

Ameen Raihani: Founder of Mahjari Literature

Mohammad Shahidul Islam*

Ameen al-Raihani (1876-1940) was a Lebanese-born Christian Arab and a prominent member of the *al-Mahjar* (Emigrant) school of modern Arabic literature and thought. His literary ventures covered the novel, short story, essay, poetry, biography, travel writing and translation. This Lebanese-American writer, philosopher and political activist devoted his life to bringing the East and West together in the first half of the twentieth century. Through his early literary activity in the United States, he made a highly significant contribution to Arabic essay writing and to the development of modern Arabic poetry. Being a critic of Arabic poetry and the first one to write prose poetry in Arabic, he earned himself the title 'Father of Prose Poetry'. He is also the first Arab American to write in English, and so known as the founding father of 'Arab-American literature'. The aim of this article is to highlight the contribution of Ameen Raihani, especially in Mahjar literature.

Biography

Ameen al-Raihani (1876-1940) a Maronite Christian was born in the village of al-Furaykah (Freike), a few miles north East of Beirut on 24 November 1876. The most of his life was spent moving between East and West, especially between Lebanon and his second home, New York, and traveling extensively in the Arab world.¹ He had dual nationality, assimilating two widely differing cultures to an extent perhaps never achieved before him.²

Ameen Fares Raihani was one of six children and the oldest son of a Lebanese Maronite raw silk manufacturer. He lived in Freike and learnt elementary Arabic and French. At the age of 12 in the summer of 1888 he emigrated with his uncle (Salamon) 'Abduh Raihani and his teacher Naoum Mokarzel to the United States of America to begin a new life in the bustling New York City. His father followed him to New York a year later. A few months after his arrival, he was put in a school outside the city of New York. There he learned the rudiments of English and found himself exposed to a completely different world from what he had known at home in Freike.³

His father and uncle, having established themselves as merchants in a small cellar of dry goods in lower Manhattan, soon felt the need for an assistant who could read and write English. Therefore, the boy was taken away from school to become the chief clerk, interpreter and bookkeeper of the family business. The family continued in this trade for four years.⁴

Although Ameen's early years in New York were dominated by his work as a clerk in his family's shop, he had a natural talent for eloquent speaking, and that occupation did not suit the young Ameen. At the age of 18/19 in 1895 he became interested in performing on the stage and ran away to join a traveling theatrical troupe, and then decided to acquire a regular education for a professional career. After he had spent a year playing a variety of roles

* Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic, University of Dhaka

¹ Ahmad Qabbish, *Tarikh al-Sa'r al-Arabi al-Hadith* (Beirut: Dar al-Zail, 1971), p. 288.

² Dr. Suheil B. Bushrui, *The Thought and Works of Ameen Raihani* (A speech at a seminar on Arab-American Cultural Relations in the 20th Century) in University of Maryland, On 15th March 1999, the Al-Hewar Center in metro Washington, D.C., Source, www.alhewar.com/Bushrui_Raihani.htm

³ Wail S. Hassan, *The Rise of Arab-American Literature: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in the Works of Ameen Raihani* (Project on Arab America and Anglophone literature), Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 247; Retrieved June 25, 2008 from www.cartage.org.lb/en/lebanon/Arts%20and%20Humanities/Humanities/Lebauthors/AmeenRaihani/AmeenRaihani.htm

⁴ *Ibid*

including Hamlet and Macbeth, the troupe moved its base to Kansas City. During that phase of Raihani's passion for literature and public speaking were realized by widely reading-William Shakespeare (1564-1616), John Keats (1795-1821), Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Shelley (1792-1822), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Thoreau (1817-1862), Darwin (1809-1882), Leonard Huxley (1860-1933), Edmund Spencer (1552-1599), Emerson (1803-1882), Tolstoy (1828-1910), Voltaire (1694-1778) and some other classic authors of western civilization. He enjoyed and developed a genuine love for reading and became familiar with their writings.⁵ Two years later in 1897 after passing the Regents Exam he entered the New York Law School. A lung infection interrupted his studies, and at the end of his first year in 1898 he faced few physical problems. At the doctor's advice his father had to send him back to Lebanon for two years to recover his health and to learn Arabic and rediscover his roots.⁶ Once back in his homeland, he began teaching English in a clerical school in exchange for being taught his native Arabic language.

After two years in Lebanon he returned to New York, It was not to rejoin the business, but to attend high school and he insisted that his father give him a regular education for a professional career. He agreed that Raihani should study law; and he attended night school for a year. In this phase he joined several literary and artistic societies in New York, such as the Poetry Society of America and the Pleiades Club, and also became a regular contributor to an Arabic weekly publication, *Al-Huda* and two others daily publications, *al-Islah* and *al-Ayyam*, published from New York. With these writings he began establishing himself as an implacable critic of Arab social traditions and of the stagnant state of religion, politics and philosophy in the Arab world.⁷

In 1905 he returned to Lebanon and kept himself engaged in writing and publishing. He met Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) in 1910 for the first time and they discussed and planned to have an opera house in Beirut for the promotion of arts and reconciliation between Christianity and Islam. It was on Raihani's advice that Gibran in New York in 1912 formed Rabita al-Arrabitah (The Arabic Bond), a literary society for Arab emigrés. As a result of this advice, a group of young aspiring men of letters and persons constituted al-Rabita al-Qalamiyyah (The Pen Association).⁸

