

Essay Competition Honors Arab World's 'Prince of Poets'

A year has passed since Jawdat Haydar, named the "Prince of Poets" by the Arab League, died in Lebanon at the advanced age of 102 and the AUB Department of English Language and Literature and the Anis K. Makdisi Program in Literature announced the Jawdat Haydar Essay Competition to AUB students.

Haydar belongs to a long tradition of Lebanese poets who composed their verse in English, including Gibran Khalil Gibran and Amin Rihani. On December 4 to honor him in a ceremony devoted to his life and work at Unesco Palace, the three winners of this year's student essay competition were announced, with the prizes of money going to Diala Kabbara from the University of Balamand, Maya Sfeir from the Lebanese University, and Nayiri Kalayjian from Haigazian University.

The contest, sponsored by the Committee of the Friends of Jawdat Haydar, sought to recognize the "students' creative skills in thought and expression" as conveyed in the English language in a maximum of five thousand-words. According

to Sirène Harb, Assistant Professor of English and American Literature, who represented AUB on the selection committee, the students' entries in general dealt with the notions of memory, time, eternity, and idealism in Haydar's works. Other entries discussed his poems from a comparative perspective, establishing links between his works and those of other poets.

In addition to Harb, the jury panel included representatives from each of Haigazian University, the Lebanese University, the University of Balamand, the Lebanese American University, the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, and Beirut Arab University.

Haydar was born just after the turn of the century to a family of wealthy Baalbeki landowners and assorted intellectuals. He attended Beirut's International College, pursued his university studies in the U.S, graduated from North Texas State University with a degree in education, and returned to Lebanon in 1928. Haydar wrote his poems in English until the death of his wife in 1982, at which point he began composing in

Arabic. He is often credited with the revival of Lebanese literature after the 1975-1990 civil war.

Haydar's work is collected in four English-language anthologies: *Voices*, published in 1980; *Echoes*, in 1986; *Shadows*, in 1999; and *101 Selected Poems*, published in 2006. Haydar's books tackle everything from the parallel lives of an individual and a nation to the sociological dilemmas of mankind and the environmental problems of an unpredictable century. He blended East and West with great dexterity in his poetry. Clearly influenced by the likes of John Keats, Lord Byron, William Wordsworth, and Gibran Khalil Gibran, Haydar used poetry to purge personal anguish, such as the death of his only son, as well as to express collective anxiety, such as the Lebanese web of hatred and distrust spun by fifteen years of internecine violence.