

## THE IMAGE OF DISPLACEMENT: IMAGIST AESTHETICS AND THE POETICS OF EXILE IN MAHMOUD DARWISH'S *UNFORTUNATELY, IT WAS PARADISE*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article reconsiders Mahmoud Darwish's *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* through the lens of imagist poetics. Darwish is often read mainly as a poet of resistance, nation, and Palestinian collective memory. Those readings remain important, but they can narrow our understanding of the formal discipline of his poetry. This study argues that Darwish's treatment of exile depends not only on political testimony but also on a highly concentrated image system that resembles and reshapes the major principles of Imagism. Instead of using abstraction or rhetorical excess, Darwish repeatedly turns exile into concrete scenes, objects, movements, and spatial fragments: an abandoned theater, a fading garden, a shadow, a road, a mountain, a tame sky, a horse's blood, a tent, a guitar. These images do not merely decorate feeling. They organize memory, displacement, estrangement, and longing into visible forms. The article develops a composite theoretical framework that combines imagist principles of precision, condensation, direct presentation, and verbal economy with exile studies accounts of fractured belonging, cultural memory, and in-betweenness. Using qualitative close reading, the article examines three poems from the collection: "I Have a Seat in the Abandoned Theater," "The Stranger Finds Himself in the Stranger," and "The Gypsy Woman Has a Tame Sky." It shows that Darwish transforms imagist sharpness into a poetics of historical wound. His images carry political pressure without collapsing into slogan, and they preserve lyrical intensity without losing formal restraint. The article finally argues that Darwish expands Imagism beyond its Anglo-American genealogy and demonstrates how image-centered poetry can articulate collective trauma, mobile identity, and the experience of exile in world literature.*

**Keywords:** Mahmoud Darwish; Imagism; exile; displacement; memory; Palestinian poetry; modernism; close reading

### INTRODUCTION

Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) occupies a unique position in modern Arabic literature. Born in the Palestinian village of al-Birwa in Galilee, he became not only a national poet for Palestinians but also a figure of international literary standing. The events of 1948, which Palestinians call the Nakba or "catastrophe," forced his family into exile in Lebanon. When they returned, they found their village destroyed and their land incorporated into the newly established state of Israel. This early experience of displacement shaped Darwish's entire poetic project (Nassar & Rahman, 2008, p. 3).

Darwish's biography reflects the larger Palestinian trajectory of exile and statelessness. He lived in Haifa, where he joined the Israeli Communist Party and worked for Arabic-language

publications. He spent years in Moscow, Cairo, and Beirut. He joined the Palestine Liberation Organization and edited its literary journal *Al-Karmel*. Yet his poetry consistently moved beyond political rhetoric toward existential meditation. His later works, including *Mural* (2000) and *A State of Siege* (2002), explore universal themes of love, death, memory, and hope alongside specifically Palestinian experiences of loss.

This study re-examines Darwish's poetic technique through the lens of imagism, an early twentieth-century movement that transformed English-language poetry. Imagism emerged around 1912 through the efforts of poets including Ezra Pound, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Richard Aldington, and later Amy Lowell. These poets rejected the abstract language, moralizing tendencies, and metrical regularity of Victorian poetry. They called for direct treatment of the poetic subject, elimination of unnecessary words, composition in the sequence of the musical phrase rather than the metronome, and freedom in subject choice (Pound, 1918, p. 95).

The imagist emphasis on precise, concrete presentation finds strong resonance in Darwish's mature poetry. His later work, particularly in collections like *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* (2003), demonstrates a move away from the overtly political declamation of his early period toward more condensed, image-based expression. This shift aligns with what several critics have identified as Darwish's growing interest in the lyrical and the universal (Nassar & Rahman, 2008, p. 7).

