

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334108218>

# The Life and Works of Kahlil Gibran: A Critical Review

Article in *Asiatic* · June 2019

CITATIONS

0

READS

537

2 authors:



**Homam Altabaa**

International Islamic University Malaysia

6 PUBLICATIONS 0 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



**Adham Hamawiya**

International Islamic University Malaysia

15 PUBLICATIONS 0 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



التعليل النحوي [View project](#)

## The Life and Works of Kahlil Gibran: A Critical Review

Homam Altabaa<sup>1</sup> and Adham Hamawiya<sup>2</sup>  
International Islamic University Malaysia

Article Received: 21 February 2019

Article Accepted: 15 May 2019

### Abstract

There have been numerous dedicated studies on the life and works of Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) which is understandable due to his stature and popularity in Arabic and American literatures. Nonetheless, it has been argued that the literary establishment has not given Gibran his due credit, especially in the United States, since Gibran has attained global recognition, been translated into tens of languages and sold more volumes than all other poets of America, including Walt Whitman and T.S. Eliot. This review seeks to present an overview of the studies about Gibran and highlight, when possible, the input of these studies on the spiritual aspects in his creative writings. These studies about Gibran and his works have been written in various languages, but the focus here will be on the studies published in English and Arabic, originally or in translation.

### Keywords

Kahlil Gibran, Émigré literature, diaspora, literary studies, comparative studies, mysticism

The life and works of Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) have been the subject of numerous literary and biographical studies. This is understandable given the influence and popularity of Gibran as a poet and a writer of prose fiction. Such studies highlight multifaceted aspects of his life and works. This article begins by reviewing the biographical books and then zooms in on books and articles that deal with specific aspects of and influences on Gibran's works. A good place to begin this review is the comprehensive work *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet*, written by Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, and published in 1998. Bushrui was a world-renowned scholar on Gibran and established the Kahlil Gibran Research and Studies Project at the University of Maryland that sponsored the book. The book follows chronologically the life of Gibran in eleven chapters. In this, it analyses

---

<sup>1</sup> **Homam Altabaa** (Ph.D.) is an assistant professor at International Islamic University Malaysia. His doctoral thesis investigated the mystical elements in the works of Kahlil Gibran. Email: drhomam@iium.edu.my.

<sup>2</sup> **Adham Hamawiya** (Ph.D.) is an assistant professor at International Islamic University Malaysia. His research covers various aspects of Arabic language and literature. Email: adhamawiya@iium.edu.my.

the context of writing and publishing his major works, offering insights and critical commentary on them individually. Throughout its scholarly observations and analyses, the book is methodic and well-referenced. In her foreword to the book, Kathleen Raine<sup>3</sup> strikes a comparison between Gibran and W.B. Yeats, seeing them both as teachers of the modern world who rejected their contemporaneous materialism. In this rejection, Gibran is viewed as “re-visioning Christianity in the light of Islamic (Sufi) mysticism” (Bushrui and Jenkins vii) to locate a spirituality for the people. The book acknowledges and presents a clear appreciation of the mystical and spiritual aspects of Gibran. It sees Christian mysticism and Sufism as great factors in forming the character and poetic aspirations of Gibran. These two influences combined to issue forth the seminal character of *Almustafa*, the spiritual Prophet of “East and West” (Bushrui and Jenkins 9).

The book has plenty to offer for readers interested in the spiritual influences on Gibran. It also occasionally offers comparisons between Gibran and prominent mystical writers such as Ibn ‘Al-Fāriḍ and Ibn ‘Arabī, with regard to certain mystical concepts such as the unity of being. In this, Bushrui and Jenkins have no qualms in describing Gibran as a Sufi. The commentary on the Arabic works of Gibran concludes by describing them as an onslaught of social justice against corruption, hypocrisy and oppression. At the same time, they are a subtle manifestation of Gibran’s “mystical ontology, reforging Sufi thought to express the poetic realities of his own creative vision” (Bushrui and Jenkins 15). As for his English works, they are seen as a counterweight against the mechanical Western worldview that is “arrogantly unresponsive to mysticism” (Bushrui and Jenkins 18). Thus, Gibran transcends these soulless, mechanical views and any cultural barriers to infuse his Eastern spirituality into the Western literary and cultural arenas (Bushrui and Jenkins 18).

Another key biography of Gibran is the work by his friend and peer, Mikhail Naimy, *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and His Works* (1974), which was originally published in Arabic and later translated into English. The beautiful original prose of Naimy, who dramatised some biographical anecdotes of Gibran, is hard to match in any other biography on the latter. Another aspect that is hard to match is the fact that Naimy knew Gibran very well as a close friend and colleague. Naimy and Gibran shared a similar poetic vision that culminated in the establishment of the Pen League (“al-Mahjar”), the first Arab-American literary society, with other prominent and like-minded émigré writers. The common life and shared vision of both poets awarded Naimy deep insights into the life and work of his friend. In recording these insights, Naimy does not refrain from criticising his friend or from offering his subjective opinions. An interesting

---

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Jessie Raine (1908-2003) was a British poet and critic, influenced by William Blake and W.B. Yeats, and deeply interested in spirituality.

