



QUESTIONING THE ISLAMIC
CULTURE
ADONIS

Ali Ahmad Esber, *nom de plume* Adonis, was born in 1930 in Kassabine, Syria. In 1945, he completed his Licence ès lettres in Philosophy at Damascus University and, in 1973, his doctorate at the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut. He co-founded the literary magazine *Shi'r* (Poesy) in Beirut (1957–1964) and founded and headed the magazine *Mawâquif* in Beirut and Paris (1968–1995). Professor at the Université Libanaise (1971–1985), the Université de Genève (1989–1995), the Université Saint-Joseph (Doct. Advisor) (1982–1985). Guest Professorships: Université de Damas; Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris III; Collège de France, Paris; Georgetown University; Princeton University – Transregional Institute, Center of International Studies. He is the author of ca. 15 poetry collections, most of which have been translated into various European languages. His most important works of poetry are *Al-Kitâb* (The Book) I and II (1995 and 1998). He is also the author of ca. 10 essays on Arabic poetics and culture, beginning with his three-volume dissertation, titled *Le Mouvant et le Fixe dans la Culture Arabe* (The Movable and the Constant in Arabic Culture). Various prizes and honorary titles. – Address: 1, square Henri Regnault, 92400 Courbevoie, France.

This year I worked on two projects. The first, which I started at Wiko during my first fellowship (1998–1999), is titled *The Book*. This project is a poetic journey through Arab history, starting from the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Two volumes of this project have been published. This year, I finished the manuscript for the third volume, which will be published in October 2002.

The second project, titled “Geography of the Other World in the Islamic Imagination”, has two goals. The first goal is to explore the perspective of Islam on the afterlife and to analyze the assumptions that anchor this perspective. The second goal explores the following thesis: It is impossible to understand with any precision or depth the norms and practices of Islamic life without first understanding Islamic beliefs about death and the afterlife. Unfortunately, I have not been able to make as much progress on this project as I would have liked.

In addition to these two projects, I devoted part of my time to familiarizing myself with the problems of Arab immigrants to Germany, especially Berlin. Within the framework of the Modernity and Islam project, I invited a speaker every two weeks to a meeting at Wiko. During these meetings we discussed a vast range of issues related to the reasons for immigration, the conditions of immigrants’ residence here, and the relationships they have constructed. We paid special attention to the psychological, social, and cultural problems they have encountered.

I also devoted part of my time to holding in-depth conversations with some of the other Fellows. We discussed cultural trends specific to their countries of origin, as well as global issues as each Fellow perceives them from his or her specialization. I will publish these conversations in *Al-Hayat*, the most important and largest-circulating Arabic daily newspaper in Europe and the United States.