

Jerusalem in Palestinian and Israeli Imaginations:
A discussion of poems by Mahmoud Darwish and Yehuda Amichai

Professors Vered Karti Shemtov and Khalil Barhoum

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Burlingame Hall, 252 West Spain Street

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict captures the daily news: images of both violence and attempts at peace have become routine items in broadcast and print media. How is this conflict seen by the two peoples involved? What are the meanings assigned to it by Palestinians and Israelis? And, with Jerusalem being a principal point of contention, what are the perceptions of this holy city? This forum will explore the literary portrayals of Jerusalem, drawing on the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and Yehuda Amichai.

Professors Karti Shemtov and Barhoum have taught several successful seminars at Stanford University on Israeli and Palestinian, Hebrew- and Arabic language literature, focusing class discussions on such issues as the literary representation of land, “the other,” and most recently cities of the Middle East.

If I Forget thee, Jerusalem

By: Yehuda Amichai

If I forget thee, Jerusalem,
Then let my right be forgotten.
Let my right be forgotten, and my left remember.
Let my left remember, and your right close
And your mouth open near the gate.

I shall remember Jerusalem
And forget the forest – my love will remember,
Will open her hair, will close my window,
will forget my right,
Will forget my left.

If the west wind does not come
I'll never forgive the walls,
Or the sea, or myself.
Should my right forget
My left shall forgive,

I shall forget all water,
I shall forget my mother.

If I forget thee, Jerusalem,
Let my blood be forgotten.
I shall touch your forehead,
Forget my own,
My voice change
For the second and last time
To the most terrible of voices --
Or silence.

In Jerusalem

By: Mahmoud Darwish

(Translated from the Arabic by Fady Joudah)

In Jerusalem, and I mean within the ancient walls,
I walk from one epoch to another without a memory
to guide me. The prophets over there are sharing
the history of the holy . . . ascending to heaven
and returning less discouraged and melancholy, because love
and peace are holy and are coming to town.
I was walking down a slope and thinking to myself: How
do the narrators disagree over what light said about a stone?
Is it from a dimly lit stone that wars flare up?
I walk in my sleep. I stare in my sleep. I see
no one behind me. I see no one ahead of me.
All this light is for me. I walk. I become lighter. I fly
then I become another. Transfigured. Words
sprout like grass from Isaiah's messenger
mouth: "If you don't believe you won't be safe."
I walk as if I were another. And my wound a white
biblical rose. And my hands like two doves
on the cross hovering and carrying the earth.
I don't walk, I fly, I become another,
transfigured. No place and no time. So who am I?
I am no I in ascension's presence. But I
think to myself: Alone, the prophet Muhammad
spoke classical Arabic. "And then what?"
Then what? A woman soldier shouted:
Is that you again? Didn't I kill you?
I said: You killed me . . . and I forgot, like you, to die.