Jawdat Haydar's Poetic Legacy

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Issues of Modernity, Belonging, Language, and Transcendence

Edited by

Mario Kozah

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"That's why we look the hand of might to see
The veins streams of light glowing in the sky
A rainbow with colours of piety
A signal of truth for those who deny."

"Mahatma Gandhi"
Jawdat Haydar

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FOREWORD

I am sad not to have been able to attend the 2013 international conference dedicated to Jawdat Haydar. Not being blessed with the centenarian poet's robust genes, I have been forced to recognize that for some of us, age does sometimes inhibit one's best intentions. Nevertheless, I am grateful to the conference's organizing committee for allowing me to say a few introductory words by proxy, because I very much value the opportunity to record my appreciation of a man I greatly admired.

I cannot claim to have known Jawdat Haydar well but I knew him well enough to recognize that he was a truly exceptional man. How frequently do we come across men of action who are also accomplished poets? How often do we meet men who have had successful careers in the workaday world and yet have managed to retain a clear-eyed awareness of life's manifold complexities? In short, what made Jawdat Haydar so exceptional was his multi-faceted personality. He was simultaneously an active participant in our busy material world but also an acute observer of it. He was both practical and philosophical. He was a man of the world yet also above it.

And then, of course, there is his poetry. Jawdat felt strongly about the power of poetry to provide inspiration and insight into the human condition. Therefore, not surprisingly, like the man himself, his writings range across all aspects of life. His poetry is reflective yet passionate, inspirational without being strident. Clearly, he owed an aesthetic debt to the English Romantic poets, notably Coleridge and Wordsworth, who believed that great poetry came from an overflow of powerful feeling recollected in tranquillity. And there is no mistaking the powerful feeling that lay behind Jawdat's poetry. He felt strongly about a great many things. Yet, his voice is quietly authoritative rather than obtrusive; it is the voice of a man who has seen so much but is still able to derive solace from the natural world, viewing it with silent wonder. His poetry is straightforward, direct, without seeming naïve. One feels that the emotions he describes are the product of genuine experience rather than the constructs of the poetic imagination. His poetry is personal without being sentimental. It is essentially the reflections of a sensitive yet worldly man who has lived a rich but sometimes difficult life from which he has emerged not just morally unscathed but ennobled. His poetry is the

reflection of not just a will to survive but a determination to come to terms with it and squeeze from it whatever lessons there are to be learnt. Jawdat's poetry is not just interesting in its own right but it also impresses as the voice of a wise and tolerant man, who had brooded over life and felt the need to pass on what he had learnt.

To make use of that over-used phrase, Jawdat Haydar was truly a man for all seasons. He was also a man "of" all seasons, whose poetry reflects the concerns of both young and old: hence his universal appeal. The Victorian dramatist and wit, Oscar Wilde, best known for his comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, said enigmatically that youth was wasted on the young, meaning that during our most vital years we rarely use our energies wisely. One could also say that age is wasted on the old, because without the vigor of youth, what use is the wisdom that comes with age if we lack the force to use it? Occasionally, however, we come across those who seem to have been able to embrace the virtues of both youth and age throughout their lives. Jawdat Haydar was such a man. He tempered youthful idealism with common sense and in his later years spoke wisely with passionate conviction.

Jawdat Haydar lived during a period governed by the intellectual importance of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, two men who revolutionized our thinking about society and ourselves. Politically, he grew up in an environment dominated initially by the Ottomans before witnessing the emergence of Arab nationalism, the French occupation of Lebanon, the travails of World War II, the emergence of regional democracy and the destructive force of Lebanon's recent civil war. Haydar reflects on these shaping forces but refuses to be seduced unthinkingly by flawed, simplistic visions, whether economic, psychological or political. He was cautious about embracing the views of others unless he could prove them on his pulses. To quote the Victorian essayist and poet, Matthew Arnold, Haydar "viewed life steadily and saw it whole." This meant that when Haydar spoke out, he spoke with heartfelt conviction rather than engaged in a display of intellectual virtuosity. Few among the movers and shakers of his time appear to have impressed him. In fact only one figure seems to have captured his imagination: Mahatma Ghandi, whose philosophy of non-violence exercised considerable appeal.

Haydar's basic philosophy was simple. Fortified with a firm belief in the traditional values of courage in the face of adversity, patriotism, self-respect, love for one's family and friends, respect for one's community and the environment, simple common sense; and love of an all-embracing God; Jawdat's vision was refreshingly direct. Holding firm to these values

which transcend time and nationhood, he wrote poetry that has a perennial appeal.

