

Actor Brian Cox reading Palestinian poet Refaat al-Ar'eer's *If I Must Die* viewed more than 11 million times

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Palestinian poet Refaat al-Ar'eer, a professor at the Islamic University in Gaza, was murdered in a targeted assassination, along with his brother, his sister and four of her children, by Israeli military forces on December 7. This heinous crime amid the ongoing genocide in Gaza has sparked outrage across the globe.

As part of the Palestine Festival of Literature, a video recording of veteran actor Brian Cox reading al-Ar'eer's last work, *If I Must Die*, was posted Tuesday afternoon. As of the time of this writing, it has been viewed more than 11 million times on the Palestine Festival of Literature X/Twitter page alone.

The poem, written in English and dated November 1, reads

If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself—
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up
above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale.

Cox recites the short piece slowly and movingly.

Al-Ar'eer, born in Gaza City in 1979, received an MA from University College London in 2007 and a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Putra Malaysia in 2017 with a dissertation on English poet John Donne (1572-1631). He was known for his editing of two books, *Gaza Writes Back* and *Gaza Unsilenced*, and his contributions to several others, including 2022's *Light in Gaza: Writing Born of Fire*.

Al-Ar'eer was a regular contributor to Palestinian and left-wing news sites, including *Electronic Intifada*. He co-founded the organization We Are Not Numbers, following Israel's 2014 military campaign "Operation Protective Edge" to assist young Palestinians who survived to cope. One of his brothers was killed in an Israeli air strike during the 2014 war.

In the aftermath of the October 7 attack by Hamas forces, in an interview with the BBC, al-Ar'eer described it as "exactly like the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising." As the BBC noted after his death, al-Ar'eer "declined to leave northern Gaza following the start of Israeli operations in the area. Two days before he died he posted video to social media in which a number of explosions could be heard. 'The building is shaking. The debris and shrapnel are hitting the walls and flying in the streets,' he wrote."

Brian Cox has a long career in the theater, film and television. Classically trained, Cox had stints with both the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre during the 1980s and 1990s. His many honors include two Laurence Olivier Awards, a Primetime Emmy Award, and a Golden Globe Award, as well as a nomination for a British Academy Television Award.

Cox has been most prominent recently in the popular

series *Succession*, playing the patriarch of the Roy family, the rapacious, destructive owners of a vast media and entertainment conglomerate.

In 2021, Cox was one of 16,000 artists to sign “A Letter Against Apartheid,” which denounced Israeli policy. The letter began, “Palestinians are being attacked and killed with impunity by Israeli soldiers and armed Israeli civilians who have been roaming the streets of Jerusalem, Lydda, Haifa, Jaffa and other cities chanting, ‘Death to Arabs.’ Several lynchings of unarmed and unprotected Palestinians have already taken place in the last two weeks.”

The murder of more than 20,000 Palestinians in Gaza has horrified millions around the globe. While the US and British media pretend that the public is more or less united behind the governments and their support for genocide, except for a handful of “supporters of terrorism,” the reality is quite different. The current Nazi-like murder campaign, along with other social and economic processes, is creating or widening the vast and unbridgeable divide between the ruling elites and the mass of the population.

Artists, along with many others, have been deeply disturbed by the events. Thousands have signed open letters, issued appeals and made public statements opposing the Israeli destruction of Gaza. Cox speaks for the best layers of the intelligentsia coming into conflict with the unbearable realities of modern-day capitalism.

US and Western authorities generally have launched a desperate, crude witch-hunt of those opposing genocide on college campuses, in the entertainment industry and elsewhere.

This leads one to ask: Will Brian Cox be hauled before a congressional hearing? Will the actor be denounced as an “antisemite,” along with the millions who have viewed his reading of *If I Must Die*? Will his career be “canceled”? Will McDonalds now dismiss Cox as its advertising voice? Will *Succession* be removed from streaming platforms?



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