In 1913 Raihani and Najeeb Diab (1880-1936) represented the emigrant Lebanese at the first Arab Congress in Paris, the first of many such ambassadorial activities undertaken by Raihani. Two years later, returning again to New York in 1916 he married Bertha Case, an American artist who was part of the Matisse, Picasso, Cezanne, and Derain group.⁹

Although Raihani and his wife Bertha were eventually divorced, she visited Lebanon in 1953 (thirteen years after Ameen's death) and stayed in Freike with the family of Raihani's brother, Albert. At the age of 91 Bertha passed away in New York on 29 July 1970. She had requested that her body be cremated and that her ashes be sent to Freike to be buried next to Raihani's.¹⁰

Raihani was acquainted and maintained contact with a number of writers, poets, scholars. He had also met and held talks with numerous political leaders, kings and heads of state, and

⁵ Biography- Lebanese Writer Ameen Raihani, June 2005, Retrieved June 25, 2008 from

www.jerusalemiloveyou.net/spip.php?article131; www.onefineart.com/en/artists/aRaihani/index.shtml

⁶ Hanna al-Fakhuri, *Al-Jami' Fi Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Zail, 1986), First Edition, p. 269.

⁷ Dr. Suheil B. Bushrui, *The Thought and Works of Ameen Raihani*, *op. cit.*

⁸ Issa J. Boullata, *Iliya Abu Madi and the riddle of life in his poetry*, Journal of Arabic Literature, Volume XVII, Leiden, E J Brill, 1986, pp. 70-71

⁹ Dr. Suheil B. Bushrui, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Retrieved June 25, 2008 from www.cartage.org.lb/en/lebanon/Arts%20and%20Humanities/Humanities/Lebauthors/AmeenRaihani/AmeenRaihani.htm

won a wide variety of honors and decorations in recognition of his endeavors and achievements. In 1917 during World War I, he traveled to Europe as a correspondent of two magazines published by *The New York Times*. In the same year Ameen met Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), former President of the United States, and discussed the Palestinian issue. In this year Ameen and his wife Bertha visited Pope Benedict XV. The Pope was interested in ending World War-I and in establishing an equitable peace between the fighting armies.

A fervent opponent of the Ottoman regime, especially in the countries of the Near East, Raihani visited Mexico in 1917 to urge local Syrian and Lebanese expatriates to support the cause of the Allies against that of the Axis powers, which included Ottoman Turkey (1299-1923).

In 1919 Raihani was asked to represent Arab interests at the Hague Peace Conference. In 1921 he served as the only near eastern member of the Reduction of Armaments Conference in Washington, D.C.

He was the first one at that time to traverse the whole territory of Arabia in one trip, and he did this in 1922. He was also the first Arab traveler of modern times to discover the heart of Arabia and communicate to the world the great spiritual, moral, intellectual, literary and material treasures of what he called 'the most fertile region in history'. At the age of 64 in 1940 he was injured by a bicycle accident which resulted in infectious injuries from multiple fractures of the skull and passed away in his birthplace Freike on 13 September.

As early as 1904 Raihani was recognized in New York, Beirut, Cairo and elsewhere. He was elected to honorary life membership of many clubs like the New York Pleiades Club, Poetry Society of America, American Asian Society, New York Authors Club, American Press Club, American Oriental Society, Italian Art and Cultural Club, the National Art Theatre Society of New York. He becomes Chairman & Vice President of Syria-Mt. Lebanon League of Liberation, New York, Arab Academy of Damascus; and President of Arab Institute of Studies, Tetuan, Morocco.

Raihani was honored on numerous occasions during his life by dignitaries, diplomats, men of letters in New York and Boston, U.S.A, as well as in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Morocco, England and Mexico. After his death, several commemorations were held in his memory. He was honored by literary figures in Cairo (1922), by the Italian Cultural Garden of New York (1935); and he was decorated with the Lebanese Gold Medal (1940), the Iranian and Moroccan Order of Merit for learning (1940). He was also bestowed the title of Prince by King Hussein I (1922). Many street names were named after him in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Tunisia. A few Schools were named after him in Lebanon and Syria. Many world leaders and distinguished personalities gave him gifts like personal sword of King Abdul-Aziz (1876-1953), founder of Saudi Arabia, a rosary from Pope Benedict XV (1854-1922), a royal dagger from King Hussein (1935-1999) and a piece of the Holy Moslem Ka'aba cover by King Hussein.

Raihani's thoughts in his literary works and its influences in Arabic Literature

Ameen Ferris Raihani was a man full of ideas, energy and talent. He wrote on a wide range of topics like Arab Renaissance, political and social issues, modern American painting, Russian ballet, etc.¹¹ He went on producing a large amount of written work, including a number of articles in several well-known American magazines and newspapers. When he achieved a

¹¹ Sana Mcharek, *Khalil Gibran and other Arab American Prophets* (Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis), The Florida State University, College of Education, Department of Middle and Secondary Education, 2006, p. 39; Retrieved May 27 from Internet-etd.lib.fsu.edu/theses/available/etd-04102006-114344/unrestricted/Mcharek2006.pdf

mastery of the English language, he began publishing a number of English works of poetry, short story, novel, literary criticism, collection of essays, travelogues, translations of classical Arabic poetry and historical and political analysis. The whole of his work in Arabic, sought to open the eyes of his countrymen to unity, the needs for progress, freedom and modern techniques.¹² He authored more than 50 volumes both in Arabic and in English. Some of these books were published when he was alive and others were published after his death by his brother Albert Ferris Raihani.¹³