The details of Jawdat's eventful life may be readily summarized. He was born in Baalbek in 1905 during the Ottoman occupation to a family of patriotic Lebanese, whose nationalist activities placed them at odds with their Turkish overlords. In fact, Jawdat's older brother, Rustum, who played an influential role in Jawdat's early life, was particularly active in Arab nationalist circles, being co-founder of the Paris-based, Arab nationalist society al-Fatat. Later, Rustum became a confidant and counselor to Faisal Ibn Hussein, later King Faisal I of Iraq. It was inevitable that a family so dedicated to the Arab nationalist cause would run afoul of the Ottoman authorities, who eventually forced the family into exile, in Anatolia. However, Jawdat, though still only a child, was left behind in Lebanon to take care of his ailing mother but joined his parents some time later. Eventually, in 1917, the family was allowed to return home, where Jawdat received his early education, first at a Christian missionary school in the Bekaa but later at the Syrian Protestant College. There he excelled as a student and participated in a range of extra-curricular activities, all the time harboring a desire to further his studies in the United States.

At first, it seemed that his dream would remain unfulfilled. Encouraged by his elder brother, Rustum Haydar, who had studied at the Sorbonne, Jawdat was sent off to study in France. However, a fortuitous encounter with the wife of an American diplomat in Lyon enabled him to obtain a visa which allowed Jawdat to study for a bachelor's degree in education and agriculture at the University of North Texas. After graduation, he returned to the Middle East and served first as an educator in Lebanon and Palestine before being appointed to a senior administrative position with the Iraqi Petroleum Company. Later he became a businessman and farmer. And of course for most of this time he wrote poetry.

Because Haydar was a Lebanese poet who wrote mostly in English and lived for an extended period in the United States, he is often grouped unthinkingly with the so-called "Mahjar" poets, that is to say with the likes of other Lebanese exiles such as Kahlil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy and Ameen Rihani. To label him thus is misleading. Unlike his perhaps better known compatriots, Jawdat's exile in America appears to have been a more positive experience than theirs and while he may have yearned for home, he was not repelled by what Gibran called a "civilization that runs on wheels." On the contrary, he admired America's dynamism and openness and on a more practical level, anticipated utilizing the agricultural theory and methods he had learned in Texas in the Bekaa

when he returned home. More importantly, he envisaged promoting what he perceived to be the cardinal American virtues of freedom, democracy and impartial justice in his homeland, now no longer dominated by the Ottomans but subject to the oppressive authority of the French mandate.

Haydar's years in "dear old Texas," as he called it, made a deep impression on him. He refers to his stay there on a number of occasions, always with great affection. He found his physical environment congenial. One may only speculate what the response of the Mahjar poets would have been to the United States if they had lived under the broad, open skies of the "Lone Star State" rather than in a New York ghetto. And Haydar evidently made American friends there. Photographs of him taken at the time show an engaging young man in the company of people his own age, clearly at ease with himself and his surroundings. In fact, Haydar has provided us with ample written testimony of his love for Texas, as in "Sweet Home," included in his collection called *Echoes*:

> Yes those days of old were resplendent and fair,
> When nigh the sycamores with dear Jack and Lee
> I jovially rallied played and learned to care
> For the land of the real the land of the free.

But for all of Haydar's love for Texas, it was Lebanon that claimed his soul. And like the Mahjar poets, it was not just the physical beauty of Lebanon that captivated him but its history and its spiritual associations as well. Haydar's most forceful expression of his love for both Texas and his native Lebanon is found in one of his most successful poems. Apart from the poem's content, it is also significant in that it reminds us of Haydar's literary debt to the American poet Robert Frost whom Haydar had (accidentally) met on a train journey during his early years in America. As in Frost's most characteristic verse, Haydar's poem begins with a simple rural image, from which he derives an insight into the human condition. The poem is untitled but it begins "A gunman shooting fox leaping behind a ridge of stone." This simple image evokes a nostalgic reverie in which Haydar's affection for both America and Lebanon is clearly interfused: "Texas of the Alamo the citadel of the brave / My dreamland of youth and love bygone / Still a memory burning torch in my heart" and "This paradise found on these Lebanese shores." The poem's closing lines aptly summarize how both Texas and Lebanon exerted a powerful force over Haydar's spirit, the two places reinforcing Haydar's affection for each other:

Ah! The birds the birds caving wings cracked away
And I was saddened much of the which as such
Being left alone a look behind a dream ahead
Floating on the twining current of my mind
Over Denton my old home and alma mater
I pulled down a breath gravity borne to the ground
Where long thought images clustered around
With a silent rhythm of speech in their eyes
Tears, tears, tears and tethered tongues
With them forever I longed to be to stay
But the Arabian flying carpet of the wind was ready
When I thought of the Lebanon far away
And the gunman shooting fox leaping behind a ridge of stone.

