

Jawdat Haydar and AUB

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President Mahfouz, honored guests from Lebanon and beyond: it is my pleasure to represent the American University of Beirut at this commemoration of the 4th anniversary of the death of Jawdat Haydar. We are proud to count him among our alumni, although when he arrived at our institution it was not called AUB but Syrian Protestant College, a name that reminds us that Lebanon did not exist as an independent country at that time either. He lived to see many things change.

Haydar's poetry reveals a deep attachment to Lebanon, its landscape, its history, its people. But he was also a man who moved freely across the world. Some people have said that AUB is a place where East and West meet and reshape each other. One might say the same about the life and mind of Jawdat Haydar. But it would be better to reject such categories altogether, to reject the division of the world according to directions, religions, languages, or any other category of difference, and to say with Jawdat Haydar: "I have no boundaries!"

Perhaps because he lived through so many changes, perhaps because he had such a deep sense of history, he was keenly aware of how ultimately fragile are all political regimes. The individual human life, even a long one like that of Jawdat Haydar, is also a very brief affair. But his words, and the words of many others like him who tried to see things from a larger perspective, remain with us. Whether that larger perspective endures is now up to us.