Raihani was the first Arab to write and publish a novel in English. He was a thinker who firmly believed in his country Lebanon, and saw it in the context of the great Arab heritage, as he saw the Arab world in the wider context of the family of nations. He had believed that radical reform was needed in the Arab East: an overwhelming revolution in thought, spirit and existing material conditions had to take place. He also believed that the decline in Arab society was due to both ignorance and sectarian fanaticism. So he drew the attention of the Arabs and wanted to be the transmitter of the eastern spiritual message and values to the West and to be the transmitter of the western message and progress to the East.¹⁴ He regarded himself as the beneficiary of the rich synthesis of Christian-Muslim traditions and was fully aware of the larger perspectives of a global culture and civilization in which peace prevails and harmony exists between East and West. Thus he may be seen as moving within three concentric circles: Lebanon, the Arab world and the world at large.¹⁵

Raihani never lost sight of the rich cultural heritage into which he was born, and which was bequeathed to the world by Arab civilization. His interest in the Arabs was furthered by reading Washington Irving's *The Alhambra*. He became determined to find out more about his own people and their cultural background. He was a dedicated liberal, but his idealism was tempered with a very practical recognition of the need for an ordered, disciplined society. He always retained a healthy respect for tradition.¹⁶

He was both a romantic and a realist. On the one hand he firmly rejected the ills of society, and was both a literary rebel and a lover of nature and of all things simple; but on the other hand he talked not of escapist solutions but of aims and objectives, and championed not idealistic causes but science, technology, progress. As a critic, he expressed the utmost contempt for linguistic scholasticism and for romanticism in the form of imprecise sentimentality. He reserved his most vitriolic attacks for the Arab neo-classicists, and was one of the first to call for socially committed poetry.¹⁷

Raihani's interest in effecting a radical change in literature was no less passionate than his other interests. His attack on the defects of the poetry of his time was unique. He was one of the first critics to call for socially committed poetry and to attack romantic escapism and meandering in the realms of the abstract and of imaginative sorrows. He was also one of the first Arab writers to rebel against scholasticism in language and the reverence in which Arabic had come to be held early in the country.¹⁸ He was not only the first Arab ever to write novel in English, he was also the first Arab to write English verse. Raihani had tried to free poetry from rule of rhyme and meter by influence of the American poet Walt Whitman

¹² M. Mandur, *Qadaya Jadida fi Adabina al-Hadith*, Beirut, 1958, pp. 88-91; Sana Mcharek, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹³ Ahmad Qabbish, *op. cit.*, p. 288; Sana Mcharek, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Retrieved May 27 from www.etsd.lib.fsu.edu/theses/available/etd-04102006-114344/unrestricted/Mcharek2006.pdf

¹⁴ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, Voll-01, p. 86; Ismat Mahdi, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Hyderabad: Rabi Publishers, 1983), p. 141.

¹⁵ Dr. Suheil B. Bushrui, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

(1819-1982). Among readers of Arab American Literature he was also the first Lebanese Arab poet to successfully introduce prose poetry (al-Shir al-Manthur-) and free verse (al-Shir al-Hur-) to the very formulaic and traditional Arab poetic canon and the modern Arabic poetry as early as 1905 through his *Hitaf al-Udiyah* (-Hymn of the Valleys).¹⁹ He had also a highly significant contribution to the development of the art of the essay in modern Arabic. His early literary activity in the United States was an inspiring example to the young immigrant talents around him, and by helping to establish the romantic trend and rebelling against the old, outmoded ways, which built his reputation as a forward-looking thinker and a visionary.²⁰ His new style of poetry was flourished in the Arab world and continued to influence modern Arabic poetry after his death in 1940 and throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Raihani illustrates his own and the émigré writers attitude to life. As he says:²¹

! !

(Light! Light! Let it shine in our hearts, however dark the world may be.
Let it flow forth from our hearts, however somber the horizons may be.
Though I have only a hut in the valley, in the night by a meager candle,
My eye reflects in the hut all the light it beholds in the world.
And should the storm blow and uproot my hut as it uproots the trees,
Carrying it to the river's mouth,
There is a cave there among the rocks impregnable to the storm and there
Is the light of the sun and the stars?
And should the heavens darken and the planets and stars be eclipsed.
Still in this human heart is light eternal.
Let light shine in our hearts, however sombre the horizons may be.)

Among his prose poetry I mentioned here one which is published with the title "Dajla- ":²²

(I shake my hands with him with the heart in my hand
I welcome him with the soul on my tongue
I stand in front of him then the wonderful things of the age open to me
Some of his words alarm and some of them influence, and some words save the life and some
of them send to death.
He goes on his ways in calm peaceful mind
Bears the message from north to south.)

¹⁹ Ahmad Qabbish, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-9.

²⁰ Sana Mcharek, *op. cit.*, p. 36

²¹ As quoted by Ismat Mahdi, *op. cit.*, pp.143-4 from Mounah A. Khouri and Hamid Algar, *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, p. 25.