Unlike the Mahjar writers, whose preference for East over West is clearly apparent, though Gibran and Rihani, in particular, tried their best to do justice to both worlds, Haydar's vision is genuinely holistic. He recognized the virtues of both East and West and sought to rise above a partial preference for either. When the United States began to pursue a foreign policy in the Middle East which Haydar believed betrayed America's most sacred principles, he spoke out against the "Forlorn House," as he called the White House. And when he witnessed the destruction of his beloved Lebanon during the Civil War, he spoke out with equal vehemence, as in "Brothers," calling upon all Lebanese to unite to save their country:

Brothers why be like a moon on the wane
Ever beating the bolted door in vain
Hence why not unite again to stand 'gain
Prideful of your Lebanese cultured vein

Just as Haydar sought peace within and among nations, so he excoriated those who would destroy the sacred bond which should exist between Man and his environment. This was the theme of one of his best known poems, "Never Scratch Nature to Bleed and React":

We chariot to school to learn to read and write
Not to skin nature and rise to the sky
Not to work for fame by using dyn'mite
Pollute the world and by pollution die.

Folks awake and be aware of the reek
The death like hills of the chemical lees

Quick shut the flood gates of poison and seek
To stop being charioted to hades

Never scratch nature to bleed and react
For the falling blood is nothing but bane
'Tis not a vision fancied but a fact
Since we've polluted the air and the main

Why not be a hand in glove with nature
To've a serene and happy future

In short, Haydar's vision was all-embracing, all inclusive, genuinely holistic. And in portraying his vision, he drew upon a variety of images from both East and West. One is as likely to hear the call of the muezzin in his poetry as church bells. He admired the great classical writers of Greece and Rome, no less than those of his own cultural heritage. His willingness to cross cultural boundaries is also demonstrated by his enthusiasm for the poetry of the English Romantic poets (particularly Wordsworth), which rivals his fondness for his Lebanese compatriots, Mikhail Naimy, Kahlil Gibran and Ameen Rihani.

Haydar believed that poetry was the most powerful medium of expression because he believed it encapsulated the fullness of human experience, both material and spiritual, in a way that no other medium could. Haydar is quite explicit about this. He says in some brief notes that preface his *101 Selected Poems*, his last published volume of verse, that literature is like a "forest of thoughts," from which grow "trunks of culture." More specifically, he singles out poetry as the perfect medium for one's deepest thoughts, in a poem called "Orpheus," which serves as an introduction to the same volume.

Orpheus pull out the strings of my heart
And stretch them head to bottom on your lyre;
Tighten them, tune them and please quickly start
The yearning melodies of my desire.

Thanks Orpheus, now let me hear the strain
Of the tuneful Nine sent across the years
The soft rhythm within the roar of the main
The calm airs within the gales of the spheres.

Have the strings wire deciphered notes to tell
The secret of this being having no end

Kindle the notes, feed the fire, make it swell,
Burn the world with music to comprehend

The meaning of this ecstasy is in the lay,
Since time was born out of time yesterday.

So strongly did Haydar believe in the comprehensive power of poetry to instruct and inspire that in his later years he made great efforts to promote literature as a creative force in Lebanon. Thus he was prominent in creating an organization called *Wahat al-Adab*, Oasis of Literature, which was designed to support and encourage the study and writing of literature in the Bekaa Valley. Among their activities was the refurbishment of the statue of Khalil Moutran, another well-known writer from the Bekaa, which now stands at the entrance to Baalbek.

It was particularly appropriate that Jawdat should have been in the forefront of this venture, as Khalil Moutran was similar to Haydar in many ways. Like Jawdat he was educated in a Christian school and like Jawdat went on to combine the lives of businessman, writer and public servant. He was a co-founder of the Bank Misr in Cairo, a journalist with *al-Ahram*, wrote poetry and translated Shakespeare into Arabic. In later life he also worked for the Egyptian Agricultural Workers Syndicate. Most importantly, he was proud to be known as a *Shaer al-Qutrayn*, a "bridge between cultures" in much the same way as Jawdat was, though Jawdat, a modest man, would have hesitated to have called himself thus.

Though the "bridge between cultures" metaphor certainly highlights one aspect of Haydar's literary reputation, that alone does not justify our spending time talking about him at an international conference. More importantly, Jawdat Haydar stands out as a man of peace, in the fullest sense of the word. His poetic vision embraced the whole of mankind and all aspects of human endeavor. He believed Man should live in harmony with his environment. He believed that human beings had an obligation to act not just as responsible citizens, nor even as peaceful members of the international community but in all aspects of life. As Jawdat never tired of reminding his listeners, human beings should behave as respectful participants in a world order which acknowledged a common obligation to cherish life in all its forms. That was his message and while we are here today to acknowledge the poetic legacy of a truly remarkable man, we should also seek to live in his spirit for our mutual well-being and survival.

