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**GIBRAN KAHLIL GIBRAN
BETWEEN TWO MILLENNIA**

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In the course of the year, 2000, the so-called Millennium Year, many lectures were delivered by representatives of various nationalities in which they reviewed the achievements of their respective peoples in the course of the twentieth century, together with their hopes and their expectations for the twenty-first. The Arabs, or their twenty-two states- to my knowledge- have not saluted the end of the century or the dawn of the new one through such celebratory lectures, and we all know why: it has not been a good century in Arab history.

Lectures of a different kind were also delivered and exhibitions were mounted, celebrating Western artists and men of letters. Such was the case in England, which in its National Gallery, the Tate Britain, has mounted an exhibition that lasted for some three months, from November 2000 till February 2001, thus straddling both centuries. It displayed in its entirety the work of one of her artistic geniuses, and conveniently for our purpose tonight, it was none other than William Blake, Gibran's "ancestor in the spirit." The three months of the Exhibition witnessed a torrent of lectures, seminars, books, articles, conferences, courses, performances, films, videos and workshops, all in Blake's memory and honor. The critics rehabilitated him as a genius under whose influence many modern artists are now working, and also poets reflected in such titles as "The Blake Renaissance in Modern Poetry."¹

It was in Paris that Auguste Rodin is said to have called Gibran "The William Blake of the Twentieth Century," when he discovered that Gibran was under the jurisdiction of two Muses: painting and literature. Indeed, Gibran was such and the study of Gibran's literary and artistic *oeuvre* is most profitable when his natural affinity with Blake and the latter's influence on him are recognized and investigated. The judgment of the distinguished French sculptor must have confirmed Gibran's faith in his artistic and literary talents and in the intimate relationship that obtained between the two, especially in those works of his that united both, as in literary works that he himself illustrated, such as his masterpiece, *The Prophet*.²

These, then, are two of the three inspirations of this lecture: the William Blake Exhibition at Tate Britain in London, and the dawn of the New Millennium, to both of which I was fully exposed for an entire year, my Sabbatical spent in my alma mater, Oxford. They inspired me to write a paper on what can be done for Gibran in the context of these two inspirations, similar to what has been done for Blake. Shortly after I returned to my base in Washington, the tragic events of September 11 took place, which changed the image of the Arabs and Islam in America from what it had been before in the twentieth century, to what it has become in the twenty-first. They immediately provided a third inspiration to rewriting this lecture on Gibran, whom these events have raised to a new level of relevance-, that of the image. And à propos of September, the eleventh, a quotation from Gibran is very apposite. In an open letter, which he addressed to Americans of Arab origin on the

various constituents of good citizenship, one sentence is especially relevant, and it reads as follows:

“It is to stand before the Towers of New York and Washington, Chicago and San Francisco saying in your hearts ‘I am the descendant of a people who built Damascus and Byblos, Tyre, Sidon, and Antioch, and I am here to build with you, and with a will.’” The quotation speaks for itself.³

So much for an introduction. In a lecture that is tri-partite in inspiration and hence in structure,⁴ which presents Gibran -inter alia- as a figure in world literature, it is necessary even incumbent, to re-examine the truth about his place within the caravan of internationally acclaimed men of letters, especially as he has always been in the center of controversy, one who has never suffered from any lack of admirers or detractors, both in his lifetime and posthumously. In the course of only the last quinquennium, two substantial books have appeared on him, one laudatory,⁵ the other derogatory.⁶ It is, therefore, to addressing this question that the first part of this lecture is devoted.

-I-

Gibran has been the gift of Lebanon and the Arab peoples to America and the Arab-American community. No Arab author has reached so many million Americans in the course of almost a century as Gibran has, and no Arab-American literary figure has attained the *global* reputation that Gibran has, after being translated into some twenty of the languages of the world. Although his *Prophet* has sold, according to one estimate,⁷ ten million copies, thus outselling all American poets from Whitman to Eliot, the American literary establishment has not given him the recognition he deserves, and has not admitted him to the American literary canon. The Ivy League Universities, such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, do not teach him in their departments of English or Comparative Literature, and it is only recently that he came to be taught, but in a non-Ivy League University, that of Maryland, by Professor Suhayl Bushrui. The most American of all philosophies, pragmatism, has not been applied to Gibran, the philosophy that judges the validity of a work by its results. As has been said, ten million people in all walks of life and in various countries and periods have bought *The Prophet* and read it, a reflection of the fact that the pragmatic test has been unofficially applied to it, and their favorable judgment strongly suggests that *The Prophet* has passed the pragmatic test. Indeed, ten million cannot be entirely wrong. Yet, *The Prophet* has not passed the threshold of the Canon.