factor forming the mysticism of Gibran, according to Naimy, was his desire for fame. Gibran became drunk with the success of his publications and sought more recognition by claiming to be a mystic from the East, born in Bombay, India rather than Bsharrī, Lebanon. Naimy also depicts the ominous and pervasive effect of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) on his friend, and how it replaced his sense of compassion and spirituality with a will to power and greatness (Naimy 119-21). This effect is most evident in Gibran's short story "The Grave-Digger" (1920). Naimy states that the influence of Nietzsche (1844-1900) quickly receded as the essential nature of Gibran was spiritual, "the robes he borrowed from Nietzsche were most unbecoming to him.... Nietzsche's temper, will and faith were not his... their worlds were far apart" (Naimy 142). Gibran's true beliefs, according to Naimy, revolved around an "All-including Self," from which, like a mother, all human souls proceed. On this belief, the morality of man is built, where one is to be as compassionate to other souls as the Mother. Knowledge comes as a flow of the All-Self into the soul. If the flow increases, the human soul feels itself to be infinite, in unity with the All-Self and embracing the whole existence (Naimy 177-78). It is this mystical ontology that enabled Gibran to conceive *The Prophet*, eagerly conveying the "mystic bond of love" and the charms of these spiritual discoveries (Naimy 185). In summary, the importance of this book, by one of the pioneering and adroit writers of modern Arabic, lies in the fact that it presents a comprehensive picture of Gibran. In other words, Gibran is not sentimentally presented as a one-dimensional mystic or a Romantic rebel. Rather, it points to various imperfections such as his excessive inebriation and his hunger for acclaim. The book describes how numerous biographical developments shaped the evolution of the complex character of Gibran as a person and as a creative poet. Accordingly, the mystical writing of Gibran can thus be appreciated through a more multifaceted and nuanced biographical background.

A similar biography in delineating the complex character of Gibran is *Prophet: The Life and Times of Kahlil Gibran* (1998) by the British Classical scholar Robin Waterfield. This book is an academic study rather than a personal account by a colleague or a hagiography by a follower. It pays close attention to the flaws of Gibran's character, such as insincerity, pretension and narcissism. The inaccurate stories of Gibran about his family, status and mystical upbringing are highlighted on various occasions. These, coupled with a desire for fame and greatness, ensured the downfall of Gibran by way of alcoholism and cirrhosis when he was forty-eight years old. Nonetheless, the aim of the book is not to disparage Gibran, but to present a complete portrait of a man, who is both vain and capable of genius-like spiritualism. The book explores all aspects of Gibran's life, with a stress on his failure to live up to the spirituality he preached. Despite this and despite his sentimentality, the book sees Gibran as an ancestor and forerunner of

the New Age movement that rebuffed institutional religion and embraced subjective spirituality.<sup>4</sup>

It can be noted that the biographies by Bushrui and Waterfield have both benefited from one earlier biography, namely, *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World* by Gibran's Lebanese-American relative, Kahlil Gibran, and his wife, Jean Gibran (1974). However, the importance of this biography lies in the fact that it is the first meticulous, exhaustive and well-documented account of Gibran. The one by Naimy is subjective at times and does not rely on historical research and documentation as much as this work does. Thus, the fact-based research behind this book relies on hundreds of letters written by Gibran and his friends and other relevant diaries and historical files. In general, the book presents a complex and rather dark portrayal of Gibran. However, recent biographies have built and expanded on this book to also present a deeper analysis and literary contextualisation of the historical findings of this book.

A book that addresses various aspects of mysticism in the works of Gibran is *Spiritual Tendency in the Literature of Gibran and Naimy*, by Raymonde Cobin. It was written in Arabic, published in Beirut in 1993, and has not been translated into English. The author relies on both English and Arabic works of Gibran and lists extensive secondary references and studies in it. The book is divided into two parts. The first part explores the meaning and roots of spiritualism for Gibran and Naimy, while the second delves into around a hundred spiritual concepts to clarify their meanings according to both poets. These concepts include repentance, spiritual beauty, eternal wisdom, true happiness, overcoming desires, silence, the inner eye, perfection, overcoming the self, nirvana, pain, peace, modesty, among others. Not all of the studied concepts relate to Gibran. Some are examined only in relation to the writings of Naimy. This second part of the book is an index of spiritual concepts and their corresponding quotations by Gibran and Naimy with short commentaries by the author.

The author does not offer a clear statement about her definition of spirituality but rather describes it as transcendence over materialism and belief in the holiness of the soul. She begins the book by describing the roots of spiritualism in the works of Gibran, concluding that a few key factors formed his character and spiritual inclinations. The most important factor, according to the author, is Gibran's mother, who bequeathed most of her traits to her son including her religious and romantic inclinations. The author believes that Gibran consciously sought to adopt the ideas and behaviour of his mother, who as a youth, wished to lead a contemplative life as a nun in a Maronite monastery. This idealised mother is thus presented as a major source of positive influence upon Gibran. Another factor is the natural beauty of Lebanon, with its thick forests,

---

<sup>4</sup> The New Age movement, which became prominent in the 1970s and 1980s, has its roots in the counterculture of the 1960s. It is spiritual, esoteric and millennial revivalist in nature with its focus outside established religious traditions.

lofty mountains, rivers and streams, and rich flora and fauna. The book claims that nature represented innocence and a refuge from the materialism of modern society to young Gibran. In other words, a romanticised vision of nature is presented as a major influence in the life of Gibran.

