

Speech of Professor
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Co- Winner of the 1992 King Faisal International Prize for
Arabic Literature
(Translation into Arabic of Literary and Critical Studies)

*In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate
Thanks be to Allah, Peace and Prayers be upon his Messenger*

Your Royal Highnesses,
Distinguished Guests,
Gentlemen,

I am pleased that my efforts in the Translation of Literary and Critical Studies (into the Arabic Language) have met with so much appreciation in your great country, which is the cradle of Arabic and the protective castle of Islam.

The King Faisal International Prize for Arabic Literature means to many people, myself included, that Arabic Literature is no more closed onto itself, as it was in the dark ages. It is now resuming its international role expressing the ideals of the Arab Islamic civilisation in today's world. Communication among cultures never takes place by one party alone; we must try to know what others have (to say) if we want them to know what we have (to say). We do not seek out others' literature because we lack it. Indeed we have a great literary tradition, but we realize that the interaction of minds activates thought inasmuch as the movement of matter generates power.

Islam addressed the minds of all people and its language, Arabic, became the language of science and civilisation east and west when it comprehended the wisdom of the ancients, adding to its Arabic's own genius. Today, the concept of culture has changed, allowing literature to occupy a large place in it. Cultures now communicate with each other using the verbal arts, such as poetry and prose, more deeply, more comprehensively, more often, than they communicate through the pure sciences.

Noble feelings are among the greatest of the Arabs' merits. The scientific revival Your Royal Highness has nourished since it was a small plant in this blessed land, has blossomed into a great city of science that has no equal in the Arab world. This scientific revival, which we hope will take us to where the powerful nations of today are, cannot let us forget that spiritual transcendence is the foremost pillar of our civilisation, the great heritage of our forefathers, and the wonderful gift which we can offer to a world that does not measure matters by the facts but rather by their results.

Your Royal Highness,
My noble audience,

My efforts in translating literary and critical studies from European languages into our noble language have always been connected with my consistent travails to add whatever I could contribute, with my own humble work, toward the building of a genuine Arab culture expressing this nation's pride in its past, and its hopes for the present and the future. And, so, my first effort in this respect has been the translation of the first and most important of the west's critical books, namely the "Book on Poetics" by Greece's greatest philosopher, Aristotle. The book had been translated into Arabic in the fourth (Hejira) century but I retranslated it recording the history of the ancient translation and its impact on the Arab culture where I found that the Arabs had their own interpretation of this book, an interpretation that sprang from the characteristics of Arab poetry and still maintained the gist of Aristotelian thought.

After that, I translated "Notes Toward a Definition of Culture" by the

English poet and critic T.S. Eliot. Though obviously biased toward his own people's culture, Eliot presented in this book an honest, objective explanation of immensely important theses on cultural, intercommunication, internationalism, localism, the relationship between culture and religion, and the continuity of tradition in modern culture. These are matters that concern us more than they concern those for whom the book was written, as I explained in my introduction to the book.

Between internationalism and localism there exists a wide range of joint culture. The unity of western culture is a reality felt by both westerners and us. And that is why it was my intention to present the view of a major western critic about Western man as represented by his literature, so that maybe we will not forget that today's world, so full of both achievements and tragedies, is man's own creation.

In the process of all of that, I continued as much as I could to follow up western studies in the arts of literature and language, trying to introduce them into our noble language which has for so long been deprived of exposure to them by the forces of habit and neglect.

Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,

Your satisfaction with my work fills me with joy and nourishes my hopes for a brilliant tomorrow where Arab culture and Arab glory shine again.

God bless you. Peace be upon you.