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“Most men lead lives of quiet desperation” once said Thoreau. We wake up, we eat, we work, we suffer and one day, we die. The pages of our lives remain blank because we have failed to spill the ink of our rampant thoughts on them. Instead, we fill our lives with “what-ifs” and “there will be time”; we either linger in the theoretical past or in the hypothetical future. Few are those who realize that lives are not made of such feeble things. The temple of Baalbeck was not built on such aborted thoughts that never come to life. Jawdat Haydar was very well aware of that and his collection of poetry serves as legacy that survives to prove it. Jawdat Haydar, born in Baalbeck, is a poet who had the certainty that “quiet desperation” was not the path he will choose to follow. By writing poetry, by building a society of Lebanese poets and by attempting to revive Lebanese culture and literature, Jawdat Haydar left his print on the sand of the Lebanese shores he wrote so often about. Ever since I opened his books and delved into the realms created by his poetry, the idea of my country and Jawdat Haydar have become linked; I cannot think of one without the other making its way into my mind. It reminds me of a quote whose author’s name eludes me, and it speaks of how at certain points, one can no longer tell the dancer from the dance. That is the way I feel about Jawdat Haydar and Lebanon when I read his poetry, the poet is so dedicated to it that they have come to form one entity. In his poems about Lebanon, we can clearly see the undying love that the poet vows to it by

singing its praises but we can also notice the critical eye that Jawdat Haydar has towards the country for he doesn't fail to notice its faults alongside of its beauties, however, no matter how clearly he sees the vices of Lebanon, his longing for it never fades away.

Jawdat Haydar's fascination about Lebanon seems endless, his devotion limitless and his love contagious to his readers. We have the impression that Jawdat Haydar is constantly kneeling at the altar of this country and offering his poems as a present, ever-thankful to all that Lebanon has to offer. In his poem "Lebanon", the poet speaks of "the eye of an artist possessed" that holds "such a paradise in mind". For him, this country is so perfect that it has to be the figment of an artist's imagination, the product of mad genius. The poet draws a flawless, quasi-divine picture of Lebanon, and his poems act as a prism that reflects his love in a colorful rainbow of sceneries. A "celestial view" is offered to us through the eyes of the poet, who goes on to describe in more depth the wonders that lie before him. Jawdat Haydar mentions a "vision of growing ecstasy", which brings us back to the certainty that his fascination is, indeed, endless. The image of the prism resurges in my mind when I read the line "where beauty and dreams meet in poesy", the two seem to converge into the poet's product and form one entity that goes by the name of Lebanon. Jawdat Haydar mentions in the previous line that he feels "dissolved and carried fancy-free", which also takes me back to the ever-present thought that the poet melts into his country and vice versa until you cannot tell one from the other, he "dissolves" into it and seeps through its fertile grounds and ever-running rivers and is "carried" by the breeze that our country is renowned for.

What is unique about the poem “Lebanon” is that in it, the poet is not admiring the country by himself; he also invites his “darling” wife to come along with him. He starts his poem by wishing: “I would that you were with me hence, sharing/ This celestial view...” Jawdat Haydar invites his wife to see Lebanon through his eyes; “come to me, darling, and look at the strand” and then repeats the invitation once more in the following stanza; “come darling, to see what I see, and more”. The poet never ceases to invite his wife as well as the reader to feast on this scenery and he does so by involving our senses. Even though the verbs that refer to the different senses are not always explicit, Jawdat Haydar still succeeds in immersing us in the images he’s describing. He starts by calling us to look through his eyes, “to see what (he) sees”. The image that struck me the most is that of the “stars above, stars below, moon in between” and I could not help but imagine the shimmering of the sea as little twinkling stars that mirrors the skies above and leaves the moon hanging in the middle, lost between which star-studded sky to reside in. Then he goes on to describe “a brigade of cavalry charging the shore/ Falling back on sand in glorious sheen”. There, we can just hear the sounds of the notorious waves that rise and then come crashing on the shore. He then continues to mention “the cedars living for ages unknown”, and like any Lebanese, one cannot hear of the cedars without having their intense smell sneak up his nostrils and trigger the memories we have of this immortal wood. The smell of cedars is to us what the taste of a “Madeleine” was to Marcel Proust. One bite into this cookie and Proust drowns into memories of his childhood and relives them as if they were happening at that exact moment.

Of course, one cannot speak of Jawdat Haydar’s undying love for Lebanon without mentioning Baalbeck; the heart that pumps creative blood in the veins of the poet’s

works. Baalbeck will always be for Jawdat Haydar, as he put it in “Baalbeck and the Ruins”, “a unique structure of eternal fame”. One cannot help but notice words such as “eternal” and “forever” (which shows in the last stanza). The poet fills this poem with lines that stress on this city’s immortality. By using words like “centuries”, “heirloom”, “generations”, Jawdat Haydar underlines the fact that Baalbeck stood against time itself and survived the decay that is usually brought on by the centuries that pass. “Hundreds of generations have passed, and still,/ These pillars against time and time tall”, the poet adds; nothing can bring down these massive stones that have rooted themselves in history. Baalbeck is indeed immortal; for me, it is a metaphor for the poet’s infinite love for Lebanon. Both stood the test of time, both have left profound prints in history.

Like a devoted lover, Jawdat Haydar does not only gaze upon Lebanon’s external beauty, but also praises its illustrious inner qualities. In “Lebanon”, the poet ends the poem by mentioning the democracy that is held in “the flag of liberty”, thus mentioning two great abstract concepts that interrelate and coexist in this country; democracy and liberty. In the poem “Beirut”, the poet describes it as “the city that was keeping big with fate”; the capital spread universal concepts such as “brotherhood and love”, it is portrayed as a teacher who delivers lessons of wise verities that “opened the purdah of mind”. Indeed, one cannot deny that for quite a long time, Lebanon was (and still is) considered as the most open-minded country in the Middle East. Artists and intellectuals fled their countries and sought refuge in Lebanon because we were known for enjoying liberties that are only dreamt of in other Arab countries. The description of Lebanon’s inner qualities only goes to show the undeniable depth of the poet’s love for his country. It is

clear to us readers that his love is not just a mere ephemeral fascination, but a true and long-lasting admiration for what Lebanon truly stands for.