In addition to the influence of his mother and of nature, Arab culture in general and Islamic mysticism played a vital role in shaping the creative mind of Gibran. The influences of Arab writers and mystics include, but are not limited to, 'Al-Mutanabbī (915-65), 'Al-Ma'arrī (973-1057), Ibn Sīnā (980-1037), 'Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), Ibn 'Al-Fārīdī (1181-1234) and Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406). Divine love, as inspired by Islamic culture, became a constant feature in the writings of Gibran. The stress of Islamic mysticism on knowledge and spirituality has also influenced Gibran. Similarly, Christianity and the New Testament held an unparalleled sway over Gibranian thought. The author claims that Jesus became "Gibran's best friend" since childhood, with Christian teachings leaving an indelible mark on his mind.

Another source of influence is the spiritual movements and the Eastern religions. The author describes the influence of the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-91) and others. Blavatsky's magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), sees the universe, an illusion, as an episodic manifestation of the Absolute Essence, and stresses esoteric knowledge and occult philosophies. The influence of Hinduism, on the other hand, is mostly palpable in concepts such as transmigration of the soul and nirvana, which Gibran embraced and poetically utilised in his works. From the Western hemisphere, the author lists two major influences, the Romantics and Friedrich Nietzsche. Learning English in the United States had flung open the door for Western influences to the heart and mind of the poet. Romantic ideals of subjectivity, freedom, innocence, nature, etc. struck a deep chord in Gibran. William Blake (1757-1827) was a major influence on Gibran as a painter and as a poet, especially with his stress on imagination and prophetic vision. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) exerted a considerable influence on Gibran by his stress on natural goodness and original innocence, which was most visibly exhibited in *The Procession* (1919). Finally, Nietzsche's influence is mainly visible in the revolutionary spirit of some Gibranian works such as the *Tempests* (1920) and in his relentless search for the truth.

Another Arabic book that seeks to cast some light on the literary merits of Gibran is titled *Gibran Khalil Gibran: A Genius from Lebanon*, which was also published in Beirut in 1989, and written by Fūzī 'Aṭwī. The book summarises the life of Gibran, citing travelling and the various environments that he lived in as major factors in forming his character and literary output. The book also offers critical readings of *The Prophet* and the *Tempests*, without exploring their mystical dimensions. The author finally presents what he deems the general characteristics of Gibran, as exhibited in his works. These include rebellion against tradition, evil

and materialism. In this, Gibran is perceived to be a pessimistic critic rather than a reformer, especially in his early works before establishing his activist voice in *The Prophet*. Another feature of Gibran is the triumph of emotionality over rationalism, especially in his percepts of the Unseen. In short, the book assigns literary merit to realism and analytical social commentary, without recognising a great value for Romanticism or spirituality in general.

In contrast, an Arabic book titled *Islāmiyāt Jubrān (Gibran's Islamics)* by 'Aḥmad Husayn Ḥāfiẓ focuses on religious values and beliefs in the works of Gibran and presents a collection of his works that the author considers to be Islamic in theme such as *Iram: City of Lofty Pillars*, a one-act play set in a city mentioned in the Qur'an and first published in 1921. The author traces the development of Gibran's thought, outlining three key stages of intellectual evolution. In the first stage, Gibran was a reformer without intellectual depth, calling for social reform and for an end to oppression in Lebanon without basing these calls on ideological or theoretical frameworks. In the second stage, Gibran was influenced by European thought, with marked Romantic and Nietzschean proclivities. In short, he became a rebel who believed in individual freedom and self-affirmation. In the third stage, Gibran became an intellectual who pondered ontological and religious themes with maturity, yet without losing the Romantic flair. Almost in every turn of his life, the book describes Gibran as having a sincere belief and deep personal sense of God. Gibran marvelled at the Divine Wisdom that creates and sustains the universe, in all its glory and mercy. According to the author, Gibran had strong faith that eventually overcame any scepticism about divine justice and outmatched any philosophical or theological doubts. On nature, Gibran saw it as a manifestation of the creative attribute of God. Thus, all creations have a divine aspect in them that leads to the realisation of higher realities. On death, Gibran did not consider it a form of extinction but rather a relief from God that transports man away from the material world to the world of values and spirits. Gibran took Jesus to embody transcendental values and to be a divine gift to mankind to guide it to the path of love, peace and goodness. This, however, did not translate into adherence to Christianity or any other religion for that matter. Gibran took religion to be every aspect of one's life, a full integration of beliefs and behaviour. Additionally, religion for Gibran was love and compassion, without an institutional framework. To summarise, this book explores various aspects of religion and their manifestations in the Arabic and English works of Gibran, concluding that Gibran was a deeply spiritual man but without adherence to any specific religion.

