

TRANSLATION

Speech of Professor
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Co Winner of King Faisal International Prize
for Arabic Literature 1999/1419H.

Tuesday 2.3.1999 (14.11.1419H)

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Your Royal Highness, Prince Sultan Ibn Abd Al Aziz,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure to be with you tonight, arriving from the flourishing city of Rabat to the splendid city of Riyadh to be honoured by the King Faisal International Prize for Arabic Literature, which has been awarded to me jointly with my colleague Dr. Makarim Al Ghamri of Egypt. Our sharing of this Prize reflects our cultural unity from both

nationalistic and Islamic perspectives.

I came to Riyadh to receive this Prize in an important field of humanities that has long been alienated. I would like, therefore, to express my gratitude for its revival, and my confidence that Kipling's claim that east and west cannot meet is refutable. Meeting the other doesn't mean being identical with, or dissolved into, it. The real unity is in diversity. Internationalism neither means Westernism nor Europeanism, while globalization neither means domination nor suppression of one or the other.

I wonder if any of the humanities or the pure sciences cannot be subject of comparative cultural studies. In fact, I wonder if there is any phenomenon pertaining to our intellectual, religious or even routine daily life that is not comparable. Isn't our age that of religious and cultural dialogues? Isn't today's celebration of the King Faisal International Prize a reflection of the old Islamic and Arabic Bait Al Hikma (House of Wisdom)? We need wisdom today more than we have ever needed it before, because in order to achieve higher levels of humanity, we must first accomplish reconciliation and global brotherhood. As long as the sun doesn't rise in the west nor set in the east, there is no east without west and no north without south.

At this point, I would like to recall that when the renowned Ibn Abd Rabbu presented his great work Al-Iqd Al-Farid to the Mashariga, they described it as their "goods returned to them". Today, we are searching for our non-returnable, non-perishable goods - our creativity - which are veiled by the masks of regionalism, **continentalism**, internationalism, and globalization in a rapidly changing world. We are, therefore, in greater need than ever to perceive things from a "comparative" perspective, within an appropriate framework of knowledge and resources. We need that in order to get out of the bottle neck, and know where we stand in this age of conflict between civilisations, each claiming its unique identity, even though diversity should have been an element of unity and continuity, rather than an end to history.

Prompted by academic specialization and intellectual inclinations, I believe that more comparative literature studies should be carried out in order to obtain a clearer insight into the common aspects of literature hidden behind many languages and cultures. Cause-effect relationships cannot hold true as long as the comparison is not based on rationality and authentication, and as long as literature is viewed independently of other forms of ethnic and cultural expressions. Comparative literature tends to interact with other disciplines of humanities and pure sciences; that interaction is essential to bridge the numerous gaps between major and minor literatures and explore wider horizons of knowledge. The "poetic" aspect of comparative literature, in the east or west alike, lives only in the imagination of some. Arabic comparative literature has never been a tool for

responding to western literature, nor an egalitarian matter. It is intended primarily to enhance human thought.

I would like to express my appreciation of this superb cultural event that coincides with the Kingdom's centenary celebrations, while marking the King Faisal International Prize initiative to commemorate 50 years of comparative Arabic literature.

Best wishes and assai am alaikum.