In anthologies of English or American literature, Gibran does not appear, not even in those that are known for diversity in their cultural inclusions, such as the prestigious *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*,⁸ where there is not a line from Gibran. The confusion that attends Gibran and his work extends, even pervades, the libraries and bookshops, where *The Prophet* is not to be found on the shelves reserved to literature, but to religion, a fact to which the title of the book, *The Prophet*, contributed its generous share, thus making Gibran a religious figure, and worse still, an Oriental guru. In this respect, Gibran stands in sharp contrast with another countryman of his, namely George

Shehade, who has been immediately accepted by the French Literary Establishment and indeed has become one of the major representatives of Surrealism in French Literature.

What, then, is the truth about Gibran as an artist and a man of letters? I shall begin with Gibran as a man of letters.

As a man of letters in Arabic, Gibran has stood the test of time, the best of all critics. It has been a century since his literary career began, when his first publications received a wide and immediate vogue, and they have remained such till the present day, thus illustrating Ezra Pound's dictum on true literature, that it is "news that stays news." In Arabic, his place is secure and has been recognized by fair and objective critics. As is well known, he pioneered almost all the literary genres which he and his colleagues introduced into Arabic, such as the essay, the short story, the novel, and the drama, thus relieving Arabic literature of its medieval look and endowing it with all the aspects of contemporary Western literature. In poetry, he wrote in the traditional idiom of classical Arabic prosody and in that of free-verse, and he is rightly considered the father of modernity in Arabic literature, both in prose and poetry.⁹

Although his creativity as a man of letters took place in America, he and his group of Arab-American writers revolutionized the course of Arabic literature in the Arab homeland as representatives of the new school of Romanticism in Arab literature, antedating and preludeing the rise and development of the romantic movement in the Arab world, through the Diwân school and then the Apollo school, both in Egypt. Thus, from their base in America, the Arab-American writers presided over by Gibran, proved to be the catalyst in the literary renaissance of the Arab world in its vast Afro-Asian extent.

In addition to his being one of the classics of modern Arabic literature, he had the good fortune of having one of his best poems set to music and sung by the foremost singer in the Arab world, the Lebanese *chanteuse*, Fayrûz, who has charmed audiences in the Arab world, from Gulf to Ocean and also western audiences even in America and in Europe. In so doing, Fayrûz has enabled Gibran's literary legacy to be spread among millions of people to whom his writings had remained *terra incognita*; but now, through the auditory dimension, a lyric of his has been wed to music and song, arts on which he had written one of his earliest works, *al-Mûsiqâ*.

So much for Gibran's *oeuvre* in Arabic and its secure place in the Arab world. But Gibran was a bilingual literary artist, and in the last decade or so of his life, he turned to English, through which he wrote his works notably his masterpiece *The Prophet*, the work on which his reputation in the western non-Arab world rests, a single book he wrote in the twenties of the last century, a slim volume that can be read in an hour. But the non-Arab world at large, with the exception of a few specialists among the Arabists, know practically little or nothing about him and his work other than his authorship of *The Prophet*. His astounding versatility and the many facets of his *persona*, let alone his *anima*, remain unknown to the majority of his admirers with the result that his image is opaque and its outlines are blurred. As has been already said earlier in this paper, Gibran, respected and loved by millions in all walks of life, has yet to be accepted by the American literary establishment. In a paper delivered at the Library of Congress in Washington in 1995, which later appeared in print, I have explained in detail the reasons why Gibran has not yet

been inducted into that Hall of Fame, the American Literary Canon.¹⁰ Some distinguished literary critics and theorists would like to dismantle this Canon. They do not think much of it and consider it a construct. In the words of one of them, Terry Eagleton, "it is a construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time."¹¹ However, the Canon remains important, even in Classical Arabic literary theory, reflected in the exchange between the eighth century critic Khalaf al-Ahmar, and one who told him "If I think a poem is good, I do not care a hoot for what you or your coterie, the critics, say about it." To which Khalaf replied "You may consider a dirham you have a good coin, but of what avail is it, if the money changer in the market tells you it is not a good penny?"¹²

For Gibran to appeal to the sophisticated literary critic, the latter has to be made aware of Gibran's *oeuvre* in its entirety, the *oeuvre* that made him the acknowledged dean of Arabic letters in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the one who revolutionized the course of that literary tradition. But that *oeuvre* is a closed book to the critic who is innocent of Arabic. Here comes the importance of rendering Arabic Gibran into an English version that can reflect the art of Gibran in the original Arabic. Two of the Classics of World Literature are *translations* from the world of the Near East, the English Authorized Version of the Bible and the Fitzgerald English version of the Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam.¹³