This, in my opinion, is what justifies keeping the memory of Jawdat Haydar alive. His message is as relevant today as ever it was; his significance is timeless. He also reminds us of a Lebanon which we would

all like it to be: an amalgam of different kinds of people living together in harmony. It is often said that Lebanon is the gateway between East and West but this handy metaphor fails to do justice to the immensely fertile land that lies between: a land that has absorbed influences from both East and West but has made them uniquely its own. In that sense, Jawdat Haydar symbolizes what it means to be a true Lebanese and as such he should be assured of his rightful place in the cultural history of his native land.

I am proud to have known Jawdat Haydar and I am proud to share in commemorating the life and poetry of a truly great man.

John Munro

INTRODUCTION

MARIO KOZAH

Jawdat Haydar was born in Baalbek in 1905. At that time, much of the Middle East was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, whose severe policies had forced thousands of Arabs to flee the region. Haydar's family was no exception especially since it was actively engaged in resisting the Ottomans. As a result of their activism, Jamal Pasha, the regional governor of the Ottomans, decreed that they be exiled to Anatolia. This punitive act deeply affected Haydar's childhood since he was the only family member to be left behind by his mother's side in Baalbek. Following the death of his mother, the young Haydar had only one option: to become an exile himself and join the rest of his family in Anatolia. In his autobiography, Haydar described the despair he felt during his childhood years: "I felt bitterness in my heart as I was longing for my exiled father and siblings… my mother died… I felt a terrible loneliness."[1] At the age of eight he found himself struggling to survive in a strange land with no money, food, or any form of support. It is these harsh events he endured during his childhood and the bitter experience of exile that shaped much of his poetry, steeped as it is with deep insights into the nature of human suffering.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Haydar's family returned to Mandate Lebanon and the young Haydar pursued his studies, with a particular interest in the English language, under the tutorship of the Lebanese poet Adib Farhat. He was soon admitted to the American University of Beirut from which he graduated in 1923. During his years at the University, he excelled in English, for which he had an unparalleled enthusiasm: "There is something about the English language I can't quite explain. It has a kind of facility that I love… Maybe it's because the teachers who taught me English were so professional and explained poetry in such a way that I had to love it."[2] In 1925, Haydar pursued his studies in Agriculture and later in Education at North Texas University, in the United States. It is during these years in the United States that he nurtured his passion for poetry and developed his writing abilities. His first poem

was dedicated to his teacher, Miss Cleveland, who after reading it declared: "A poet is born."[3] The first lines read as follows:

> Sweet be not proud of thine fair and liquid eyes
> Which sparkle like a twin of stars in their skies
> The sun goes down then he doth rise
> So forget not yet…[4]

This first successful attempt encouraged Haydar to continue writing poems in English. In 1928, after completing his studies in Education in the United States, he decided to return home. However, he was denied a Lebanese passport because he was considered to be Turkish.[5] It was only a number of months after this remarkable turn of events that he was finally able to return to his beloved country accompanied by feelings of bitterness about being stripped of his Lebanese nationality and having to live in exile for a second time in his early life.

In Lebanon Haydar worked in various sectors, notably in education, business and politics. Yet he never relinquished his love for poetry and he continued to write despite his busy schedule until he finally decided to devote himself completely to poetry in 1960. His poetic achievements culminated in the publication of four collections of poems: *Voices*,[6] *Echoes*,[7] *Shadows*,[8] and *101 Selected Poems*.[9] These volumes propelled him to fame and eventually earned him the appellation "The Shakespeare of the Arabs,"[10] bestowed on him by an American critic.

In 2002, Haydar published his autobiography *Mishwār al-'Umr* ("Life's Journey"), which provided deeper insight into his life and mind. In it Haydar described the difficulties of growing up during Ottoman rule. He also acknowledged that the hardships of forced exile helped him to develop within himself the character of a survivor which would later impact his personal life and poems.[11] The autobiography includes other important sections which describe the blending of Arabic and English cultures in Haydar's poetry. In this respect, the Lebanese literary figure Ibrahim Haydar stated that Jawdat Haydar represented "the Arab soul in English literature."[12] For a brief period after the death of his son Bassam, Haydar wrote poetry in Arabic, but finally admitted that the English language opened wider horizons for self-expression than the Arabic language did.[13] Furthermore, he regretted the state of stagnation of the Arabic language and that poets "write and recite poetry in a language which has not evolved for twelve centuries."[14]

The life achievements and literary works of Haydar have always received a great deal of attention from the Western and Arab press, most notably in Lebanon. *The Daily Star*, *al-Seyasa*, *The Jordan Times* and

other newspapers regularly kept track of Haydar's poetic activities and interviewed him on several occasions. These interviews shed light on many central issues in Haydar's writings such as his attitude towards the language of poetry, the manner in which he considered himself to be culturally hybrid, the authors he read in his youth and his opinion on different social, political, and literary matters.