²² Ahmad Qabbish, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

In his Arabic writings he warned his own people and his Arab brethren against many dangers threatening them and the ambitions of other nations with regard to their own integrity. He appealed to them to be wary of the wealth that was about to descend on them. He warned them against disunity and encouraged them to consolidate and develop their spiritual and moral values as well as their human and material resources. He bitterly attacked religious prejudice, political extremism and divisive tribal loyalties. He urged them to unite and together promote a philanthropic spirit in reforming and modernizing their societies so that the Arab people would be able to play an important role in the modern world without sacrificing the moral and spiritual heritage which has been their mainstay ever since the dawn of history.

His writings were all the more substantial because, even in their diversity, they were firmly rooted in his breadth of knowledge. Thus he could write convincingly on history, politics, social affairs, literary criticism, theatre, oratory, music and painting.

His first book; *Nubza fith-Thawra El-Faransiya* (-A Treatise on the French Revolution) was published in Arabic in 1902 by al-Huda Printing Press, New York. A year later (in 1903) this was followed by *Al-Mouhalafa at-tulatiyya Fil- Mamlaka al-Hayawanniya* (-The Triple Alliance in the Animal Kingdom).

In 1904/1095 when he returned to his native mountains he lectured and published two volumes of essays, a book of allegories and a few short stories and plays in Arabic. Additionally, he lectured at the American University of Beirut and in a few other institutions in Lebanon, as well as in the cities of Homs and Damascus.

In 1910, he published *Al-Raihaniyyat* (-The Raihani Essays), the book that established him as a forward-looking thinker and visionary. As a result, the Egyptian media hailed him as "The Philosopher of Freike".²³

The most notable of his English writings are the novel *The Book of Khalid* written during the same period of mountain solitude and was later published in 1911 after he returned to New York. It influenced many Arab authors including Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) and Mikhail Nu`aimah (1889-1989). Raihani is most known for this novel. It has established the basic characteristics of Arab-American literature in general and Lebanese-American literature in particular.

Shortly afterwards one of Raihani's most important works was published his translations of the verse of the 11th-century blind Arab poet 'Milton (1608-1674) of Arabia' Abu'l-Ala' al-Ma'arri (973-1058) entitled *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala* (1903). A revised version under the title of *The Luzumiyat* was published in 1918. It was the first English translation from Arabic by an Arab translator.

He enriched English with translations of such Arab poets as Imru al-Qays (501-544) and Abu'l-Alal al-Ma'arri (973-1058), as well as enriching his own culture by transmitting the ideas of Carlyle (1795-1881) and the American transcendentalists in his Arabic writings.²⁴ He was a nationalist in that he advocated Arab unity and independence; and worked, along with other national leaders and lectured widely, often carrying the banner of American democracy and independence of his country from Ottoman Turkey (1299-1923) and later from European colonialism. As a political analyst and activist, he advocated East West understanding, particularly a dialogue of peace between the USA and the Arabs. He expresses his concern

²³ Retrieved June 25, 2008 from www.cartage.org.lb/en/lebanon/Arts%20and%20Humanities/Humanities/Lebauthors/AmeenRaihani/AmeenRaihani.htm

²⁴ Dr. Suheil B. Bushrui, *op. cit.*

over the affairs of the Arabs lands addressing the Statue of Liberty in his books 'Brooklyn Bridge'. He says:²⁵

(When will you turn your face towards the East, Oh liberty! Will the future see a Statue of liberty by the side of the Great Pyramid? Is it possible to see something like you in the Mediterranean Sea? Oh liberty! When will you revolve like the moon round the earth, to light up the darkness of the oppressed people and enslaved nations.)

In 1921, Raihani published two works which demonstrated his prowess as an essayist and poet in English. The first of these was his social and reformist essays - *The Path of Vision*: a collection of essays illustrating basic differences between East and West and between Christianity and Islam. The others of his own mystic poetry in *A Chant of Mystics*, a collection of his verse with an essentially spiritual, mystic message of longing for mystical union.

Ibn Saoud of Arabia: His People and His Land (1928), the first book in the trilogy, is an impression rather than a biography of the great Arab leader, Sultan, King and Imam of Najd in the first few decades of this century.

The most controversial of his works *Antom Ush-Shu`araa* () -You the Poets) was published in 1933, in which he fiercely criticizes the woeful and spineless state of Arabic poetry. His influence on later generations of Arab poets was largely structural, especially as regards unity of theme and division of a piece into shorter or longer stanzas. His use of short sentences, repetitive phrases and invocations, in a manner not unlike the Holy Qur'an, and of images and metaphors taken from nature, was also influential, as were his less successful attempts to charge his poetry with emotion.²⁶

Finally, two other English works by Raihani are also worthy of mention. The first of these is *The Descent of Bolshevism*, a short book on political analysis in English, published in 1921. It traces the ideology of the Bolshevik revolution and places it in its historical and philosophical context. The second work is *The Fate of Palestine*, a collection of illuminating essays about an issue which Raihani rightly predicted would develop into a calamitous problem. These essays were first published as a collection by the author's brother in 1967.

Founder of Adab Al-Mahjar

The term al-mahjar () is an Arabic word that signifies emigration, sanctuary, refuge, retreat, settlement, colony and place of emigration.²⁷ It is a term that refers to the lands of diaspora²⁸ of Arabs around the world. It can also be a general term for the diaspora. Adab al-

²⁵ As quoted by Ismat Mahdi, *op. cit.*, p.142 from Anis al-Makdisi, *al-Ittijahat al-Adabiyya fi'l Alam al-Arabi al-Hadith*, p. 281.

