

Opening Remarks

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On the occasion of the Third Anniversary of the Passing of the Lebanese poet Jawdat Haydar, I wish to extend a warm welcome to you and to ask you to join the Lebanese American University and the Friends of Jawdat Haydar in this tribute to a unique poet and intellectual. Jawdat Haydar has contributed to world literature by publishing four volumes of poetry in English: *Voices* in 1980, *Echoes* in 1989, *Shadows* in 1998 and *101 Selected Poems* at age 101. His romantic attachment to nature is manifested in the vast majority of his lyrical and contemplative poems, as well as in the poems he addressed to the Lebanese Mahjar poets and writers such as Gibran Khalil Gibran and Michael Nuaimy as well as the English romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron. Nevertheless, Haydar's attachment to nature should not be considered as an escapist attempt to shy away from contemporary issues. In his poetry, he is explicit about his aversion and anger at abuses of the earth's natural resources that have polluted the world and caused irrecoverable and irreversible damage. Haydar is an outspoken environmentalist who refused, to use his own words, to "scratch nature" and let it "bleed". In our own time of environmental crises, his poetry has a unique capacity to restore our attention to our environment in its imperiled state. And, as we take heed, we may well become better managers of the earth. His romanticism is not the result of a sweepingly misanthropic hatred of civilization, rather it is

deeply and profoundly about the possibility that one can make a better world.

In addition to writing, Haydar has been an active member of Lebanon's cultural community. He organized the return of the statue of poet Khalil Moutran to Baalbeck and funded a group called "Oasis of Literature in the Beqaa," which contributed to the revival of interest in poetry in post-war Lebanon. Furthermore, his vast humanitarian work won him a papal medal from Pope John XXIII. He was a lover of nature who loved the land he tread upon. This was his way of expressing his love for the homeland, his version of nationalism that called for love rather than hate, dialogue rather than discord, peaceful co-existence rather than armed conflict. Jawdat Haydar strongly believed in the power of poetry to change the world.