In an interview with Ossama Khairallah, he acknowledged that English is his "linguistic exile."[15] He briefly explained why he has always felt at ease when expressing himself in a language that was not his native one: "As I was the only Arab studying in Dallas at that time, I did not have the opportunity to speak Arabic during the years I spent in the United States… I was never able to use my native tongue as a guide for my creativity…"[16] The "linguistic exile" which he referred to may indeed be the reason behind his sense of alienation in some of his poems. Haydar always considered his poetry as fusing two cultures: "Despite their global direction, my English poems are rooted in my origin as an Arab Eastern man who feels the hardships of his nation and suffers with it deep inside."[17]

Haydar expressed his delight that his poetry was considered universal and not limited to a specific time and place.[18] He also believed that the soul could reach beyond human society, culture and thought. Haydar never relinquished his Arab identity by writing his poems in English. On the contrary, his poems reveal his deep love for his country often calling for all Lebanese people divided and in the throes of the Civil War to unite:

> Brothers why be like a moon on the wane
> Ever beating the bolted door in vain
> Hence why not unite again to stand 'gain
> Prideful of your Lebanese cultured vein[19]

Haydar was also a firm supporter of Lebanese nationalism and was proud of his Lebanese identity. In "The Lebanese People," for instance, he called upon his countrymen to regain their dignity through their united efforts:

> The blade of your unity and reason
> The blade of your clever diplomacy
> The sharp blade so made to defeat treason
> Within the walls of your democracy.[20]

In all four of his published collections of poems, Haydar unceasingly expressed his deep love for Lebanon, its landscape, and its cultural and literary heritage. His pride in his Lebanese roots is an important aspect of his poetry that is unambiguously expressed in his description of Lebanon

as "the heart of the world."[21] However, given his interaction with and deep understanding of Western civilisation, his cultural experience can be said to be binary. Thus, Arab and Western cultures converge in his poetry, a very convenient intermingling since it was never Haydar's purpose to limit himself to a single culture or defined category. Once, when he was asked whether he was Arab or American, Haydar vehemently replied: "It doesn't matter."[22]

Haydar's biographical details are echoed in the universalism of his poetry that is similarly not restricted to a specific time or place. *Mishwār al-'Umr* describes his travels to several parts of the world, including Turkey, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, France, the United States and Great Britain. John Munro insightfully observes that "[Haydar] may write of Texas, Palestine, of Napoleon or De Gaulle, but in each case his concern is less with these places and people as they are than their importance in relation to civilization and humanity."[23] Haydar was, in fact, engaged in the expression of universal experience and aspired to liberate his verses from temporal and spatial restrictions.

Haydar wrote poetry which reflected the duality of his cultural identity. This first came to the fore when the Lebanese consul in the United States refused to grant him a passport to enter Lebanon because he was considered to be Turkish. Haydar insisted that he was Lebanese, born of Lebanese parents.[24] His loyalty to his Lebanese cultural and national identity is clearly illustrated in the many poems he wrote in defence of his country from injustice and in describing the beauty of its unparalleled landscapes. However, he was also open to Western Anglo-American culture fully immersing himself in it during his stay in the United States in the 1920s. Although Lebanon was under the French mandate, the English language and American culture were offered in numerous Lebanese schools and colleges, the result of the presence of American and British missionaries. Haydar, who pursued his education at the American University of Beirut, was thus exposed to Anglo-American culture during his formative years. In the words of George Antonius: "[E]ven the Americans who had hitherto led the field in reviving the resources of Arabic took the line of least resistance and, about 1880, made English the medium of instruction in the Syrian Protestant College . . . a generation grew up who felt more at home in French, English or Russian than in their mother Arabic."[25]

In Texas Haydar was introduced to poetry by one of his American professors.[26] Haydar began to write poetry in English a language that he considered provided him with a better vehicle for the expression of his ideas and thoughts than Arabic. He was Lebanese in emotion, but English

in expression. According to him, his dual Lebanese and American cultural identity was never a source of inner conflict. Rather, well aware of this dual identity he never struggled to resolve it but preferred to celebrate this harmonious hybridity through his poetry. In an interview, Haydar stated: "I am one of the pacifiers in the world… Why should we fight? Why should I go to heaven from East and the other from West?"[27] He often eulogized the splendour of his Lebanese homeland as in his poem "Lebanon":

> The deep is rising, the ships heading east
> The green mountains capped with snow behind
> Perhaps the eye of an artist possessed
> May contain such a paradise in mind.[28]

Yet despite the fact that Lebanon was his place of birth, he recalled Texas with deep nostalgia also referring to it as "My dreamland of youth and love bygone / Still a memory burning torch in my heart."[29] Having lived there for nearly three years he came to consider it as home. In an interview, he declared: "My years at North Texas are among my cherished days and moments. After all these years I consider it home. I'll never forget the man in the registrar's office who was generous enough to lend me some money to start my life in the new world and, more importantly, to help me achieve my dream."[30] In his poem "Sweet Home" he wrote:

> Oh! no more never more those homely sunsets,
> No more never more those song sparrows to hear;
> Ah! for the Queen moon to take me where she sets
> On the horizon in old Texas, the dear.[31]

Commenting on his cultural hybridity, Ica Wahbeh stated: "[Haydar], in his fine collection of poetry, grants us the privilege of sharing with him the intellectual heritage of those Lebanese who feel as much at home in the American cultural tradition as in their own."[32] Not only did Haydar look back on his American years with nostalgia, but he also expressed his admiration for American values. The United States represented for him "national pride" and "integrity" and it respected "the rights of man in such a dignity."[33] Haydar bore the hope that the Lebanese people could also live by these principles in order that they might "teach those gate-crashers to understand / The meaning of our brotherhood and land."[34] Thus, instead of succumbing to the process of fragmentation that most hybrid writers fall prey to, Haydar sought to integrate and unite his cultural identities into one poetic persona.

When he was asked about the manner by which he blended Arab and American culture in one poetic persona, Haydar replied:

> Despite its international course, the poetry I write in English is steeped in my roots as an Eastern and Arab man who feels the hardships of his nation and suffers deeply with it. I wrote a lot about and for it, and it is a pleasure for me to know that my poetry is characterized by its universalism and distinguished by the fact that it does not belong to any particular place or time.[35]

Haydar's profound love for his homeland is reflected in his feelings of relief and joy at finally settling down in Lebanon: "After a five-year absence, I desperately need to smell the scent of my country, breathe its air and see my family, my countrymen, and everything that belongs to my country: its sand, rocks, hills and trees."[36] He was a man who was deeply enamoured with the beauty of his country as a youth, yet woke up in 1975 to horrific scenes of destruction and the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. John Munro considered him to be "a true patriot and genuine lover of his country [who] has reacted to the anarchy and destruction he [saw] everywhere around him with stoical fortitude."[37] Haydar vehemently opposed the terrible disfigurement of his country and lamented the loss of its beautiful nature so ravaged by scavengers. Observing the Lebanese condition, Haydar made a heartfelt call for change in the following lines from "Brothers":

> Brothers why be like a moon on the wane
> Ever beating the bolted door in vain
> Hence why not unite again to stand 'gain
> Prideful of your Lebanese cultured vein[38]

Haydar sought consolation from the tragedy of the Civil War by retreating to what remained of Lebanon's nature:

> That was the time of my coffee outside
> Sitting alone; under the banyan tree
> ……
> The wind through the leaves made a swishing sound
> Like snakes in front of gleaners gliding free
> I listened well and presumed to have found
> That the trees have a breath like you and me;[39]

In his despair at the ubiquitous sights and sounds of death, Haydar found solace in the living world of nature, a clear indication of his rejection of

the destruction wrought by the Civil War in Lebanon and his wish that his country regain its previous prestigious status as "the heart of the world."[40]

For Haydar, poetry is "a statue standing on the pedestal of our imagination gazing at the universe dreaming of a solution of its perplexities."[41] Haydar undoubtedly contemplated existence and the meaning of life and death in many of his poems, such as in "Lines": "What's nothingness but a nothing of nothing / And the infinite but a limitless space? / …We are all within the infinite a thing."[42] Yet despite this dominant characteristic Haydar's poetry remains fully engaged in the world addressing pressing contemporary issues especially wars, pollution, and political, as well as moral, corruption. He encouraged others to write poetry that issues from their imagination, the depth of their feelings, and the power of their insight, but all the while to stay true to the realities of the world. He also emphasized the role of the poet as a defender of civilisation, a messenger who can transport a message of knowledge to this world from another. For him, a true poet should openly share his ideas and should neither be selfish nor misleading. Haydar strove to attain these same expectations he describes of what a poet should be:

> Since I started reading poetry I began to feel that the poet might be the medium between nature and the world, having the power to verify through his creative faculties its characteristics into images bearing the features of beauty, love, passion, pain, despair and worry. He can cup the wings of his mind to rise in thought to the upper heights of the universe to drill wells of knowledge and discover means for the promotion of our civilization. 'Tis most ennobling of a poet to dedicate gratis his heirloom of print to be shared by those inhabitants of the earth who care for such a wealth of thoughts which I consider to be the genuine furnace where the problems of life melt into the sweetness of reality.[43]

From his first successful attempt at writing poetry as a student, to the day he published his last collection of poems, a period of eighty years, Haydar never lifted pen from paper. In an interview, he described his daily routine: "I have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and then I begin to think deeply about subjects. So, I get up quickly, write them down and develop them during the day."[44] On the subject of the philosophical nature of his poetry, he stated: "There's a philosophical quietude in my poems, as well as an attempt to approach a spiritual and meditative life. However, I am not an adherent of escapism from reality or lounging in imagination because my aim is that my poetry reaches universalism…"[45]