²⁶ Dr. Suheil B. Bushrui, *op. cit.*

²⁷ J. Milton Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (germany: buchdruckeri huberl and co. 1976), p. 1196.

²⁸ The term *diaspora* meant "the scattered" and was used by the Ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a dominant city-state who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire. It also refers to the forcing any people or ethnic population to leave their traditional homelands, the dispersal of such people, and the ensuing developments in their culture. The current meaning started to develop from this original sense when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek; the word "diaspora" then was used to denote the Jewish communities living outside the Holy Land Palestine or present-day Israel. It was originally used to designate the dispersal of the Jews at the time of the destruction of the first Temple and the forced exile from Judea in (586 B.C.) to the Babylonians, and from Jerusalem in AD 136 to the Roman Empire. The term also carries religious, philosophical, political,

Mahjar or the literature of al-mahjar means all writing in Arabic produced by Arab emigrants to the new world, and despite the fact that the geographical location is not specified, the generally accepted meaning is emigrant.

Adab al-Mahjar means a steady stream of Arabs writers emigrated in the last quarter of nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries from the various geographical regions of the Arabic world or the Arabic-speaking countries²⁹ of the Middle East and their descendants, espacially from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine to America. They wrote in one form of Arabic and published newspapers in Arabic, while being in America, thus strengthening the Arab identity of the emigrants. Most of these emigrants groups went to North American cities like New York; but some of them went to South American countries³⁰ such as Brazil and Argentina.

There were some important causes that worked behind the emigration of the Arabs to America. First, the inhabitants of the mountainous regions were deprived of agricultural land after the establishment of the regime of Mutasarrifiyya. A section of the population was economically deprived, which led them to leave the mountain region and to seek employment outside their homeland. When migration to America was possible, some groups traveled there. Second, oppression of the peasants by their feudal lords, the burden of taxation, persistent sectarianism, corruption of administration were some social ills. Third, long contacts of Arabs with the West. The western religious missions to Lebanon had reinforced there contacts during the rule of Ibrahim Pasha (1832-40), founding schools, cultural associations, importing presses, translating and publishing books.³¹ Fourth, Brazil favored the settlement of emigrants as a means of contribution towards its prosperity and furthering the exploitation of agricultural land and promised them aid and assistance. Argentina offered similar attractions with its enormous tracks of land requiring cultivation and its untapped material resources.³² Fifth, escape them from Turkey's rule or to earn their livelihood or both of them.³³ Behind these there also an important reason that when the first Protestant missionaries began arriving in Arab areas, they played an important role in propagating American culture and values of freedom, democracy and wealth. This was all taking place

and eschatological connotations, inasmuch as the Jews perceive a special relationship between the land of Israel and themselves; Retrieved June 27 from wikipedia-<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaspora>; *Britannica online encyclopedia*- <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9030291/Diaspora>; <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Diaspora>

²⁹ The Arabic-speaking countries today include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, pre-1948 Palestine and the Palestinians, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Somalia and Djibouti are also members of The League of Arab States and have some Arabic-speaking populations; Suliman, Michael, ed. *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999, W. 1.

³⁰ The Countries of South America known as Latin America also. It is generally understood to consist of twenty of the independent republics of the America continent. They include the eighteen countries- Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Haiti, The Dominica Republic, El Salvador, Uruguay, Honduras, Paraguay, Costa Rica, Panama, Brazil and Haiti. The meaning of Latin America is extended to include the more recently independent, English-speaking countries of the Caribbean- for instance Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago; *The Encyclopedia Americana*, dombarg, Encyclopedia Americana Corporation, 2007, p.1.

³¹ Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1998), Vol-2, p. 492.

³² *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol-5, p. 1258.

³³ Jhon A. Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature 1800-1970* (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), First Edition, p. 173; Ahmad Qabbish, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

while the Arabs were still suffering from a long Ottoman occupation that had had devastating consequences on the Arabs in all sectors of life: education, literature, work, freedom, etc.³⁴

The first Arab emigrants to America in recent history arrived in about 1850. It was to North America. From the beginning of the stage, journalism played an important role in reinforcing the identity of the Arab communities. They published Arabic newspapers to communicate among themselves. Later, they formed literary circles and published literary magazines and journals under the banner of these circles, and consequently they stepped into writing literary genres. This group published around 135 newspapers and magazines in Arabic in the United States and Canada before 1980. The first Arabic newspaper *kawkab Amirka* was founded in 1892 in New York and continued until 1908 and the first literary magazine *al-Funun* was published by Nasib Arida (1887-1946) in New York from 1913 to 1918. This magazine served as a mouthpiece for young Arab writers. ‘Abd al-Masih Haddad (1890-1963) hosted a meeting of this emigrant group on 20 April 1920 to discuss ways and means the Arab writers in New York could adopt to improve and enliven Arabic literature. They founded a literary society, *al-Rabita al-Qalamiyyah* (The Pen Association or the New York Pen League).³⁵ The suggestion that a formal organization be created was warmly approved consisting of Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) as President, Mikhail Nu`aimah (1889-1989) as Secretary, William Catzeflis (1951) as Treasurer and Nasib Arida (1887-1946), Iliya Abu Madi (1889/90-1957) A. H. Haddad, Rashid Ayyub (1871/81-1941) and Nadra Haddad (1881-1950) as members. On 28 April 1920 eight members of the group met at Gibran’s studio and agreed on the name, the structure, the purpose, and the plan of action of the organization and charged Nu`aimah with the drafting of its by-laws.³⁶ This literary society lasted for more than ten years (1920-1931). It was dissolved with the death of the founding President Gibran Khalil Gibran (1931) and the return of Nu`aimah to his homeland (1932), but other members of the Society continued their literary production for a certain time.³⁷

