

LAU pays tribute to Lebanese poet Jawdat Haydar

The Lebanese American University (LAU) and the Friends of Jawdat Haydar paid tribute to Lebanese poet Jawdat Haydar in LAU on December 4, on the occasion of the third memorial lecture since the poet's passing in 2006.

Dr. John Munro related his first encounter with Haydar. Munro, a professor of comparative literature at the American University of Beirut at the time, was more interested in conversing with Haydar about the more pertinent political issues of the time. Haydar, on the other hand, saw no topic more worthy than that of poetry. "For Jawdat, poetry was not simply playing with words, a verbal game. It was the distillation of life with all its complexities into language, which was evocative, forceful and illuminating," Munro explained.

"He believed in the power of poetry to change the world," said Dr. Samira Aghacy, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences. "For Jawdat as for the Romantic poets, as for Gibran, the poet's mission was to express thoughts 'which lie too deep for tears...' He [the poet] should be its moral arbiter, inspiring people to lead a better life," continued Monroe.

As such, Haydar's poetry was not withdrawn but engaged, strongly advocating for such issues as women's rights, non-violence and environmentalism. In his poem "Never Scratch Nature to Bleed," sculpted in stone at the Jawdat Haydar Square in Baalbek, the poet writes, "Never scratch nature to bleed and react, for the falling blood is nothing but bane." He concludes urging man to "be a hand in glove with nature," otherwise man will bring the end of man.

Commenting on these verses, Dr. Joseph Jabbra, President of LAU stated, "To me his major contribution lies in the treasure of his English and Arabic poetry."

Mr. Jamil Mroue reminded that Haydar himself was an "improbable poet," having come to poetry from an extensive career in business with the Iraq Petroleum Company. Poetry came later both to the poet and to Mroue's acquaintance with Haydar, whom he perceived as "a telescope of time." Having met the poet after he had retired in his hometown, Baalbek, where he spent the rest of his years until age 101, Mroue was intrigued. "He represented the eighth pillar of Baalbek to me. I wanted to discover how this pillar moved," he said.

In probing into the themes addressed in Haydar's poetry including humanism, patriotism, and a democratic secular vision for Lebanon, Mroue concludes, "We have in Jawdat Haydar a reason to regenerate." On behalf of the Friends of Jawdat Haydar, he therefore hoped that Haydar's poetry would continue to be analyzed and used as a "corner for a gathering of thought."

Dr. May Maalouf from the Lebanese University invited literary academics to investigate Haydar's work more closely. She warned against the easy categorization of Haydar's verse into the Romantic or Victorian tradition, calling for a more serious literary criticism of his works. Haydar is the author of four poetry anthologies: *Voices* (1980), *Echoes* (1989), *Shadows* (1998) and *101 Selected Poems* (2006), which he published at the age of 101.