

Speech by
Prof. Muhsin Al-Musawi

I am pleased to be among the winners of King Faisal Prize this year. I am also delighted to see that I have met the expectations of the Prize's various committees, whose members must certainly have diligently perused my writings in English on Arabic literature. The jury must have been firmly appreciative of my literary production in English to deserve the prize.

This is indeed an appreciation for an endeavor for which I was not expecting any reward. My work and my research are part of a long journey not just in authorship, scholarship, and academic teaching in the universities of the Arab world and later in the United States of America. They also reflect my deep conviction that Arab culture needs, as a matter of importance, to feature on the map of world cultures, instead of simply sitting on the fringe as an object of study and research by a group of senior scholars. Today, such interdisciplinary and comparative studies have been growing steadily because they confirm the commonalities shared by the cultures of the Arabs and the world through analysis and criticism. The matter is not confined to just that; the challenge facing scholars and critics lies in the significance of knowing other cultures, especially those written or transmitted in English thanks to their popularity and wide circulation. The absence of this mutual knowledge was certainly responsible for the marginalization of Arabic culture in relation to other cultures, and ultimately for the inability to interact.

As I noted before in the *Journal of Arabic Literature*, published in English by Brill Academic Publishers, and later in a number of highly specialized conferences run by Columbia University under my supervision, rhetorical and cultural turns have already been growing in Arabic literary scholarship in English. A new generation of scholars embraced new approaches in reading, researching, and contemplating Arabic literature, both ancient and modern. Such approaches helped infuse Arabic literature with some fresh vitality and freedom from traditional philological methodology that tends to deal with literature through a stagnant prism, as though Arab life and culture have been firmly dormant throughout the ages. However, the emergence of Arabists, as I have noted, in the various fields of knowledge is of great significance. Equipped with social science and better acquainted with a wide spectrum of humanities, they brought into the field something lively and interesting to other cultures. This is my generation of scholars and critics who brought life and vitality to the field. Along with my peers in this journey, we are able to develop and advance a vigilant and vibrant approach.

This approach enabled and would enable Arab culture to interact with other cultures, and allow those cultures to establish a reciprocal relationship with Arab culture.

As such, the coming of this Prize is timely and opportune. It does not just spotlight the outcome of these endeavors, but it also fills the recipient of the prize with the feeling that these achievements receive due acknowledgment and recognition. The awarding committee drew attention to the high caliber of these studies in meticulous and concise terms as befitting a highly respectable prize.

While I am truly thankful for this prize. I should add a personal note to what is mentioned: I always approach the subject of my writing and research with passion and pleasure, with which time and fatigue seem to fade away. Thus, I try to write in a style that is substantive without wordiness, and enjoyable without boring the reader, even when references, cross-references, and referrals abound.

I applaud the commendable work performed by the organizers and awarders of the prize, just as I laud the efforts deployed by Saudi Arabia in promoting the field of culture.

I should add that this prize is also an incentive to redouble my scholarly efforts in a bid to boost the visibility of the Arab culture in the dominant cultures of this age.

To you, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and to Your Highnesses and Excellencies, I express my gratitude and appreciation, wishing you continued health, happiness and peace.

May Allah grant success to all!