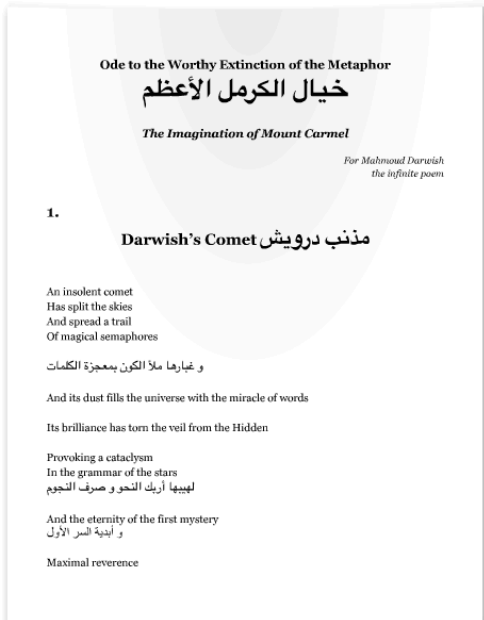


ODE TO THE WORTHY EXTINCTION OF THE METAPHOR



Mustapha Benfodil

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'I thought poetry could change everything, could change history and could humanize, and I think that the illusion is very necessary to push poets to be involved and to believe, but now I think that poetry changes only the poet.' - *Mahmoud Darwish*

Mustapha Benfodil's contribution to Ibraaz Platform 002 is an extract from a longer text intended as a tribute to the late Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish. As a poet and spokesperson for the Palestinian cost, Darwish attracted much by way of controversy in his lifetime and with his work. Palestine was and remained throughout his poetry and writings an effective metaphor for the loss of innocence and the unresolved trauma of dispossession and forced exile.

Originally a member of Rakah, the Israeli communist party, Darwish later joined the Palestine Liberation Organization in Beirut. Although critical of Israel's policies in Palestine, he consistently demanded a 'fair' stance in negotiations with Israel and was equally critical of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist party that governs the Gaza Strip. In 2005, following a ban on outdoor music and performances in Qalqilya, a Palestinian city in the West Bank, by the Hamas-led municipality, Darwish warned that 'there are Taliban-type elements in our society, and this is a very dangerous sign'.

Following heart surgery, Darwish died in 2008 in Houston, Texas. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas declared three days of mourning in Darwish's honour and he was accorded the equivalent of a State funeral. He is buried in Ramallah near its Palace of Culture.

According to Benfodil, 'in this context of Arab uprisings, we must give a thought to an intellectual like (Darwish)'. *Ode to the Worthy Extinction of the Metaphor* is a text in many parts, featuring lyrical sections borrowing tropes and imagery common to Darwish's poems as well as angry, staccato sections exploring violence. Darwish's writing often employed monorhymes that resembled the metrics of traditional Arabic poetry. The ongoing refrain of 'and the blood' in Benfodil's text appears throughout to impress the infinite and perpetuating nature of violence, all of which culminates in forms of linguistic absurdity.



The poem is written in French and Arabic; however, for Ibraaz, the French sections have been translated into English, while the Arabic remains.

Benfodil's writing is lyrical, immediate and unapologetic. Earlier this year, an installation he created for the tenth edition of the Sharjah Biennial was censored and removed following a public outcry. The work in question, *Maportaliche/Ecritures sauvages (It has no importance/Wild Writings)* (2011), featured headless mannequins in an imaginary football game, their shirts bearing excerpts from Benfodil's writings, along with hybrid texts borrowed from Algerian popular culture.

Not all of these excerpts, Benfodil said in a statement following the outcry, were 'polite': included were excerpts from Benfodil's play *Les Borgnes*, which discusses the rape of women in Algeria during the civil war.

'Perhaps it is my error [Benfodil has observed] to have naively believed that life is not polite. And that art is free to be impolite and irreverent. Indeed when Art meets the street and artists listen to the utterings of real life, it is a sign of good cultural health. However those in positions of power should be more imaginative'.

Anthony Downey

Full PDF of *Ode to the Worthy Extinction of the Metaphor* available here:

<http://www.ibraaz.org/usr/library/documents/main/benfodil.pdf>

About the author

Mustapha Benfodil is an Algerian writer and journalist. He has written poetry, novels and plays, and presented an installation as part of the Sharjah Biennial in 2011, which was censored and removed. Benfodil lives and works in Algeria and writes for El Watan daily newspaper.