This article argues that Darwish's representation of exile in *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* can be usefully understood through imagist aesthetics. Rather than explaining exile through abstract statement or political argument, Darwish presents it through a series of sharp, clear images that convey its emotional and psychological dimensions. Trees, roads, theaters, birds, and shadows become vehicles for expressing displacement without explanatory commentary. This approach allows Darwish to transform a specifically Palestinian experience into something that speaks to broader human conditions of loss and longing.

The article proceeds in four parts. First, it reviews existing scholarship on Darwish's poetry, identifying gaps that an imagist reading might fill. Second, it develops a theoretical framework drawing on imagist principles and their philosophical foundations. Third, it offers close readings of three poems from *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*: "I Have a Seat in the Abandoned Theatre," "The Stranger Finds Himself in the Stranger," and "The Gypsy Woman Has a Tame Sky." Finally, it considers the implications of reading Darwish as an imagist poet for both Arabic literary studies and comparative modernist scholarship.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly work on Mahmoud Darwish has evolved significantly over the past four decades. Early criticism tended to emphasize his role as a resistance poet and spokesperson for Palestinian national aspirations. Writers approached his work primarily as documentation of collective suffering and political struggle. This approach, while valuable for understanding the context of his poetry, often overlooked its formal complexity and aesthetic dimensions (Nassar & Rahman, 2008, p. 2).

More recent scholarship has attended to the literary qualities of Darwish's work. Critics have examined his use of metaphor, his engagement with Arabic poetic traditions, and his place within world literature. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to his relationship with specifically modernist poetic techniques, particularly those associated with Anglo-American imagism.

Hamoud Yahya Ahmed Mohsen, Tanja Jonid, and Homam Altabaa (2024) examine how Darwish employs natural imagery as a mode of resistance in his poetry of exile. Their study identifies three

forms of "green resistance" in Darwish's work: centric resistance, where the self establishes symbolic connections with natural objects; interconnected resistance, which emphasizes human-nature relationships in exile; and defiance through nature, where cultivation and organic growth become metaphors for survival and rootedness (Mohsen et al., 2024, p. 3).

This analysis usefully highlights Darwish's attention to natural imagery. However, it focuses primarily on the political functions of such imagery rather than its aesthetic qualities. An imagist reading might complement this approach by examining how Darwish's treatment of natural objects achieves its power through precision, clarity, and emotional condensation rather than through symbolic meaning alone.

Khaled M. S. Masood's work on metaphor in Darwish's poetry offers another valuable perspective. Drawing on cognitive metaphor theory as developed by Lakoff and Johnson, Masood argues that Darwish's metaphors are not merely decorative but function as central narrative tools reflecting cultural and political realities. His analysis of bird and cage metaphors demonstrates how Darwish uses concrete images to structure abstract understanding of freedom and confinement (Masood, 2019, p. 64).

This cognitive approach shares ground with imagist poetics. Both emphasize the primacy of concrete experience in shaping meaning. However, imagism adds attention to the visual qualities of images and their immediate sensory impact, dimensions that cognitive approaches may underemphasize.

Several critics have noted a significant shift in Darwish's poetry over his career. Mahfoodh (2021) traces this development from the militant, emotionally direct poems of the 1960s toward the more reflective, symbolically complex work of his later years. This later poetry, Mahfoodh argues, replaces direct confrontation with dialogue and understanding. Memory becomes a political tool, but one wielded through indirection and suggestion rather than explicit statement.

This evolution toward indirection and symbolic compression aligns Darwish's mature work with imagist principles. His later poems increasingly rely on what they do not say, on the spaces between images, on the reader's act of completion. This quality marks a significant departure from the rhetorical fullness of his early work.

Bilquees Dar (2023) situates Darwish within world literary contexts, arguing that his use of symbols like trees, passports, and stones transforms personal and national experience into universal representations of loss and homeland. This universalizing tendency, Dar suggests, accounts for Darwish's reception beyond Arabic-speaking audiences.