Speaking of his influences, Haydar admitted that he had read a wide range of poems written by American, English, French and Arab writers, who inspired him to write the best possible poetry.[46] In his autobiography,

Haydar indicates that he was fluent in Arabic, Turkish and French, yet received his education in English. His schooling began at the Evangelical School, he then studied at the American University of Beirut before finally pursuing his higher education in North Texas State University.[47] When he published his first work of English poems of "the highest quality"[48] what attracted readers was "the universality of his themes, expressed through the details of his own life journey, the impressive choice of words and poetic structures, and the enchanting rhythm of his verse."[49] When asked about the reason behind his choice of English instead of Arabic, Haydar recalled his years as a youth admitting that English was his "linguistic exile"[50] owing to the fact that he was not exposed to Arabic for many years, particularly during his years in Turkey and education in the United States. Elsewhere, Haydar confessed: "I began thinking in English not in Arabic. It is easier to express myself in English."[51] Haydar found a certain unparalleled ease of expression in the English language: "There is something about the English language I can't quite explain. It has a kind of facility that I love."[52] Paradoxically, Haydar also indicated that "Writing in English is very hard because it is an irregular language."[53] Further acknowledging the challenges of writing in English, he added that poetry requires the careful construction of structures: "You have to build a poem, and the process is so difficult that one poem can sometimes take years to complete."[54]

Haydar's use of English enabled him to directly address the politically-influential Western nations through his poetry with the purpose of drawing their attention to the concerns of his homeland and the world's environmental problems. In "O World" he accuses the world of being indifferent to the suffering of his people during the Civil War:

> O World! our world has become a world of pain,
> Murder torture empty houses and despair;
> Our people herded slaughtered on hill and plain
> O world! is there no world in this world to care?[55]

Elsewhere, he conveyed his concern for the environmental effects of pollution in the world, emphasising the need for greater human responsibility:

> Everything that goes to excess is harmful;
> We have had enough of this brutality;
> We need more common sense to be more thoughtful
> Of the human race and its mortality.[56]

His call for a unified and morally responsible human race reveals Haydar's humanism and universalism as a poet belonging to and addressing the whole world. Indeed, he once admitted: "What first inspired me to write poetry was the beauty of nature and the diversity and mysteries of the world . . . Once I started writing I realized that through my work I can express my deep inner feelings of beauty, love, ambition, passion, pain, despair, loss and worry."[57] On several occasions in his poetry Haydar lamented the destruction of the beautiful nature of Lebanon and the spread of rack and ruin:

> Once a forest behind our fence
> Where the wood choppers hacked the wood
> And the dead trunks lay down on the ground
> As if they were soldiers killed
> During the civil wars
> In Lebanon, Nicaragua or Spain.
>
> That picture of the forest
> Is still hovering in my mind;
> Of the birds banished,
> Of their kingdom destroyed,
> By that cruel hand of man,[58]

Haydar's commitment to the preservation of nature was not limited to Lebanon, he also expressed his concern for environmental disasters throughout the world calling for a universal human awareness of the dangers of pollution:

> We chariot to school to learn to read and write
> Not to skin nature and rise to the sky
> Not to work for fame by using dyn'mite
> Pollute the world and by pollution die.[59]

A certain exemplary harmony exists between the poet and nature as he communicates and unites with it through shared feelings of sorrow and joy. In "Bereaved Birds Sorrow Like Men" in *Echoes*, for example, he describes feeling "lonely and lonesome"[60] and deciding to climb a hill, encounters a timid nightingale. They gaze at each other, then the poet compares the sorrow of birds with that of men:

> Thinking of man and bird who stay
> On this earth lassooed together
> One with skin and one plus feather
> Though at variance of strain and kind

They joy and grieve alike I find.
Thus wouldn't I be right to say then
That bereaved birds sorrow like men?[61]

Harmony between the human race and all of nature's creatures in this shared world requires communication and synchronization between both parties. In a similar manner, the poet "converses" with nature in many of his other poems with a personified Nature also offering him its words of wisdom on many occasions.

Like Haydar, this personified nature is somewhat reserved and does not reveal itself easily. As the poet sat down in his garden one night, a rosebud whispered: "Look the face of the moon the slopes / The shattered ugly spines of mountains high."[62] When the poet wonders about what to expect after death, the "yellow corn cob with a tassel spake: / 'Why argue about what's still in the blind?.'"[63] A lover of nature, Haydar opines that nature is a human's companion that is able to freely communicate thoughts and feelings, as well as offer consolation and understanding.