The main centers of Arab immigrants to Latin America literary activity have been Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, and Buenos Aires, Tucuman and Cordoba in Argentina. The first literary circle in Latin America was the *Riwaq al-Ma`arri*, founded in 1900 by Na`um Labaki. It concentrated on reading and discussing works by contemporary Arab poets. The activities of the organization were disorganized and could not reach any definite goal. It is not known exactly why or when this circle came to end. But some historians claim that the organization survived until the First World War when its founder returned to his homeland in 1908. In 1922 alumni of the American University of Beirut formed a circle to educate Arab immigrants to South/Latin America and to make Arabic literature known through translation. This Group founded a literary circle or society *al-Usba al Andalusiyya* (The Andalusian League) in January 1932 and they elected Mikhail Ma`luf chairman of al-‘Usbah. It failed to continue after 1953 because of the death of chairman of this society Mikhail Ma`luf and the return of exiles to their homeland, especially by absence of the President Fawzi Ma`luf (1899-1930) and prominent member Mishal Maluf (1889-1943).³⁸

The name al-‘Usbah has a ground that, it (the name al-‘Usbah al-Andalusiyyah) will remind us of the treasure that the Muslim left an Andalusia. Unlike ‘al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyyah’ in the

³⁴ Fadi Ahmad al-Issa, *The Literature of the Early Arab-Americans Between 1870-1940* (A Thesis for the degree of Masters of Arts, Dept. of English, The Florida State University, Summer Semester-2003), p. 15.

³⁵ Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

³⁶ Issa J. Boullata, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁷ *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), New Edition, Vol-V, p. 1255.

³⁸ Ahmad Qabbish, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-313; Dr. Ali Mohammad Hasan, *al-Tarikh al-Adabi* (Cairo: Jamhariyyatu Misar al-Arabiyya, 1998), p. 64; Dr. Sawqi Daif, *Fusulun fi al-Shear wa Naqdihi* (al-Qhera: Dar al-Ma`rif, 1971), Second Edition, p. 292; Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, *op. cit.*, pp. 492-3.

North, it abstained from any kind of exaggeration. It reminds us of the existing gap between the 'Andalus al Jadid' (the new Andalusia-Brazil) and 'al-Andalus al-Qadim' (the old Andalusia-Spain). Being victorious, the Arabs entered into Andalusia and spread their influence which established their language (Arabic) there. Now, they entered the land of Columbus. So it is quite logical to name their attempt 'al-'Usbah al-Andalusiyyah', although their only goal was to make Arabic literature familiar in the new land where the people did not speak Arabic. It is nothing but a clear victory.³⁹

This organization fulfilled its linguistic and literary mission. They often wrote in Arabic and collaborated with translators of their works. They took initiatives to provide financial support to the poor writers. It arranged regular sittings which discussed contemporary socio-politico-economic developments in the Arab world. Their style was changed by the new environment. The most important goal of the organization was unity among the Arabs staying in Brazil, to strengthen Arabic literature, protect and establish Arabic Language, to bring the writers in a single platform, to enhance the intellectual status of Arabs, to avoid imitation and to publish a magazine titled *al-'Usbah al-Andalusiyyah* which survived for twenty years. They took initiatives to collect the scattered prose and poetic works of eminent figures of the organization. The organization also collected the works of those persons who were not with the organization. The writers of this organization used pure Arabic in their writing to reach the above-mentioned goals. They followed rules of Arabic grammar what their brothers in the north neglected. They blamed the brothers of 'Usbah of following the old style. It can be mentioned here that if they wanted to mean use of out-dated words and following the traditional rules of Arabic grammar by it; they are right. If they mean by new ideas –new style and the new style means coming one of the original language. Then, I think that they are wrong".⁴⁰

Their subjects of writing were dominated by nostalgia for the motherland that they had left description of natural sceneries, contemporary socio-politico-economic and cultural issues in there homeland and their lifestyle in the new home.⁴¹ The literary works written by the Arab emigrants consist of emotion and imagination. Both the prose and poetic works were written in easy language. The emigrant writers and poets were credited for protecting the originality of Arabic language. They wrote poems following the traditional style of Arabic Quasidah with due importance to both structure and meaning of poetry. The poetry of emigrants is full of binary opposition— day and night, East and West, beauty and ugliness and so on. There is also ambiguity, simplicity of diction, variety of rhyme and line length. The Mahjar poets preferred short meters to the longer ones and celebrated pain and suffering.⁴² However, they were influenced by local language and literature too.

Mahjar literary works reflect the personal and communal life and also illustrate the relations between the Arab immigrants and their American neighbors as well as their continued exchange of ideas with their counterparts from their native land. These emigrants group founded their own libraries, newspapers, magazines and published their books in their new countries. They imbibed the culture of their new environment and if they were more receptive to western culture and literary trends than the Arabs back home, they did not forget their homeland which they visited when they could, and maintained their own culture and language.⁴³ A close acquaintance with western literature, especially with the works of

³⁹ George Sayda, *Adabuna wa Udabauna Fi al-Mahajir al-Imriki*, p. 217.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, V-5, (Leiden: E.J. Brill), p. 1253.