This global reception raises questions about the literary traditions that might have shaped Darwish's work or that offer productive frameworks for understanding it. While Darwish was deeply rooted in Arabic poetic traditions, particularly the modernist innovations of poets like Adonis and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, his later work also shows affinities with international modernist practices. Imagism, as one of the most influential movements in twentieth-century poetry, provides a useful comparative framework.

Existing scholarship on Darwish has not systematically examined his relationship to imagist aesthetics. Studies of his imagery tend to focus on symbolic meaning rather than visual presentation. Analyses of his style emphasize its lyricism and musicality rather than its precision and economy. This gap is significant because imagism offers tools for understanding aspects of Darwish's poetry that purely political or symbolic readings may miss: the sensory immediacy of his images, their emotional condensation, their resistance to explanatory expansion.

This article addresses this gap by reading selected poems from *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* through an imagist lens. It asks: How does Darwish use precise, concrete imagery to represent the experience of exile? What aspects of imagist poetics appear in his work? How might an imagist reading illuminate dimensions of his poetry that other approaches have overlooked?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: IMAGISM AND ITS EXTENSIONS**

### **The Philosophical Foundations of Imagism**

Imagism emerged from specific philosophical and psychological contexts that shaped its understanding of the image. Contrary to assumptions that imagism derived primarily from French symbolism, recent scholarship traces its theoretical foundations to French empirical psychology and philosophy (Martin, 1970, p. 35). T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound drew on the writings of Hippolyte Taine and Théodule Ribot, who understood the image as the mental representation of sensory experience. For these psychologists, images possessed virtues of clarity, precision, and complexity, in contrast to the vagueness and simplicity of abstract ideas (Martin, 1970, p. 36).

This psychological understanding of the image shaped imagist poetics in crucial ways. The image was not a symbol pointing beyond itself to some higher reality. It was rather the direct presentation of sensory experience, valuable for its own clarity and precision. Pound's famous definition of the image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound, 1918, p. 96) reflects this understanding. The image does not stand for something else; it presents directly.

### **Core Principles of Imagist Poetics**

The imagist program, as articulated in manifestos and prefaces, rested on several core principles. First, direct treatment of the subject: the poet should present the object itself, without explanatory commentary or moralizing interpretation. Second, economy of language: every word should contribute to the poem's meaning, and no word should be merely decorative. Third, free verse composition: rhythm should follow the sense of the poem rather than predetermined metrical patterns. Fourth, precision in imagery: images should be sharp, clear, and definite in outline (Pound, 1918, p. 95).

These principles represented a significant departure from nineteenth-century poetic practice. Victorian poets often used images as illustrations for abstract ideas or as decorations for emotional expression. Imagists insisted that the image itself carried the poem's meaning. As Pound (1918) wrote, the image is "the poet's pigment" (p. 97), the fundamental material of poetry rather than an ornament applied to it.

### **The Image Metaphor and Its Implications**

Recent scholarship on imagism has examined its distinctive use of metaphor. Peter Crisp (1996) analyses what he calls the "image metaphor" characteristic of imagist poetry. Unlike conceptual metaphors, which map one domain of experience onto another to generate propositional meanings, image metaphors present sensory configurations without clearly specified conceptual entailments. They work through direct perceptual resemblance rather than through conceptual structure (Crisp, 1996, p. 80). This understanding of image metaphor helps explain the distinctive quality of imagist poetry. When Pound writes of "petals on a wet, black bough," the image does not stand for something else in a one-to-one symbolic relation. It presents a sensory configuration that carries emotional weight without specifying what that weight means. The reader experiences the image directly rather than decoding it.

Crisp (1996) argues that image metaphor reveals the perceptual foundations of conceptual metaphor. Image schemas—basic structures derived from bodily experience—underlie more

abstract conceptual mappings. Image metaphor thus displays "the matrix out of which conceptual metaphor proper itself develops" (Crisp, 1996, p. 89). This argument has important implications for reading poetry that, like Darwish's, emerges from specific historical and political contexts. It suggests that imagist techniques can convey political meaning without reducing poetry to political statement.