Haydar believed that God was present in nature reflected by the perfection of His creation. Contemplating "The Willow," the poet observed:

And the charm of the divine creation,
The perfection of the design ordained,
Of the shapes, up whirling in space, flashing
Rays of fire, protecting life by the flame.

A shrouded mystery of up and down,
Being the top secret of the willow,
Remains the voice uttered by the image,
Mirrored in the waves, talking in a dream.[64]

According to him, nature does not reveal its secrets to men who wish to acquire complete knowledge, thus emphasising nature's mysteriousness. One such instance is to be found in "The Green House of Creation" where the poet, wandering in a forest in a search to unlock the mystery of the origins of Man, comes face to face with "the deep unconquerable well of life."[65] After this encounter, the poet concludes:

"Why worry about a lost key
When the lock was never found,
For the deceptive hidden gate of mystery
Where origin growth and mutation
Will ever remain the hidden secret
In the green house of creation?"[66]

Haydar is often found contemplating the "beads of the past"[67] especially his early youth with tenderness and nostalgia. In "Yesterday," the poet passionately described his childhood years:

> When looking back upon the rosary of my memories
> Ah then! how beautiful to repeat then
> And how dearly I remember
> My childhood my school days
> The smile of my father the glad eye of my mother[68]

Again in "A Pensioner Made," the poet regrets the loss of his teenage years: "Oft I go dreaming of my early yesterdays, / Sailing on the seven seas of memory, / Until I feel living twice the teens of my days."[69] Not only does he recall the schooldays he spent in Lebanon, but also those vital formative years in Texas and the American friends he made there:

> Yes those days of old were resplendent and fair,
> When nigh the sycamores with dear Jack and Lee
> I jovially rallied played and learned to care
> For the land of the real the land of the free.[70]

In another nostalgic poem "Forget Not," Haydar longs for the days he spent with his wife who was no longer with him:

> Forget not the honey days, dear of yore,
> And the souvenirs with which they went by;
> Those cherished memories, sweet, are no more,
> For yester, darling, was heaven with thou nigh.[71]

Haydar's poems, then, present us with glimpses from his past that he recalls with deep emotion and that cumulatively offer the reader a psychological biography of the poet's life. His nostalgia for the past culminates in the present with contemplations on death. Nevertheless, Haydar's love of life, despite its injustices, did not lead him to regret the past or fear future death which he considered in these contemplations to be the natural end of all things including the world.

In "Bluff No More," he describes people passing away like autumn leaves whose legacy will be based on their good deeds or bad actions in life:

> All are gone within a lid shutting eye
> Falling Autumn leaves bearing ink each name;
> That's the film of life, all living will die
> And the ink will hence be read fame or shame.[72]

In addition to Haydar's recollection of the past in his poetry in order to recreate his most precious memories, the past is also used to promote the hope of a better future for Lebanon. The glorious image of Lebanon's past so often highlighted in Haydar's poems presses readers to envisage the real possibility that this past might be resurrected. His yearning for Lebanon's glorious past is directly related to his rejection of its shattered present. In "Beirut" this rejection is unequivocally articulated and reveals a poet desperately searching for the lost "Beirut of yesterday"[73] which was a hub of knowledge and a beacon of human values:

> The City that was keeping big with fate,
> The precursor of religious pride in the east,
> Where the origins of thought
> Opened the purdah of mind
> To teach the world
> The true meaning of brotherhood and love,
> Where is the Beirut of yesterday?[74]

Civil war Beirut had become a mass grave for the thousands of people who had died there. Haydar contrasts beautiful images of Lebanon with the horrors of the war within the same poem for poetical effect. "Our Hills on Fire" begins on "top of the Rawsha Rock"[75] with the description of a bird's feather falling from the sky, symbolic of "the touch of ecstasy"[76] and the "charm of living."[77] But this peaceful scene is suddenly overcome by the smell of the "stench of human skulls,"[78] the "rivers of blood meandering down,"[79] and the "alien bullets and the dynamite of hate."[80]

To inspire his readers Haydar proceeds to restore the prestigious image of his country by celebrating Lebanon's historical and cultural heritage with copious references to the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Greeks and the Arabs; to Amin Rihani, Gibran Kahlil Gibran, and Mikhail Naimy; and, of course, to Baalbeck, "the city / Of the gods,"[81] not to mention the majestic cedars, the nation's symbol. The following excerpt, taken from "The Black Corner," reveals the poet's undying hope that Lebanon would rise again from the ashes like the proverbial phoenix:

> Still lonely and silently contemplating
> When I heard the voice of Gibran:
> "Pity the nation divided into fragments
> Each fragment deeming itself a nation."
> The voice dwindled away and I went to sleep,
> Sleeping I dreamt that the Lebanese will rise again
> Like a phoenix from the ash by the wings