A study that focuses on Gibran as a Romantic and on his role in the development of modern Arabic literature is *Gibran Khalil Gibran: Between Rebellion and Self-Reconciliation*, by 'Abd 'Al-'azīz 'Al-Nu'mānī. This book, which was written in Arabic and published in Cairo in 1997, contains three major chapters. The first serves as an introduction to Romanticism in the history of Arabic literature, with

focus on key milestones such as the publication of the first collection of poetry by Khalil Muṭrān (1872-1949) and the propagation of Émigré literature in the Arab world. The second chapter presents a biographical sketch of Gibran, his American and Arab settings, and the personal and literary characteristics of his Romanticism. The third chapter presents samples of his works with short commentary. In short, the book, mainly through its second chapter, presents Gibran as a highly sensitive and emotional Romantic poet, with a keen sense of personal freedom and love for nature. Accordingly, a key concept for Gibran was imagination, which enabled man to reach unseen worlds and to make unexpected connections between realism and transcendentalism.

*The Death of the False Prophet Gibran Khalil Gibran* was written in Arabic by George Mikha'īl Dīb and published in Damascus in 2005. It takes an antagonistic stance towards the writings of Gibran because they are essentially mystical, given that mysticism and spirituality are the enemies of reason, science and progress. The book sees the spirituality of Gibran as fake mysticism coupled with shallow philosophy, a collection of opaque and vague sayings. For Gibran, the soul is the essence of man, and Truth can be reached and experienced by man in direct manner through introspection and meditation. The author views such beliefs as traditional Eastern rejection of reason and science, a phobia of naked physical truth that stares man in the face with all its modern cold facts. Thus, rejecting romanticism and spirituality as worthless endeavours, the author details how Gibran understood major mystical concepts. First, the world for Gibran was a prison that withheld humanity from realising their full potential. By the same token, it is also a path to a nobler realm of values; however, materialism prevents humanity from discovering this. At certain points, due to the influence of Islamic mysticism, Gibran presents the world as a manifestation of a higher existence. The physical world can move from being a path, a symbol or a manifestation to be one with the Divine, where God is the world and the world is God. Thus, Gibran's concept of God fluctuates between transcendence and pantheism, and his views on soul sway between Darwinism and reincarnation.

According to Dīb, these views are neither philosophical nor scholarly, but are rather the views of a confused and neurotic immigrant who tries to hide behind a façade of mystery and nebulous spirituality. Moreover, as these views, taken as literary themes, are mere amalgamation of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Western philosophy, and as they bear no semblance to scientific truth, they are absolute nonsense. These mystical fantasies and illusions, characterised by hyperbole and paradox, in fact abort history and replace it with unity with God in a timeless bliss. Finally, such mystical and spiritual hideaways have snuffed the literary merit of Gibran as a young reformer and advocate of justice. In short, this book issues harsh judgements against the works of Gibran, mostly due to its author's censorious adherence to physicalism.



One book that focuses on Gibranian thought without overt judgmental notions of right and wrong is *Jubrān 'Al-Faylasūf*, by Ghassān Khālid. The title can be translated as *Gibran the Philosopher*, and the word “Philosopher” here indicates that Gibran is primarily concerned with the nature of reality and existence. The author sees the thought of Gibran to be characterised by unavoidable philosophical aspirations that were addressed poetically rather than methodically and analytically. For instance, Gibran is constantly concerned with the otherworldly, which in the form of systematic metaphysics is an important component of philosophy. Thus, the study seeks to reveal the underlying philosophical positions behind Gibran’s spiritual poetical lines. To reflect and address major thematic concerns of Gibran, the book dedicates two sections; the first deals with calls of social reform, and the second addresses the relationship between God and man. Additionally, the book delves with a psychoanalytical examination into the life of Gibran, with a focus on clear indications of an Oedipal complex. It also posits that Gibran’s behaviour exhibits symptoms of narcissism, inferiority complex and neurosis, among others. At certain stages, Gibran was schizophrenic finding refuge away from clashing with harsh social realities in seclusion. According to the book, these mental states helped fuel the creativity of Gibran and led him to find his own unique poetic voice.

*Gibran the Philosopher* examines Gibran’s call for social reform and denunciation of religious and state oppression through a religious perspective. The collective subconscious of Lebanese villagers at the end of the eighteenth century revolved around images of paradise and about reflecting these images on earth. Gibran was distressed by the social realities of transgression and oppression and sought after a prophet to save his village and mankind at large. Hence, this could explain his deep love and admiration for Jesus and highlight the vital role of Almustafa in his creative imagination. The struggle between the image of paradise and conditions in real life led Gibran in some extremes to destructive attitudes and pessimism, as exhibited in the *Tempests*. Regardless of motives and psychological analysis, the author finds four pivots of social reform in the works of Gibran.

The first of these pivots calls for reform of religion through abandoning the role of intermediaries; the clergy who claim to be arbitrators of justice and speakers on behalf of the Truth. God, by His own Will, is a call for all men and women, and is not the privilege of a select few. This reform of religion also entails perceiving the world for what it is: as a mirror of God, rather than an end in itself. The true value lies not in the material, but rather in the spiritual. Another form of religious reform revolves around happiness in both worlds, for true religion ensures that its followers are happy and strong rather than fearful and oppressed.