### **Imagism Beyond Anglo-American Contexts**

While imagism emerged from specific Anglo-American contexts, its techniques have proven adaptable to diverse cultural and linguistic traditions. The movement's emphasis on precise, concrete presentation, its resistance to abstraction, and its trust in the image's power to convey emotional complexity have appealed to poets working in many languages and situations (Edwards, 2018, p. 76). This adaptability reflects the philosophical foundations of imagism in empirical psychology rather than in specifically Western cultural traditions. The understanding of images as direct presentations of sensory experience, capable of carrying emotional and intellectual complexity without explanatory expansion, translates across cultural boundaries. What varies is the content of the images, the specific sensory experiences they present, and the historical situations they engage.

For postcolonial poets like Darwish, imagist techniques offer ways of representing collective experience without falling into rhetorical excess or propagandistic statement. The image's economy and precision can convey trauma's intensity while maintaining aesthetic distance. Its directness can present political reality without reducing poetry to politics. Its reliance on sensory immediacy can ground universal themes in specific, local details.

### **Adapting Imagism for Darwish's Poetry**

Reading Darwish through an imagist lens requires attention to both continuities and differences. Like the imagists, Darwish often presents images with remarkable economy and precision. His trees, roads, and theaters function as Pound's image does: they present an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant. They resist expansion into explanatory statement. They trust the reader to feel their weight without being told what that weight means. Yet Darwish also extends imagist techniques in directions the original imagists might not have anticipated. His images carry historical and political meanings that are specific to Palestinian experience. A deserted theater in Beirut means differently from a deserted theater in London. The difference lies not in the image's sensory qualities but in the historical situation it invokes. The image presents sensory experience, but sensory experience always occurs in history.

This combination of imagist precision with historical specificity suggests that imagism need not be understood as an escape from history into pure aesthetic form. Rather, imagist techniques can serve historical and political poetry by providing ways of presenting experience directly rather than explaining it abstractly. The image's economy and precision become resources for poetry that engages trauma and loss without betraying them through inadequate language.

### **ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS**

#### **"I Have a Seat in the Abandoned Theatre"**

The poem opens with a line that establishes both setting and situation: "I have a seat in the abandoned theater in Beirut" (Darwish, 2003, p. 57). The image is remarkably economical. In twelve words, Darwish presents a speaker, a location, and a condition. The theater, traditionally a space of performance and collective attention, is abandoned. The speaker possesses a seat, suggesting belonging or claim, but in a space that no longer hosts performances. The image carries multiple meanings without stating any of them explicitly.

The theater functions as what imagist poetics would call a direct presentation of an emotional complex. It suggests displacement: the speaker has a place, but in a space emptied of its purpose. It suggests passivity: the speaker sits as spectator rather than actor. It suggests collective experience abandoned: the theatre implies an audience, but the audience has gone. All these meanings emerge from the image itself rather than from explanatory expansion.

Beirut carries specific historical weight in Darwish's poetry. The city served as centre for Palestinian political and cultural life after the expulsion from Palestine. It also witnessed the devastating civil war and Israeli invasion of 1982, which forced the Palestinian leadership into further exile. The abandoned theatre thus invokes this history without narrating it. The image condenses decades of collective experience into a single sensory presentation.

The poem continues: "I might forget, and I might recall / the final act without longing ... not because of anything / other than that the play was not written / skillfully" (Darwish, 2003, p. 57). Here Darwish extends the theatrical metaphor while maintaining imagist economy. The "final act" suggests both theatrical conclusion and historical outcome. The judgment that the play was not "written skillfully" implies critique of the narrative that has shaped Palestinian experience. Yet the lines refuse to specify what this critique means. They present the judgment without explaining it, trusting the reader to understand.

