

THE EARTH IS CLOSING ON US

M a h m o u d D a r w i s h

The Earth is closing on us, pushing us through the last passage, and
we tear off our limbs to pass through.

The Earth is squeezing us. I wish we were its wheat so we could die
and live again. I wish the Earth was our mother

So she'd be kind to us. I wish we were pictures on the rocks
for our dreams to carry

As mirrors. We saw the faces of those to be killed by the last of us
in the last defence of the soul.

We cried over their children's feast. We saw the faces of those, who
will throw our children out of the windows of this last space.

Our star will hang up mirrors.

Where should we go after the last frontiers? Where should the birds fly
after the last sky?

Where should the plants sleep after the last breath of air?

We will write our names with scarlet steam.

We will cut off the hand of the song to be finished by our flesh.

We will die here, here in the last passage. Here and here
our blood will plant its olive tree.

Translated by Abdullah al-Udhari, in *Victims of a Map* (London: al-Saqi Books, 1984), p. 13.

Mahmoud Darwish was born in 1942 in the village of Berweh east of Acre in the Galilee in northern Israel. His village was among the more than 350 Palestinian villages depopulated and destroyed by the Israelis. Darwish is known as Palestine's foremost poet; he has been called the poet laureate of the Palestinian people.