The second of these pivots can be described as feminist at its core. Social reform can only be achieved by allowing women to freely choose their husbands. The will of women should not be subjugated to financial or status considerations

determined by the patriarchal head of the family. The third pivot of social reform relates to class struggle, where Gibran stands firmly by the poor. He calls for the poor to abandon their stance of slavery towards the rich. Feudal lords must give back to the poor the wealth they have illegitimately amassed. Princes, pashas and chieftains are not divinely ordained and should first and foremost serve the cause of social justice. These two pivots lead women and the poor, the lower caste of a social hierarchy, to realise the meaning of good and evil, which is the fourth and final pivot of Gibranian social reform. This meaning can only be apprehended through struggle and suffering; the struggle against evil and deficiency leads one to realise happiness and sufficiency.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, when judging right from wrong, appearances can be deceiving and are not an adequate criterion. It is the essence that matters, and deeds cannot be judged without knowing their intentions. Thus, when a poor man is accused of thievery or a girl of adultery, one should not hasten to condemnation and labelling. The complexity of human relations renders tolerance and prudence essential for knowing right and wrong. However, human beings are quintessentially good. Whether as a part of nature or as a breath of God, the essence of mankind is not evil. Evil comes when the individual forgets or loses his/her original innocence in the commotion of urban society. The state of nature and the original state of humankind are the best compass that guide to goodness and right.

As for the second section of the book about the relationship between humanity and God, it describes a path of ascension to divine unity as conceived by Gibran in various texts. First, people must rid themselves of their earthly and material attachments, and focus their being on being one with the Divine. If one achieves this unity, one becomes perfect; one with their own self, one with nature and one with God. Human nature is ready and inclined to achieve this unity, and one needs only to struggle and purify his soul to achieve the original state of perfection. Thus, achieving this state does not entail the creation of a new person, but rather it involves removing whatever material veils that blind the inner eye of the soul. For Gibran, discovering the greatness within defies ignorance and material serfdom in favour of a will to power, a divine power.

In the writings of Gibran, theological arguments do not seem to have a place. Thus, the existence of God and his attributes are almost taken for granted, without recourse to intellectual deliberations. God can thus be perceived in the clouds and in the trees. His omnipresence, much like His omnipotence, is not a matter for philosophical polemics, but a matter of experiencing unity with the divine in every aspect of life and a matter of holistic morality based on this experience. To summarise, Gibran does not condone deism or the belief in a deity

---

<sup>5</sup> The author relates Gibran to Plotinus in his calls for contemplation and transforming pain and other disturbances into wisdom and knowledge.

who is too transcendent to intervene in the affairs of the world he created. God is everywhere. However, his presence is not to be experienced philosophically, but rather spiritually and mystically. A person seeks unity with God as a natural way to achieve his/her own perfection. Jesus was a man who achieved this perfection and strove to establish paradise on earth through love and compassion.

The author locates various tendencies towards occultism in the writings of Gibran, such as his repeated symbolic use of the number seven and his references to the transmigration of the souls. Thus, a person has seven selves, which match the seven reincarnations before one achieves perfection. Such references are taken by the author to indicate a fascination of the occult rather than adherence to certain religious beliefs such as Theosophy. In short, Gibran wrote to overcome the limitations of the material and the physical, liberating life from its bondage in order to reach a union with the Divine. This book offers penetrating analysis and psychological insights into the life and works of Gibran. It is valuable for appreciating his metaphysical beliefs and their relationship with mystical and moral experiences.

A different approach to Gibran can be found in a book titled *The Science of Creativity*, written in Arabic by Marwān Fāris and published in Beirut in 1990. It addresses works by four modern Arab writers, starting with Gibran. The two relevant chapters are dedicated to structuralist analysis of *The Earth Gods* (1931) and *The Ash of Generations and the Eternal Fire* (1906). The book concludes that the language of these works is poetic although their genre is short story, and that ambiguity and repetition are central throughout these works. Ambiguity and repetition, on the surface, give a sense that his works have a logical deep structure. Thematically, Gibran addresses binary concepts such as life and death, body and soul, movement and stillness, and time and eternity. The conclusion is that love is the essence of all and the criterion by which to judge all binaries. To summarise, this book offers a rare semiotic analysis of the signs and structures at play in Gibran's literary world. This analysis highlights, in the end, the importance of love as the defining essence of Gibranian works.

