

Forward

I met the poet Mr. Jawdat R. Haydar about 20 years ago through my friend Siham Haydar El-Zein, his daughter, who brought some of his poetry to my attention. I read the manuscript for *Voices*, his first collection of poems, and was struck by its melancholic overtones, a reflection of the poet's philosophical view of life and, I suspect, an outcome of particular painful experiences the poet had gone through. What was fascinating to me about the collection was that it was written by a man who has not published anything before, yet the poems were of the highest quality. The universality of his themes, expressed through the details of his own life journey, the broadness of his perspective, the impressive choice of words and poetic structures, and the enchanting rhythm of his verse made me realize that he was a very capable poet with a mission. Like Gibran, Naimy, Rihani, and others before him who knew the East and experienced the West, Jawdat R. Haydar reflected the East-West blend in his poetry and came across as another strong voice for freedom and nationality. With him like with Robert Frost, the American poet whose poetry and personality he admired, "poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom." From the celebration of national causes and Arab unity as well as women in love in his early writings, Jawdat R. Haydar moved to issues and events that caused him distress and heartbreak, from the death of his wife and son to the slow death of his beloved country during 16 years of civil war. The creeping of old age did not slow the poet down; in fact, Haydar manages to write some of his best poems in his old age as this new collection of poems, *Shadows*, attests.

Although *Shadows* has a variety of themes covering the whole range of human experience, it remains dominated by a moving yearning for lost days and a philosophical attitude towards life and death.

How I long to saddle my horse and fly
Back over the tracks of life again
The age of my youth ere I age and die
Then O then! I'll love and be loved again
"The Wonder Man"

I took the liberty of showing the manuscript to two friends of mine at the American University of Sharjah, Professors Peter Fallon and Judith Caesar; both were fascinated with "the powerful and original sensibility of the poems." They were impressed also by the variety of themes and the threads of hope interspersed within the melancholic march of time and the approaching demise rings throughout many poems in the *Shadows* collection.

Fifty years ago I cried loud and now
I am crying louder for you to see how
We are approaching the cliff to fall down
Into the spare-non ocean where we drown
"It Is Wrong To Reduce Science Into Crime"

In another poem, the poet seems to lament man's inability to regenerate himself but his deep faith makes him accept the inevitable and hope for the best.

To keep our heels on a half measured
track Where we stop fall leaving only
a name Tis a dream to be a pho'nix
and live back Centuries of glory out of
the flame

Withal I bel'eve though empty is my hand
The earth perhaps will make me understand
" Perhaps"

The earth's message comes roaring in another poem composed by Haydar six months later celebrating Lord Byron; the unmistakable powerful message is that poetry and poets live forever.

What po'tic stones you've carved out of the wave
To have built your boulder rhymes of the sea
I trow that the Heav'ns that give giving gave
You the sapience of mind to write and be

Ever since, the world has written your name
On the wave that made the Oc'an of your fame.

"Byron"

The strong feelings for the Arab cause are obvious throughout. I haven't read more powerful and more expressive poetry than his recollections of what happened in Palestine where he directed Najah School.

I walked on the desert of time e'ery
where Not a tree, not a blossom, not
a stream, Noting but the barren sand
and despair And the im'ge of my
father in my dream.

My old father was killed at Deir Yassin My
mother, my sister were also slain
The world was blind but the blood I have seen
Gushing out from those dearest hearts again.

"From" A Child Forlon"

At the end of this short foreword, I find myself thinking of the great mind that dressed the eloquent content in beautiful rhythmic, rhyming verse without letting old age and the burdens of his life journey affect his creativity, originality and dedication to the cause of poetry_ And I recall William Wordsworth's eternal verses about poets who bring us truth and happiness.

Blessings be with them, and eternal
praise Who gave us nobler loves, and
nobler cares! The poets, who on earth
have made us heirs Of truth and pure
delight by heavenly lays.

Shadows comprises 51 poems ranging in topics from tributes to people the poet admired, be they great Arab and English poets or families or friends, to reminiscing about old youthful days, to celebrating the cause of freedom at all levels, and to philosophically contemplating about life and death. The collection traces Jawdat R. Haydar's life over a span of about 60 years reflecting the happy and sad times that he has experienced and showing how his philosophical temperament has helped him sail through and turned his rich experience into beautiful verses for people to enjoy reading and reflecting on. *Voices*, *Echoes*, and *Shadows* represent the poetic legacy of a great poet from Lebanon who cherishes freedom and human values and continues to enrich our lives with verses in English that compare favorably with some of the best poetry written in the language. Jawdat R. Haydar, called by many "The Shakespeare of the Arabs," projects in his poetry a fresh, rational perspective on the confusion of our lives and helps bring some order, vigor, and wisdom into these lives.

Kassim A. Shaaban,
Ph.D. Director
Center for English
Language Research and
Teaching
AUB