⁴² Fadi Ahmad Al-Issa, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴³ Jhon A. Haywood, *op. cit.*, p. 173; Dr. Mostafa Mahmud Yunus, *Min Adabina al-Muasir* (Matba'tu al-Fajr al-Jadid, 1980), pp. 75-76.

American poets such as Emerson (1803-1882), Longfellow (1807-1882), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and others, and perfection in more than one language enabled them to lead the revolt against all the moribund traditions and the conventional style of Arabic prose and poetry. As a result, these literary efforts received support and encouragement more markedly in the twentieth century to create a new kind of Arabic Literature.⁴⁴

The vast majority of immigrants in this wave were members of Christian minorities. Although some writers claim that these immigrants left their native countries for religious or political reasons, the evidence suggests that they were drawn to the United States and other countries by economic opportunity.⁴⁵

Ameen Raihani is generally regarded as the founder of "Adab Al-Mahjar" (Emigrant Literature) or the al-Mahjar school of modern literature and thought. He is the first Arab who wrote and published complete literary works in the USA (New York). His writings pioneered the movement of modern Arabic literature that played a leading role in the Arab Renaissance. He was more prophetic than any of his other Mahjar compatriots of North America. His early literary activity in America stirred up that of the Mahjar poets. He is the author of the first Arab-American poetry collection *Myrtle and Myrrh* (1905) and the first Arab-American play *Wajdah* (1909); those texts are the first English-language literary works by an Arab writer anywhere. Raihani was also the first Arab literary critic and travel writer in English.⁴⁶

In 1910, stopping off in Paris on his way back to New York he met Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) for the first time. They kept up a literary friendship and made plans for a cultural renaissance of the Arab world. The affinity of vision between Raihani and Gibran formed the basis of an enduring friendship when they came together again in 1911 in America. It was on Raihani's advice that Gibran in New York in 1912 formed *Rabita al-Arrabitah* (The Arabic Bond), a literary society for Arab emigrés. As a Result of this advice 20 April 1920 a group of young aspiring men of letters who appreciated literature joined in a group and formally constituted *al-Rabita al-Qalamiyyah* (The Pen Association), by that time Raihani had embarked on his career as a roving missionary for Arab unity and he had left the group.⁴⁷ In that cause he made a highly significant contribution to the development of modern Arabic poetry through his early literary activity in the United States, which was an inspiring example to the young immigrant talents around him.⁴⁸

He was a true champion of Arab interests-both economic and political-recording his experiences in three books which became the most authoritative account of the Arabian Peninsula, and which have never been surpassed in accuracy of interpretive vision. As the first modern traveler in Arabic literature, he revived a venerable tradition of travel works established by Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), Ibn Battuta (1304-1368/1377) and others, and in English he proved a worthy successor to men like Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935), Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890), Charles Montagu Doughty (1843-1926) and Wilfred Patrick Thesiger (1910-2003). He recognized moral and social values more refined than those upheld by the society in which he lived, and a temperament more akin to his own.

He is considered as the most prominent figure of 'Lebanese-American' Literature and the founding father of Arab-American literature and the forerunner of ethnic American literature.

⁴⁴ Ismat Mahdi, *op. cit.*, P.137; Jhon A. Haywood, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁴⁵ Nabeel Abraham, *ARAB AMERICANS*, Retrieved June 24 from <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/A-Br/Arab-Americans.html>

⁴⁶ Wail S. Hassan, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-46.

⁴⁷ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *op.c it.*, p.88; Issa J. Boullata, *Iliya Abu Madi and the riddle of life in his poetry*, pp. 70-71

⁴⁸ Dr. Suheil B. Bushrui, *op. cit.*

His early English writing marks the beginning of a body of literature that is Arab in its interest, concern, culture and characteristic, English in language, and American in spirit and platform. Raihani developed the art of essay in modern Arabic and made it into a pliable literary vehicle that had far-reaching influence on the development of modern Arabic prose and journalism. His American education was a crucial factor in this, since both the form and the content of his essays.

At last we can mention that Ameen Raihani is one of the most interesting literary and intellectual figures of the Arab world of the first forty years of the twentieth century. He is the first Arab Literary name to shine in North America. He enjoyed a great popularity and fame during his life-time and was one of the strongest voices of freedom to be heard during that time. He served the cause of modern Arabic poetry in four ways: Firstly, his early literary activity in America acted as an impetus and an example to the younger immigrants with literary talent around him; Secondly, at the beginning of his career he helped to release the Romantic trend in Arabic literature; Thirdly, his rebellion against outmoded ways in literature in general and poetry in particular was timely, radical and completely legitimate. Fourthly, al-Raihani is known as the 'Father of Prose Poetry' in Arabic.⁴⁹

Appendix

Ameen Raihani's Literary works at a glance:

⁴⁹ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Arabic Works

Essays

1. *The Raihani Essays* (Ar-Raihaniyat-), 1910, The Raihani Printing and Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon.
2. *Literature and Art* (Adab Wa Fan-), 1957, The Raihani Printing and Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon.
3. *Writings of Early Days* (Shatharat Min 'Ahd-Is Siba/), 1980, The Arab Institute For Research and Publication, Beirut, Lebanon.
4. *My Will* (Wasiyati-), 1982, The Arab Institute For Research and Publication, Beirut, Lebanon. Literary Criticism
5. *You the Poets* (Antoum-Ush Shu'ara'-), 1933, Al-Kashaaf Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
6. *My Story with May* (Qussati Ma' May-), 1980, The Arab Institute for Research and Publication, Beirut, Lebanon.