A journal article in Arabic entitled, "Philosophical Sources of Northern Émigré Literature" by Nasrollah Shameli and Sohbatollah Hasan Vand, focuses on the intellectual influences upon key émigré writers. Considerable attention is paid to Gibran as the founding head of The Pen League and the "dean" of Arabic literature in North America. The first source examined is Islamic mysticism, especially in its emphasis on the concept of Unity of Being. The second source is Islamic philosophy, with its treatises on the soul such as the work of Ibn Sīnā. The third source is Indian and Chinese religions, with concepts such as the transmigration of the soul. The fourth source is European philosophy, especially the works of Nietzsche, with their emphasis on the will to power and master-slave morality. Finally, the influence of European literature is addressed, especially the works of Maurice Maeterlinck and William Blake, in their focus on

spirituality and imagination. The paper concludes that the worldview of émigré writers and an essential principle of their writings, due to these collective influences, is the belief that existence is spiritual in essence. The search for the Absolute defines this existence and grants meaning to its endeavours. Additionally, émigré writers, Gibran included, advocated a unity of existence and an idealist position in perceiving reality.

An article in a Turkish academic journal entitled, “The Idea of Balance between Spirituality and Intelligence According to Khalil Gibran” by Mehmet Atalay, takes spirituality and intelligence as a vital duality to examine the literary world of Gibran. The author sees that the works of Gibran revolved around different conceptual dualities such as joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, body and soul, work and family, earth and heaven, tear and smile, among others. He thus claims that Gibran thought in dualistic terms and the reason behind this lay in the events that had shaped his life and thought. Immigration from the cedars of Mount Lebanon to the skyscrapers of New York had also helped form the West/East duality that shaped the perception of Gibran. Accordingly, he wrote in Arabic calling for social and literary revolution but wrote in English calling for contentment and inner peace. He also stood as an Eastern guru preaching spirituality to the West, and in contrast expounded the virtues of rationality to the East. However, the Eastern spiritual heritage was ingrained in the psyche of young Gibran and later became his cache in dealing with American culture.

The dualistic philosophy of Gibran evolved to arrive at a synthesis for all types of dualities. Thus, the duality of body and soul came to be synthesised through love, just as love unites the duality of man and woman. Similarly, the duality of sorrow and joy or the duality of reason and passion finds its synthesis in understanding, as these two opposites become steps on the ladder towards a higher understanding of life. The symbolic “Greater Sea” in various works of Gibran, especially in *The Madman* (1918), represents the union and dissolution of all dualities in the ultimate unity of Truth. The author concludes that in finding all these syntheses, the first concern of Gibran was, in fact, spiritual. These syntheses are part of a spiritually-inclined worldview.

Another article that deals with the philosophy of Gibran and its evolution is “The Mind and Thought of Khalil Gibran” by Nadeem Naimy who is a leading authority on Arab émigré literature. The article cautions first that Gibran was not a philosopher and that, as a poet and mystic, philosophy for him was a state of being. To look at Gibran as an immigrant mystical poet is to look at someone thrice estranged by facts of immigration, mysticism and poetry. Hence, three types of yearning define such an individual; a yearning for the homeland, a yearning for an imaginary utopia and a yearning for a transcending world of truth. The emphasis on these yearnings, respectively, categorised the works of Gibran as he evolved as a writer in three stages. A synthesis or harmony between the three yearnings/stages characterises his literary maturity in the third stage.

In the early stage, in works such as *Broken Wings* (1912) and *Spirits Rebellious* (1908), a protagonist struggles to free Lebanon from its feudal and ecclesiastical abductors. It is this social interest that led Gibran to be considered an iconoclast and a rebel short of a reformer, as he did not offer an alternative for the status quo except verbal romantic eloquence. In the second stage, as in *A Tear and a Smile* (1914), Lebanon becomes more of an abstract utopian land than a geographical entity. Thus, his revolt was directed at universal human follies, not related to a specific context. This is best exemplified in works such as *The Procession* (1919) and *The Tempests* (1920). A struggle between dualities, such as poor vs rich, oppressed vs oppressor, good vs evil, characterises these two stages. In the third stage, Gibran the Prophet finds the path to self-fulfilment as a seed that grows from the harsh realities of the earth to blossom in the infinite space of heavens. A mystical belief in One Reality and a belief in the unity of life, with all its joys and sorrows, give this stage its defining feature. Self-fulfilment is achieved through a realisation of a higher truth of oneness. In short, this article presents a cohesive view of Gibran as an immigrant mystical poet, shedding a unifying light on these three aspects and how they shaped the literary output of Gibran. Accordingly, a deeper understanding of the formation and dimensions of his mysticism is achieved.

A book edited by Layla Al Maleh and entitled *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, contains two important articles that shed light on Gibran in the American literary context. The first article by Richard E. Hishmeh, "Strategic Genius, Disidentification, and the Burden of the Prophet in Arab-American Poetry," discusses Gibran from the perspective of other Arab-American writers. Gibran's works are examined for political stances within their intensely subjective and spiritual messages. Starting from the works of George Lipsitz (1947-) and Gayatri Spivak (1942-), and their concepts of strategic anti-essentialism and strategic essentialism, the article reads the spirituality and Romanticism of Gibran as a survival and self-assertion strategy. Gibran utilised the essentialist Western perception of the East as a source of mystical and esoteric insights to underscore his own voice and identity as a writer and a person. From this standpoint, Gibran was able to further engage the overriding cultural context in order to change its attitude. This self-Orientalising is a process of disidentification that both concedes and rejects the dominant culture. Thus, Gibran's adoption of English as a language of literary expression marks a conscious decision of self-affirmation in the American context. Gibran's success in presenting himself as an Eastern mystic and Romantic visionary, with influences from American writers Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892), empowered his literary appeal and, at the same, his position as an Arab-American minority writer.