Although as we just mentioned, Jawdat Haydar's devotion to his country is more than evident, it is also not a blind one. The poet does not fail to notice the small "cracks" in the great walls; his admiring eye is also a critical one. As I read his biography, I noticed a quote by John Munro, who had previously taught English literature at AUB: "Haydar's poetry is not escapist; rather it is committed and concerned, but in no way partisan." The professor expresses it perfectly; Jawdat Haydar did not use literature as an escape from reality, he did not plunge into denial by speaking only of the wonders of his beloved country. By all means, this does not signify that he loved his country less, quite the contrary; I believe that it takes courage and even more love to be able to see one's country for what it truly is, to notice the gray areas that cover Lebanon's green lands. Being a country ravaged by wars, wars that picked on Lebanon like vultures pick on decaying corpses, it is needless to say that it has lost some of its shine and grandeur. In his poem "Lebanese Immigrants", Jawdat Haydar addresses the people he named his poem after and urges them to stay and hang on to Lebanon even if it has fallen apart. "Pitch tents o'er the ash of your homes and stay" he asks, explicitly referring to the houses torn down during the war and thus reaching the collective memory of Lebanese readers. The word "ash" is enough to evoke countless images that overlap, clash and intertwine, images that bring up death, bloodshed and destruction, images that conjure the dead along with their stench. After all, it does not require much to resuscitate old memories and open ancient wounds. The poet cleverly used one single word, "ash", to express more than a decade of "burned" history.

Jawdat Haydar's critical eye is more obvious in his poem "Beirut". The first line in the form of a question sums up the sentiments of an entire nation; "where's Beirut of yesterday?" It is the question that is on everyone's tongue, the question that holds the crucifix of a country, and the poet is not afraid to ask it. After reminiscing on what Beirut used to be, Jawdat Haydar goes on to lament on what it has become; "a painful memory". The words are weaved into a web of desolation that appears in "our grieving eyes", and the "heaps", "the stench of the dead" and the "calamity" is what Lebanon is reduced to. Jawdat Haydar also appears as an engaged citizen when he strongly expresses his wish to "spit now and every year once on the whole world,/ To lubricate the tools of its mechanism". The sarcasm and dark humor do not go unnoticed but on the contrary, they keep resonating in the reader's mind well after he has finished reading the poem. John Munro was definitely right when he stated that Jawdat Haydar "is not an escapist", he does not hide the ugly truth, whether it concerns Lebanon or the entire world.

Nevertheless, no matter how critical Jawdat Haydar is and even though he sees Lebanon with all its vices and shortcomings, he still possesses a profound longing to his home country and we can see glimpses of it even in his darkest poems. The poet could not have put it in a better way when he wrote "We Shall Ever Be Yearning for Beirut". Once again, Jawdat Haydar succeeds in encompassing an entire nation's emotions in one sentence. This poem starts out in a dark and angry tone, the successions of words such as "bloodshed" and "crime" followed by a line of juxtaposed vices "immorality pollution and shame" only go to show the anger that the poet holds. The first stanza is literally drenched in a very macabre mood that later on makes the poet wish to climb towards heaven so as to escape this "vile world". However, Jawdat Haydar will always remain

devoted to his own country and that is clearly obvious when he ends the poem with “though we shall e’er be yearning for Beirut”. No matter how painful the situation of the world and the country get, no matter how great the losses are, the poet still longs for Beirut, still longs for the heart of his country and he is like a devoted husband who stays with his country through the good times and the bad, till death made them part.

In the poem “On Lebanon”, a line caught my attention and once more, Jawdat Haydar delves into the collective psyche of the Lebanese people and captures their emotions. Towards the end of the poem, he writes that “our joy remains tied to our sorrow”; that line alone summed up the complexity of our feelings. Our happiness is tainted with bitterness, we love Lebanon but we also ache with it. That is why I completely identify with Jawdat Haydar, for like him, I am an adamant supporter of my country but I am certainly not blind to its vices and to the fact that it has fallen apart. Loving Lebanon has never been an easy thing to do, we suffer for doing so, we suffer to hold together an entity that is absurdly bigger than us and we suffer because we might crumble along with it. Nevertheless, my love for Lebanon is like Jawdat Haydar’s, it is like the temple of Baalbeck; it has stood the test of time and survived. Indeed, that love holds the scars of a fight, a struggle, it bears the traces of ashes, but it is a love that will not seize. I feel as if I am between every line of the poems, experiencing the breeze that the poet makes us notice through his vivid writing and also experiencing the storm that is caused by his anger and sadness.

There is no proper way to conclude a discussion of Jawdat Haydar’s poetry. Even when I close the book, when I finish typing, the feeling still subsists; the feeling that links

the poet to Lebanon and links us, the readers, to both his poetry and his country does not fade away, but lingers and resonates like the circles created by a ripple effect. Jawdat Haydar did not only write on his own behalf but on mine and on that of an entire nation. He did not take the road of “quiet desperation” but instead celebrated the beauty of Lebanon and raged against its misery. The poet is a patriot “par excellence” because he does not turn a deaf ear to the cries of his country, he does not bury his head in the sand and pretend that all is well in the best of worlds and by doing so, I can say, by quoting Robert Frost, that he “took the road less traveled, and that has made all the difference”, and I intend to follow in that same path.