Novels, Short Stories, and Plays

1. *The Trilateral Treaty in the Animal Kingdom* (Al-Muhalafa Ath-Thulathiya Fil Mamlaka -Al Hayawaniya-), 1903, Al-Huda Printing Press, New York, USA.
2. *The Muleteer and the Monk* (Al-Makari Wal Kahen), 1904, Al-Huda Printing Press, New York, USA.
3. *The Lily of Ghore* (Zanbakat-UI Ghawr-), 1914, Al-Funoun Company, New York,
4. *Faithful Time* (Wafa'-Uz Zaman-), 1934, Al-Balagh Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
5. *The Register of Repent* (Sijil -Ut Tawba), 1951, Iqra' Series Publications, Cairo, Egypt.

Poetry

- *Hymn of the Valleys* (Hutaf-UI Awdiya-), 1955, The Raihani Printing and Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon.

Historical and Political Analysis

1. *A treatise on the French Revolution* (Nubza fith-Thowra El-Faransiya-), 1902, Al-Huda Printing Press, New York, USA.
2. *Kings of the Arabs* (Muluk-UI 'Arab-), 1924, The Scientific Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
3. *Disasters* (An-Nakabat-), 1928, The Scientific Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
4. *The Modern History of Najd* (Tareekh Najd Al-Hadeeth-), 1928, The Scientific Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
5. *Extremism and Reform* (At-Tatarof Wal-Islah-), 1928, The Scientific Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
6. *The Heart of Iraq* (Qualb-UI 'Iraq-), 1935, The Sader Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
7. *Nationalisms* (Al-Quawmiyat-), 1956 [Posth.], The Raihani Printing and Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon.
8. *Faysal the First* (Faysal -UI ' Awwal-), 1934, The Sader Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.

Travel

1. *The Heart of Lebanon* (Qualb-U Lubnan-), 1947, The Sader - Raihani Printing Press, Beirut, Lebanon.
2. *The Far Morocco* (Al-Maghreb-UI 'Aqsa-), 1952, Al-Ma'aref Publishers, Cairo, Egypt.
3. *The Illumination of Andalusia* (Nour-UI 'Andaluss-), 1952, Al-Ma'aref Publishers, Cairo, Egypt.

Sayings

- *Seeds for Planters* (Buthur Liz-Zari ' Een-), 1961, The Raihani Printing and Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon.

Letters

- *The Arabic Letters of Ameen Raihani* (Rasa'el Ameen Ar-Rayhani-), 1959, The Raihani Printing and Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon.

English Works

Essays

1. *The White Way and the Desert*, 2002, Platform International, Washington, Dc, USA.
2. *Letters to Uncle Sam*, 2001, Platform International, Washington, Dc, USA.
3. *The Path of Vision*, 1921, James T. White Co., New York.
4. *The Pan Arab Movement*, 1930.
5. *The Fate of Palestine*, 1967, The Raihani Printing And Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon.

Historical & Political Analysis

1. *Turkey and Islam in the War*, 1915-1917
2. *The Descento Bolchevism*, 1920, The Stratford Co., Boston, USA
3. *Maker of Modern Arabia or Ibn Saoud of Arabia, His People and His Land*, 1928.
4. *Iraq during the Days of King Faisal the First*, 1932.

Literary Criticism

1. *Critiques in Art*, 1999, Librairie Du Liban, Beirut, Lebanon.
2. *The Lore of the Arabian Nights*, 2002, Platform International, Washington, Dc, USA.
3. *Arabian Contribution to Civilization*, 1930.
4. *The Poetry of Arabia*, 1930.

Novels, Short Stories, and Plays

1. *Wajdah*, 2001, Platform International, Washington, Dc, USA.
2. *The Book of Khalid*, 1911, Dodd Mead And Co., New York, USA.
3. *The Green Flag*, 1911-1921.
4. *The Lily of Al-Ghore*, 1914.
5. *Jahan*, 1917.
6. *Doctor Della Valle*, 1918.

Poetry

1. *The Quatrains of Abul-'Ala'*, 1903, Doubleday Page And Co., New York, USA.
2. *Myrtle and Myrrh*, 1905, Gorham Press, Boston, USA.
3. *The Luzumiyat of Abul-'Ala'*, 1918, James T. White And Co., New York, USA.
4. *A Chant of Mystics and other Poems*, 1921, James T. White And Co., New York.
5. *The Third Poetry Collection*, 1897-1937.

Travel

1. *In The Land of the Mayas*, 1918-1919.
2. *Arabian Peak and Desert*, 1931, Constable And Co., London.
3. *Around The Coasts of Arabia*, 1930, Constable And Co., London.
4. *Kurdistan*, 1932.

Letters

- The English Letters of Ameen Raihani, 1897-1940.

Behind these Raihani has a lot of Arabic and English works on Literary and political essays which are not published in his life and after his life. 200 Arabic letters dealing with a variety of political and economical subjects, including the discovery of oil in Arabia, frontier problems between Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Yemen, the obstacles to Arab unity, modern methods of education in the Arab world, the Palestine problem, and the importance of accurate coverage of Arab activity reported to the news media of Europe and America and 500 English letters dealing with Raihani's literary and political life as well as his more personal affairs.