

Awardee: Fuad Rifka**Poet, Philosopher, Translator**

The Lebanese poet, philosopher and translator Fuad Rifka has translated pivotal works of German poetry by Goethe, Hölderlin, Novalis, Rilke and Trakl into Arabic. His encounter with German culture and philosophy had tangible impacts on his own works of poetry. Fuad Rifka is being awarded the Goethe Medal for his impressive life's work as a translator.

Fuad Rifka's passionate interest in German poets and thinkers began with a coincidental discovery at the Goethe-Institut Beirut more than forty years ago. It was there that Rifka found an English edition of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. This volume of poetry made a lasting impression on him and awakened his desire to translate German poetry into Arabic, "to make it accessible to the entire Arabic world." He was the first to translate Rilke's poems directly from his mother tongue into Arabic without detours via English or French translations.

Fuad Rifka was born in Syria in 1930. In the 1940s his family moved to Lebanon. He studied philosophy in Beirut and in 1965 completed his doctorate in Tübingen on the aesthetic of Martin Heidegger with a scholarship from the DAAD. When he returned to Lebanon he taught philosophy at the Lebanese American University Beirut from 1966 until 2005. German philosophers always had a fixed place in his syllabus. A number of teaching and research opportunities took Rifka to the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany. Fuad Rifka was a founding member of the Lebanese avant-garde poetry journal *Shi'r* (Poetry), which aimed to revolutionize traditional Arabic verse and move towards freer, experimental poetry. The makers of *Shi'r* also made it their mission to translate contemporary verse into Arabic.

Fuad Rifka published his own first volume of poems in 1961. More poetry and essays followed and in 2002 a selection of Rifka's poems from the past fifteen years was printed in Germany with the title *Das Tal der Rituale* (The Valley of Rituals) in a bilingual edition. Another German-Arabic book of poems followed it in 2007 with *Die Reihe der Tage ein einziger Tag* (The Series of Days a Single Day). In addition, Rifka collaborated on a translation of the Old Testament into Arabic and published a book of 365 Biblical stories for children. In 2007 he edited a bilingual anthology of poetry of the twentieth century, for which he selected from the work of and translated into Arabic German poets including Bertolt Brecht, Günter Eich, Sarah Kirsch, Wolfgang Bächler and Durs Grünbein.

In 2001, Fuad Rifka was awarded the Friedrich Gundolf Prize by the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung for his translations of German poetry into Arabic. A year later he was elected a member of the academy. He was granted Germany's Federal Cross of Merit on ribbon in 2005. Fuad Rifka lives in Beirut.

Tribute speaker: Stefan Weidner

Stefan Weidner, born in 1967, majored in Islamic studies, German and philosophy in Göttingen, Damascus, Berkeley and Bonn and today resides in Cologne and Berlin where he works as a writer, literary critic and translator. Weidner has translated a number of Fuad Rifka's poems into German, most recently his 2002 volume *Das Tal der Rituale*. Since 2001 Stefan Weidner has been editor-in-chief of the Goethe-Institut's biannual cultural journal *Fikrun wa Fann / Art & Thought* published in Arabic, English and Farsi. He regularly publishes and broadcasts literary criticism in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Zeit*, on Deutschlandradio and WDR radio. Moreover he has published a number of works in the field of Islamic studies as well as many translations of Arabic poetry. He was awarded the 2006 Clemens Brentano Prize of the City of Heidelberg and the Johann Heinrich Voss Prize by the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung in 2007.