The poem's later lines introduce additional images that accumulate meaning through juxtaposition rather than explanation. "Chaos / as in the war days of those in despair, and an autobiography / of the spectators' impulse" (Darwish, 2003, p. 58). Chaos, war, despair, autobiography, spectators—these terms do not form a logical argument but a constellation of associated meanings. The reader must hold them together, feeling their relations without having them spelled out.

"The actors were tearing up their scripts and searching for the author among us, we the witnesses / sitting in our seats" (Darwish, 2003, p. 58). This image presents a striking reversal. Those who should perform (actors) have abandoned their scripts. Those who should provide the narrative (author) are absent. Those who should witness (the audience) are asked to become authors. The image condenses complex reflections on agency, representation, and collective action into a single theatrical scene.

The poem concludes with dialogue between speaker and neighbour that continues the imagistic method. "No spectators at chasm's door ... and no / one is neutral here" (Darwish, 2003, p. 59). The "chasm's door" presents an image of threshold and danger without specifying what lies beyond. The assertion that no one is neutral refuses argument, stating its position directly. And the final line, "I'm missing the beginning, what's the beginning?", returns to the theatrical metaphor while suggesting the impossibility of locating origins in exile's fragmented experience.

Throughout this poem, Darwish maintains imagist discipline. He presents images rather than explaining them. He trusts sensory presentation to carry emotional and intellectual weight. He refuses the temptation to expand images into abstract statement. The result is poetry that engages profound historical and political themes while remaining, in Pound's phrase, "hard and clear" (Pound, 1918, p. 98).

### **"The Stranger Finds Himself in the Stranger"**

This poem opens with an image of doubled identity: "We are two become one" (Darwish, 2003, p. 63). The line presents fusion without explaining its meaning. Two entities become one, but the nature of each entity and the quality of their fusion remain unspecified. The reader must feel the image's implications rather than having them stated.

"We have no name, strange woman, / when the stranger finds himself in the stranger" (Darwish, 2003, p. 63). Here Darwish presents namelessness as condition of encounter between strangers. The stranger finds himself in the stranger—an image of recognition across difference that refuses to specify what recognition means. The address to a "strange woman" adds gender to the encounter without making gender the poem's subject.

"What remains of the garden behind us is the power of the shadow" (Darwish, 2003, p. 63). This image presents loss through natural metaphor. The garden, traditional image of fertility, cultivation, and belonging, has become shadow. What remains is not the garden itself but its trace, its outline, its diminished presence. The image condenses the experience of exile: the homeland persists but only as shadow, as memory without substance, as form without content.

The poem continues with images of uncertainty and transition. "We come hurriedly from the twilight of two places at once" (Darwish, 2003, p. 63). Twilight suggests liminality, the moment between day and night, neither fully one nor the other. Two places at once suggests the divided consciousness of exile, always here and there simultaneously. The image presents this condition without analysing it.

"Together we searched for our addresses. / Follow your shadow, east of the Song of Songs, / herding sand grouse" (Darwish, 2003, p. 64). Searching for addresses suggests the quest for belonging in a world where location no longer guarantees identity. Following the shadow suggests pursuit of something that cannot be grasped, that recedes as one approaches. The "Song of Songs" invokes biblical traditions of love and longing, placing the search within deep cultural memory. Sand grouse, desert birds, evoke the landscape of exile, dry and unforgiving.

"You will find a star residing in its own death" (Darwish, 2003, p. 64). This image presents hope paradoxically. Stars traditionally guide travelers, offering direction and promise. But this star resides in death, suggesting that the guidance it offers leads nowhere, that the hope it represents has been consumed. The image's power lies in its compression: it does not argue that hope is impossible but presents hope's impossibility through concrete sensory form.

