

The opening word, for the 2nd anniversary of Jawdat Haydar,

by *Amal Dibo* ,

in the name of the Anis Makdissi Program in Literature, Dec 4th, 2008.

In its mission statement the American University of Beirut wills its graduates to be "individuals' committed to creative and critical thinking, life-long learning, personal integrity and civic responsibility".

Many of those graduates, in a great variety of specialized fields, in the humanities as well as in sciences and technology, faithful to their Alma mater, have deserved the pride of proving this mission successfully accomplished.

Two of them meet today at this particularly privileged event: Jawdat Haydar (1905-2006) and Anis Makdessi (1885-1997), 20 years his senior; both were raised in the Ethos of AUB and committed to a continuously developing and increasingly human and refined society.

As a member of the jury for the literary competition organized by the Jawdat Haidar Foundation, speaking on behalf of the Anis Makdessi program in literature, one is lead to appreciate a number of distinguished features they hold in common, at the heart of which stands poetry uplifting the humanity of the individual and contributing to the broader political and cultural framework of society.

At the inauguration ceremony of the Anis Khoury Makdessi program in literature, Sari Makdessi noted that "Anis Makdessi examined literary cross cultural interaction studying the impact of other literary traditions on Arabic literature, which he believed was partly responsible for the nineteenth century cultural and literary Arab renaissance."

Jawdat Haydar, in his poetry embodied this cross cultural interaction expressing in English the experiences of a Lebanese Arab, as individual and citizen.

Born in peripheral cities, Makdessi in Tripoli and Haidar in Baalbeck, they converged in Ras-Beirut, the cosmopolitan global village of Lebanon. Haydar was born two years after Makdessi received his MA, and 15 years later in 1923, Haidar graduated from the same Syrian Protestant College which become in 1920 the American University of Beirut. They lived the times where a new dawn was rising over Lebanon and the Middle East, times where aspirations for freedom and human fraternity were most vital and needed efforts to rescue nations balloting between two world wars.

Galvanized by the ethos of AUB and its liberal education, their talented and rich personalities were thus oriented towards an unequivocal commitment to a living literature experienced in depth, and expressed in freedom.

What Mohammad Baalbaki relayed concerning Anis Makdessi's belief in life summarized in love, beauty and Arab Nationalism and combining all three in the Arabic language, certainly applies to Jawdat Haydar combining love, beauty, empathy, compassion and patriotism as well as Arab nationalism in the English language.

Widely traveled in the Arab world, Makdessi was honored by his students and as a scholar, associates writer, poets, and teacher for his contributions to literary scholarship and for his own poetry: the program that carries his name focusing on developing literary and

humanistic studies at AUB and encouraging openness to different cultural forms and traditions in literature, naturally and rightly hosts in great honor the legacy of Jawdat Haydar, "who speaks with the confident tones of a man conscious of his humanity" as described by John Monroe former professor of English literature at AUB.

The circumstances of Haydar's life led him to France, and later to North Texas University in the USA where he graduated with a BS in education which he invested in serving as director of colleges in Lebanon and Palestine. After 28 years of services to the Iraq Petroleum company in Tripoli Lebanon, Jawdat Haydar returned to his home town Baalbeck where he settled down to nourish his passion for poetry.

All along these years Jawdat Haydar has carried his poetic mission as a debt to humanity. Since his early years at the University of Texas he started writing poetry holding it as a witness in all circumstances of his personal and public life. His poems declare a strong sense of belonging to the place where he lives from Texas to Baalbeck with an authentic feeling of pride for the glories and a deep compassion for the wounds which that or the other place inspired him. But every city he lived in was always for him a compact formula of the entire human community.

On his poetic style, Jayson Inen, assistant professor of creative writing at AUB writes, "Haydar boldly fuses the poetic styles and sentiments of the romantic Victorian and modern periods of Anglophone literature, while exploring issues of common interest to people living in regions as far apart as Texas and Iraq".

Haydar writes as a poet responsible. Denouncing man's rusting humanism as an engaged citizen of the world, writing in a crude attempt to reawaken the world's empathy in the face of injustice, death and pain with hope, faith and a strong will:

*“Yes friends tonight the cup tomorrow the blade
Heaven born heroes of the old Cederland
Be ready to stand unyielding unafraid
To grasp the destiny of your destiny in hand”*

But death did not stand too far away from him; it faced him very closely, taking away from him his wife and son, opening in his heart and life a wound that was never cured though controlled and overcome. He faced his tragic fate with a living poetry, throbbing with the pulse of a deeply sensitive human heart, playing along the crystal musicality of the inner voices of hope and love; a living poetry sailing in the water of tears to rising horizons drenched with images of beauty unlimited, in time and space.

Three anthologies “Voices, Echoes” and “Shadows ” followed by “101 selected poems” all in English, and a biography in Arabic witness to his cross cultural commitment in language, while his awards and medals speak to his cross cultural commitment at the international and religious level. Indeed, Haydar has received two medals from the orthodox patriarch of Damascus and Antioch, and from the other end of the Christian world, a medal from Pope John 223rd.

Jawdat Hydar stands in front of us as a **bridge** between East and West, the towns are meeting in the vastness of the English language casing winds and wounds from our land; also a centennial bridge between the romantic age of poetry and modern times, a bridge between human values and man’s deconstruction, between the most hopeful dreams and the cruelty of fatality in the living society reality.

Likewise, this competition is meant to act as a **bridge** between generations inviting young students, to meet their elderly; for

'human nature being what it is 'and his aspirations being the same since the dawn of recorded times, then some answers for today may be found in yesterday's poetry, in the truth and beauty that live for ever.

AMAL DIBO
AUB AMLP, Dec 4 2008

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Two of them stand today at the particularly privileged event, Jwada Haidar (1905-2000) and Anis Mahdavi (1933-1997), 20 years his senior, both were raised in the spirit of AUB and committed to a continuous learning and theoretical human and cultural activity.

As a member of the jury for the literary competition organized by the Jwada Haidar Foundation, speaking on behalf of the Anis Mahdavi program in literature, one is led to appreciate a number of distinguished features they hold in common, at least in part, of which stands poetry epitomizing the harmony of the individual and contributing to the broader political and cultural framework of society.