May we walk this road together
And then our days will take different directions:
I, beyond nature, which in turn
Will choose to squat on a high-up rock.
***
On my rubble the shadow grows green,
And the wolf is dozing on the skin of my goat
He dreams as I do, as the angel does
That life is here…not over there.
***
In the state of siege, time becomes space
Transfixed in its eternity
In the state of siege, space becomes time
That has missed its yesterday and its tomorrow.
***
The martyr encircles me every time I live a new day
And questions me: Where were you? Take every word
You have given me back to the dictionaries
And relieve the sleepers from the echo’s buzz.
***
The martyr enlightens me: beyond the expanse
I did not look
For the virgins of immortality for I love life
On earth, amid fig trees and pines,
But I cannot reach it, and then, too, I took aim at it
With my last possession: the blood in the body of azure.
***
The martyr warned me: Do not believe their ululations
Believe my father when, weeping, he looks at my photograph
How did we trade roles, my son, how did you precede me.
I first, I the first one!
***
The martyr encircles me: my place and my crude furniture are all that I have changed.
I put a gazelle on my bed,
And a crescent of moon on my finger
To appease my sorrow.
***
The siege will last in order to convince us we must choose an enslavement that does no harm, in fullest liberty!
***
Resisting means assuring oneself of the heart’s health,
The health of the testicles and of your tenacious disease:
The disease of hope.
And in what remains of the dawn, I walk toward my exterior
And in what remains of the night, I hear the sound of footsteps inside me.
***
Greetings to the one who shares with me an attention to
The drunkenness of light, the light of the butterfly, in the
Blackness of this tunnel!
***
Greetings to the one who shares my glass with me
In the denseness of a night outflanking the two spaces:
Greetings to my apparition.
***
My friends are always preparing a farewell feast for me,
A soothing grave in the shade of oak trees
A marble epitaph of time
And always I anticipate them at the funeral:
Who then has died…who?
***
Writing is a puppy biting nothingness
Writing wounds without a trace of blood.
***
Our cups of coffee. Birds green trees
In the blue shade, the sun gambols from one wall
To another like a gazelle
The water in the clouds has the unlimited shape of what is left to us
Of the sky. And other things of suspended memories
Reveal that this morning is powerful and splendid,
And that we are the guests of eternity.
-Translated by Marjolijn De Jager.