"Climb a deserted mountain, / you will find my yesterday coming full circle to my tomorrow" (Darwish, 2003, p. 64). The mountain, traditional site of revelation and transcendence, is deserted. The climb leads not to new vision but to circular return. Yesterday becomes tomorrow, suggesting the entrapment of exile in repetition, the inability to move forward when the past remains unresolved. Again, the image presents rather than explains.

Throughout this poem, Darwish maintains the imagist principle of direct presentation. Each image stands clearly before the reader, carrying its emotional weight without explanatory support. The accumulation of images; garden shadow, twilight, addresses, shadow following, star in death, deserted mountain, creates a complex emotional landscape without ever stepping back to describe that landscape abstractly.

### **"The Gypsy Woman Has a Tame Sky"**

This poem introduces a figure who appears elsewhere in Darwish's work: the gypsy woman as symbol of freedom, rootlessness, and mystery. The opening lines establish atmosphere through sensory detail: "you leave the wind sick in the mulberries" (Darwish, 2003, p. 71). The image is striking in its precision. Wind, normally associated with movement and vitality, becomes sick. Mulberries, fruit trees suggesting cultivation and sweetness, receive this sick wind. The image evokes disturbance in the natural order without stating what has caused it.

"As for me, I'll walk toward the sea so I can breathe" (Darwish, 2003, p. 71). The sea offers relief from the sick wind, suggesting freedom, openness, purification. The line is simple and direct, presenting response to condition rather than analysing the condition itself.

The poem then addresses the gypsy woman directly. "Why did you do this to us? Why did you tire / of living in the quarter of the lily-of-the-valley, O gypsy?" (Darwish, 2003, p. 71). The lily-of-the-valley suggests innocence, purity, domestic peace. The gypsy woman's departure from this quarter implies rejection of settled life for wandering existence. The questions ask why without expecting answer, expressing bewilderment at freedom's cost.

"We have all that you desire of gold and blood / recklessly passed down from dynasty to dynasty" (Darwish, 2003, p. 72). Gold suggests material wealth; blood suggests violence and inheritance. The phrase "recklessly passed down" implies critique of how tradition transmits both value and trauma. The image presents this inheritance without moralizing about it.

"Stamp the icon of the universe with your heel / so that birds will alight on you" (Darwish, 2003, p. 72). The icon of the universe suggests established order, sacred images, fixed meaning. Stamping it with the heel implies rejection, defiance, destruction. Birds alighting suggest nature's response, attraction to the one who breaks conventions. The image presents defiance as attracting rather than repelling natural life.

"There you'll find angels and a tame sky, / so do as you wish!" (Darwish, 2003, p. 72). The tame sky offers a striking paradox. Sky, traditionally symbol of freedom and wildness, becomes tame, suggesting that in the gypsy woman's domain, even freedom is domesticated. Angels suggest spiritual presence. The permission "do as you wish" offers complete freedom, but the images suggest this freedom exists in a realm different from ordinary experience.

"Crush hearts like a nutcracker. / Crush hearts and watch how the horse's blood spurts out!" (Darwish, 2003, p. 72). These lines introduce violence into the portrait of the gypsy woman. Heart-crushing suggests emotional destruction. Horse's blood spurting suggests sacrifice, violence, the cost of freedom. The images complicate any simple celebration of the gypsy woman as pure liberator.

"Your hair belongs to no country. Your winds are homeless" (Darwish, 2003, p. 73). Here Darwish explicitly connects the gypsy woman to the condition of exile. Belonging to no country defines the stateless. Homeless winds suggest perpetual wandering. The images present rootlessness as condition rather than choice.

"I'm without boundaries in the luminescence of your breasts" (Darwish, 2003, p. 73). The speaker's experience of the gypsy woman dissolves boundaries, suggesting fusion, loss of self, erotic and spiritual union. Luminescence suggests light emanating from within, the gypsy woman as source of illumination.