Influenced by the works of Edward Said, the second article by Wail S. Hassan, "Gibran and Orientalism," also discusses Gibran from a postcolonial

perspective. The article sees the commercial success of Gibran, compared to other Arab-American writers, to be phenomenal. A major factor behind this success is the impression given by Gibran as a mystical teacher and Eastern sage. This is inevitably connected to a discourse that, upon choosing to write in English, Gibran engaged in with the dominant cultural discourse of Orientalism. Gibran, by virtue of his bilingual writing, became a cultural translator and a critic of the East and the West. Gibran came to write in Arabic as a Westerner in Romantic garbs of subjectivity and revolution, and to write in English as a sagacious Oriental mystic. Gibran presented the West, on one hand, as materialistic, selfish and in need of an injection of spirituality in the form of prophetic aphorisms and mystical parables. On the other hand, the East was presented as a monolithic entity of vagueness, mystery and spirituality. This implicated Gibran in an Orientalist discourse which has been criticised as hegemonic and imperialist. Furthermore, Gibran failed to offer a critique of these cultural constructs but rather confirmed their validity.

On a biographical note, Gibran accepted the Americanisation of his name and presented himself as a noble hero and mysterious guru. In this, the author sees Gibran as a chameleon trying to blend in rather than as a cultural translator who tries to change, link or associate two different cultures. A redeeming quality to the mysticism and spirituality of Gibran is the fact that he assigned a positive value to the Orient he presented. Gibran's amalgamation of Hinduism, Sufism, Romanticism, Christianity and Nietzschean philosophy was remodeled as Oriental spiritualism before being presented as a replacement to Western materialism. It can be argued that this process of cultural interaction awards equivalent value to the East and the West and invites a reciprocal association between the two cultures.

In summary, these two articles employ postcolonial concepts to examine the life and works of Gibran. Expectedly, both articles address the mystical and spiritual elements related to Gibran, shedding light on their various roles in his life and writings. This highlights the wide-ranging implications of his spirituality and mysticism and underscores their undeniable importance.

An important current that cannot be ignored in the writings of Gibran is that of Romanticism. The influence and manifestations of Romanticism in his works have been the subject of various dedicated and general studies. One of these studies is *Gibran, Ribani & Naimy: East-West Interactions in Early Twentieth-Century Arab Literature* (2009), which focuses on the Romantic method of Gibran. Another study is *William Blake and Kahlil Gibran: Poets of Prophetic Vision* (2002), which traces the influence of British Romanticism, especially Blake's, on Gibran's works. A thesis entitled, *Spiritual Revival and Social Rebellion in William Blake and Kahlil Gibran: A Comparative Perspective* (2012), was recently published online. These focused works of literary study and other relevant works on the life and works of Gibran in general agree that Romanticism had a great influence on Gibran. He

learned from the Romantics and evolved through their thought and literature. This influence is not limited to William Blake, as all these studies would agree, but includes William Wordsworth and the American transcendentalists.

Knowledge of Western literature only came to the forefront among Arab writers in the second half of the nineteenth century. Romanticism only seems to appear strongly on the scene of Arabic literature in the early years of the twentieth century. Thus, Gibran was exposed to Romanticism through Arabic literary circles and through his education in America and Europe. For Gibran and the Romantics, there are numerous points of intersection such as their rebellion against the rigid and hypocritical rules of both church and society, their thirst for solitude, disappointment and disillusionment with civilised societies, rejection of materialism, hunger for nature, belief in the original goodness of man, embracing subjectivity and individualism, confidence in prophetic visions and the revolutionising role of poets, and recourse to imagination and the spiritual over the rational. The importance of Romantic thought for Gibran can hardly be overemphasised. Thus, Romanticism has helped shape the spirituality of Gibran, and it would not be feasible to reach a full appreciation of his mystical writings without studying its influence.

The transcendentalist influence on Gibran has been addressed by Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh, in an article entitled “Gibran’s *The Procession* in the Transcendentalist Context.” As Gibran lived in Boston, the city of both Emerson and Thoreau, he was exposed through libraries and education to the works of the transcendentalists. By reading Emerson, Gibran first came to appreciate Neo-Platonism and Buddhism. The author argues that some Gibranian works echo transcendentalist works in form or in content. As for *The Procession*, it is extensively “Emersonian and Thoreauvian” in both themes and style. This is evident in “its language, its basic philosophic assumptions and ideas (especially its conception of human society, human nature, and individual life) and in its dualistic structure” (Majdoubeh 480). Although the author admits that there are other influences in the poem as well.

After analysing the multiple points of similarity and analogy between the three writers, the article concludes that Gibran is a transcendentalist as he overcomes material wants and transcends them to a higher mode of existence. Here again, the spiritual and mystical element in the writings of Gibran plays an important role in defining and understanding his works and stature. By comparing relevant aspects of his works to transcendentalist writings, the article explores important dimensions of the Gibranian corpus.

