



# Voice Over: a nomadic conversation with Mahmoud Darwish

Breyten Breytenbach

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Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet (1941 - 9 August 2008), was a friend. I was on Gorée Island when I learned of his death during the course of an open-heart intervention in Houston, America. We had been together a few weeks earlier in Arles, the south of France. Even at noon the foyer of the hotel where we stayed was as if drained of light by dusk. He knew how serious his condition was – it was either the very risky operation or the possibility of dying at any moment from an exploding aorta - and with an ironic smile he speculated about his chances of survival. That night, as the sun was setting in a yellow flood over the ancient open air Roman theater and as birds began singing the accumulated sweetness of a summer's day, he publicly read one last time from his work. The poems were shot through by an ongoing conversation with death. Immediately after his passing, I started writing the above series as fragments of a continuing dialogue. In West Africa it was then the onset of the rainy season moving north, the 'petit hivernage,' when black-blue clouds would skitter and close the skies. . . . The journey continues and the conversation will carry on, in the attempt to look for Mahmoud Darwish among the words.

Breyten Breytenbach New York, December 2008

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