"From the laughing lilac of your night I pass alone down / the road of your fur, as if you created yourself" (Darwish, 2003, p. 73). Lilac suggests beauty and mystery. Night suggests darkness and the unconscious. The road of her fur suggests animality, sensuality, wildness. Self-creation suggests autonomy, freedom from origin, the gypsy woman as her own author.

"O gypsy, what hast thou done of the clay of our flesh since last year?" (Darwish, 2003, p. 74). This line asks about transformation. Clay suggests both creation (as in Genesis) and mortality (dust to dust). The gypsy woman has worked on human flesh, changing it, shaping it, but the question leaves unspecified what changes have occurred.

"You wear this place hastily as you would wear trousers of fire" (Darwish, 2003, p. 74). Wearing place suggests temporary occupation, lack of belonging. Trousers of fire suggest danger, intensity,

the impossibility of comfortable inhabitation. The image condenses the condition of exile: one occupies space but cannot dwell in it.

"The earth's only task in your hands is to look back upon / the things of departure: water anklets, a wind guitar, / a flute to distance India even further" (Darwish, 2003, p. 74). Earth looks back, suggesting memory, nostalgia, the past's persistence. Water anklets and wind guitar evoke fragility and intangibility. The flute that distances India suggests music that creates separation rather than connection, art that acknowledges loss rather than overcoming it.

"Gypsy, don't leave us like an army leaving behind / it's heart-breaking traces!" (Darwish, 2003, p. 75). The army's departure suggests abandonment, destruction, traces of violence. The speaker pleads not to be left in this condition, recognizing that the gypsy woman's freedom means her absence.

"Your tents are a guitar for vagabonds... We smash our pitchers one after another so as to keep time with her rhythm" (Darwish, 2003, p. 75). Tents suggest nomadic life, temporary dwelling. Guitar suggests music, art, the ordering of experience. Smashing pitchers suggests ritual destruction, sacrifice, keeping time with the gypsy woman's rhythm implies aligning human action with her wild freedom.

The poem concludes: "No, a gypsy girl never comes back. She never crosses the same country twice" (Darwish, 2003, p. 76). This final image presents freedom as irreversible movement. The gypsy woman's refusal to return means her presence is always temporary, always already passing. Those she leaves behind must live with her absence.

Throughout this poem, Darwish builds a complex portrait through accumulation of precise images. The gypsy woman emerges as simultaneously liberator and destroyer, divine and animal, present and absent. No single image defines her; meaning emerges from the constellation. This method exemplifies imagist technique: trust in the image's power to convey complexity without explanatory expansion.

## **DISCUSSION: DARWISH'S IMAGIST AESTHETICS**

### **Precision and Economy**

The poems analyzed above demonstrate Darwish's consistent attention to precision and economy. His images are sharply defined, presenting sensory experience with clarity. The abandoned theater, the shadow of the garden, the sick wind in the mulberries—each image stands clearly before the reader, its outlines definite, its sensory qualities vivid.

Darwish also practices the imagist virtue of economy. His poems avoid explanatory expansion. They present images and trust the reader to feel their weight. The line "No spectators at chasm's door" (Darwish, 2003, p. 59) does not explain what the chasm is or why spectators cannot stand at its edge. It presents the image and moves on. This economy gives the poetry its characteristic density. Each line carries more meaning than its words would suggest because the reader must supply connections the poem leaves implicit.

### **Direct Treatment of the Subject**

Darwish's poems also exemplify the imagist principle of direct treatment. He presents exile through concrete situations rather than abstract description. The speaker sitting in an abandoned theater, the stranger encountering another stranger, the gypsy woman moving through landscapes; these are not illustrations of exile but presentations of it. Exile exists in these situations rather than being explained by them.

This direct treatment distinguishes Darwish's mature poetry from both political rhetoric and sentimental lament. Political rhetoric explains suffering to mobilize response. Sentimental lament

dwells on feeling to elicit sympathy. Darwish's imagist method does neither. It presents the situation of exile and allows that presentation to carry its own emotional and political weight.