An article entitled, “The ‘Blue Flame’: An ‘Elliptical’ Interaction between Kahlil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore,” examines the influence of Indian culture and religion on Gibran. Thus, it locates the connection between Gibran and Hinduism in Tagore, rather than Emerson or other Western sources. Gibran and Tagore met more than once during the latter’s visit to the United States.

Thus, Gibran was strongly influenced by Tagore's mysticism and his views on God, pantheism and the transmigration of souls. However, as Tagore presented a blend of numerous tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism combined with Christian concepts, Gibran did not receive nor form an accurate representation of Indian traditions. Nonetheless, Gibran adopted various concepts of this tradition in his writings in trying to forge a new identity for himself as a writer of Eastern spirituality. In summary, the article explores the interesting and important aspects of Gibran's spirituality and mysticism.

To conclude, the life and works of Gibran present a rich field of studies for literary and cultural criticism, history and religious studies. As presented above, there is a variety of works that cover or address various aspects of his biography and creative output. The current review presents to those interested in such studies and in Gibran a parallel examination of relevant works written in Arabic and in English. Hopefully, this provides researchers, especially those who are not fluent in both languages, with a useful guide to significant references about Gibran.

## Works Cited

- 'Aḥmad Ḥusayn. *Islāmīyāt Jubrān*. Cairo: El-Sherif Mass Publication and Distribution, 2010.
- 'Al-Nu'mānī, 'Abd 'Al-'azīz. *Jubrān Khalil Jubrān bayna 'Al-Tamarrud wa Muṣālahat 'Al-Nafs* (Gibran Khalil Gibran: Between Rebellion and Self-Reconciliation). Cairo: 'Al-Dār 'Al-Maṣriyah 'Al-Lubnāniyah, 2004.
- Atalay, Mehmet. "The Idea of Balance between Spirituality and Intelligence According to Khalil Gibran." *Istanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* (Istanbul University Faculty of Theology Journal) 17 (2008): 101-25.
- 'Aṭwī, Fūzī. *Jubrān Khalil Jubrān: 'Abqarī min Lubnān* (Gibran Khalil Gibran: A Genius from Lebanon). Beirut: Dār 'Al-Fikr 'Al-'arabī, 1989. Bushrui, S. and Jenkins, J. *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet*. Oxford: One World, 2008.
- Cobin, R. *'Al-Naṣ'ab 'Al-Ruḥiyyah fī 'Adāb Jubrān wa Nā'imī* (Spiritual Tendency in the Literature of Gibran and Naimy). Beirut: Dār 'Al-Fikr 'Al-Lubnānī, 1993.
- Datta, Indrani. "The 'Blue Flame': An 'Elliptical' Interaction between Kahlil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 2.2 (2010): 110-22.
- Dīb, George Mikha'īl. *Mawt 'Al-Nabī 'Al-Za'if Jubrān Khalil Jubrān* (The Death of the False Prophet Gibran Khalil Gibran). Damascus, Al Mada Publishing Company, 2005.
- El-Hage, George Nicolas. *William Blake & Kahlil Gibran: Poets of Prophetic Vision*. Louaize, Lebanon: Notre Dame UP, 2002.



- Fāris, Marwān. *'ilm 'Al-'ibda'* (The Science of Creativity). Beirut: All Prints Distributors and Publishers, 1990.
- Gibran, J. and Gibran, K. *Kablil Gibran: His Life and World*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing, 1974.
- Hassan, Wail S., "Gibran and Orientalism." *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*. Ed. Layla Al Maleh. New York: Rodopi, 2009. 65-92.
- Hishmeh, R. "Strategic Genius, Disidentification, and the Burden of the Prophet in Arab-American Poetry." *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*. Ed. Layla Al Maleh. New York: Rodopi, 2009. 93-118.
- Imangulieva, A. *Gibran, Ribani & Naimy: East-West Interactions in Early Twentieth-century Arab Literature*. Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2009.
- Khālid, Ghassān. *Jubrān 'Al-Faylasūf* (Gibran the Philosopher). Beirut: Naufal Publishers, 1983.
- Majdoubeh A. "Gibran's *The Procession* in the Transcendentalist Context." *Arabica* 49.4 (2002): 477-93.
- Naimy, M. *Kablil Gibran: His Life and his Works*. Beirut: Naufal Publishers, 1974.
- Naimy, Nadeem. "The Mind and Thought of Khalil Gibran." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 5 (1974): 55-71.
- S.H. Ganaie. *Spiritual Revival and Social Rebellion in William Blake and Kahlil Gibran: A Comparative Perspective*. Aligarh Muslim University, 2012.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/11239> accessed on 20-05-2019. 15 April 2019.
- Shameli, Nasrollah and Sohbatollah Hasan Vand. "Al-Maṣādir 'Al-Falsafiyah fī 'Adab 'Al-Mahjar 'Al-Shamālī." *'Al-Turāth 'Al-'Adabī* 1.4 (2009): 97-112.
- Waterfield, R. *Prophet: The Life and Times of Kahlil Gibran*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.