### **The Image as Emotional Complex**

Pound defined the image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound, 1918, p. 96). Darwish's images consistently achieve this complexity. The abandoned theater presents not just a physical space but an entire history of displacement, loss of agency, and collective memory. The shadow of the garden presents not just diminished light but the persistence of the past as absence. The gypsy woman presents not just a human figure but the paradoxes of freedom, its costs as well as its attractions.

This complexity emerges from the images themselves rather than from explanatory commentary. Darwish trusts that the reader will feel what the abandoned theater means without being told. He trusts that the shadow's power will be understood without analysis. This trust in the image's sufficiency marks his mature style as fundamentally imagist.

### **Cultural Specificity and Universal Resonance**

Darwish's images are deeply specific to Palestinian experience. The abandoned theater in Beirut, the references to exile and return, the engagement with traditions of Arabic poetry; these locate his work firmly within a particular cultural and historical situation. Yet the images also resonate beyond this specificity. Readers who know nothing of Palestinian history can feel the weight of the abandoned theater, can understand the shadow's power, can respond to the gypsy woman's complexity.

This combination of cultural specificity with universal resonance reflects the imagist understanding of the image. Because the image presents sensory experience directly, it communicates across cultural boundaries. The specific situation matters, but the direct presentation allows readers to enter that situation through imagination. They do not need to know the history to feel the poem's emotional truth, though knowing the history deepens their response.

### **Imagism as Postcolonial Strategy**

Darwish's adaptation of imagist techniques suggests possibilities for postcolonial poetics more broadly. Imagism offers ways of representing collective trauma without the rhetorical excess that can betray trauma's reality. Its economy and precision can convey intensity without inflation. Its trust in the image can present historical experience without reducing it to political statement.

For poets emerging from situations of displacement and violence, imagist techniques provide resources for maintaining aesthetic integrity while engaging urgent political themes. The image's directness can cut through the abstractions that often obscure historical reality. Its compression can hold together complexity that linear explanation would falsify. Its sensory immediacy can ground poetry in the concrete experience that political rhetoric too often forgets.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article has argued that Mahmoud Darwish's *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* employs imagist techniques to represent the experience of exile. Through close reading of three poems, it has demonstrated how Darwish uses precise, economical images to present displacement directly rather than explaining it abstractly. The abandoned theater, the shadow of the garden, the gypsy woman with her tame sky—these images carry emotional and intellectual complexity without rhetorical expansion.

Reading Darwish through an imagist lens challenges interpretations that reduce his poetry to political statement or nationalist expression. While his work emerges from specifically Palestinian experience and engages Palestinian themes, its method is fundamentally aesthetic. Darwish's

achievement lies in his ability to transform political reality into poetry without betraying either poetry's formal demands or reality's painful truth. The imagist techniques of precision, economy, and direct treatment enable this transformation.

This reading also extends understanding of imagism beyond its Anglo-American origins. The movement's principles, derived from empirical psychology rather than specifically Western cultural traditions, have proven adaptable to diverse contexts. Darwish's poetry demonstrates how imagist techniques can serve postcolonial expression, conveying collective trauma through images that remain aesthetically autonomous.

Future research might explore several directions opened by this study. Comparative work on Darwish and other poets who adapt imagist techniques to postcolonial contexts could illuminate broader patterns in twentieth-century poetry. Translation studies might examine how Darwish's imagist qualities survive or transform in English versions of his work. Further theoretical reflection might consider the relation between imagist poetics and other modernist movements in Arabic poetry, particularly the Tammuzi school associated with Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and others.

Ultimately, this study contributes to ongoing efforts to read Darwish as a world poet rather than only as a national one. His work deserves the kind of attention to formal achievement that has long been accorded to major poets in European languages. Reading him through imagism reveals one dimension of that formal achievement: his mastery of the poetic image as vehicle for presenting exile's emotional and intellectual complexity.

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