The task will not be easy in the translation of certain portions of Gibran's work. Arabic and English belong to two entirely different families of languages and it has been truly said that "in Arabic, as in all other literatures, the canons of wit, elegance, and artistry in writing were dictated by the genius of the language."¹⁴ Shakespeare, for instance, translates well into a cognate language like German, but much less well into French, a Romance language. And Arabic is much further removed from English than French. Hence, some of Gibran's translations into English may sound florid and artificial, but they do not so sound in the original Arabic. It would, therefore, be unrealistic to expect translations of Gibran's works from Arabic to rival the Authorized Version and the Rubaiyyat, but hopefully they might be with measurable distance from them. Then, and only then, will *The Prophet* cease to exist in splendid isolation, but will be related to the rest of Gibran's *oeuvre* in its entirety, which established him as the foremost man of letters of his day, and this relation will draw attention to the fact that *The Prophet* proceeded from the same creative faculty that had produced the critically acclaimed previous ones, and that Gibran was one of the genuine literary voices of the twentieth century. Even this may not be enough to have Gibran enter the Canon. The case of William Blake, with whose name he was linked, is illuminating. That artist-poet was almost rejected by contemporaries, some of whom even declared him a lunatic. Blake had to wait for a hundred years before he was admitted to the Canon, and only when a major poet of the twentieth century and member of the Canon, namely William Butler Yeats, accepted him and saluted him in one of his poems. The case of Naguib Mahfouz is also à propos to invoke. Few outside the Arab World had heard of him, and it was only when he was awarded the Nobel Prize a few years ago, that he was accepted world-wide. Recently, in one of the issues of the New York Review,¹⁵ Edward Said endorsed the judgment of the Nobel Prize Committee on Mahfouz and wrote a long article in favor of him.

So much for Gibran, the literary artist, the man of Letters, and for the Anglophone world. I turn now to Gibran, the visual and graphic artist.

-II-

Gibran's place in the history of art is not established or so clear as his place in literature. And yet it was as an artist that he began his career in Boston, then in New York, and it was as a student of art that he came to Paris in 1908,- the only period in his life when he studied his craft in a truly artistic environment, amid the giants of the first decade of this century, an opportunity that was never given him as a literary artist. By the time of his death, he had left behind him some 400 pieces he had drawn and painted, pieces which nowadays are distributed in various parts of the world. His art has received much less attention than his literary work, and thus it, too, has suffered what his *Prophet* has from the Western critics, but for a different reason.

Four years ago, the *Institut du Monde Arabe* (IMA) in Paris mounted an exhibition of his paintings and it was very à propos, since it was in that city that Gibran received the nearest approximation to what might be termed a formal and serious education in art. The exhibition was very imaginative as it presented the work of Gibran chronologically and in conjunction with other artists contemporary with Gibran, who influenced him, a juxtaposition that enabled critics to compare and contrast. A catalogue prepared by 'Isa Makhluuf and Ibrahim al-Alawi presented the exhibits with critical comments.¹⁶

England, as has been said, mounted an exhibition in the National Gallery of Art, Tate Britain, for the work of William Blake, which displayed him in his entirety, some 500 pieces; the exhibition lasted for three months straddling the two years of the two centuries. What England and critics have done for the memory of their Blake has tempted me to devote the second part of this paper to what can be done for Gibran the artist, in the light of Blake's exhibition.

This is apposite for three reasons: Blake exercised the greatest influence on Gibran, whether or not Auguste Rodin said so; because Blake was omitted from the Paris exhibition of Gibran's work in 1998 rightly and understandably, as the exhibition, mounted in Paris, presented Gibran in the French cultural milieu under French, not English artistic influence; the Blake exhibition at the Tate elicited so many positive and favorable comments on Blake's art, which had previously been under fire in certain circles. In this respect, Gibran is in the same boat as Blake and, so, a treatment of Gibran's art in the Blake context will hopefully contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of Gibran's art, especially since Gibran still has some hostile critics.

-A-

Before I treat Gibran and Blake, I should like to say a few words on Gibran's art, not as a professional art historian, which I am not, but as an historian and a cultural analyst:

- 1- Gibran was precocious and self-taught. He was 25 years old when he came to Paris for two years, the only time he could be said to have had some formal training in art.

- 2- Unlike other artists, his life was relatively short. He died at the age of 48. Goethe and Hugo died in their eighties and Blake, the closest one to him, lived 21 years more than Gibran did, and it was during these last twenty years of his life that Blake reached the height of his powers. One could imagine what Gibran would have achieved if he had lived twenty more years.
- 3- During this short life, he was plagued by ill-health, three deaths in his family, all of consumption, was an uprooted immigrant who had to live his childhood in Chinatown, underprivileged, socially and otherwise. Furthermore, while other graphic artists were only such, he was both an artist and man of letters.
- 4- Yet in spite of all this, he left behind him some 400 pieces which reflected his versatility. He was surrounded by jealous critics. While in Paris, he apparently rejected the new innovative styles and schools which Paris witnessed early in the century, including Cubism, and preferred to stay in the fold of Classical art and that of the Italian Renaissance. Critics took exception to this, but his negative reaction admits of another explanation, namely his independent nature and firm artistic will.¹⁷ The fact, however, remains that the *Société Nationale des Beaux Arts* did accept one of his paintings, "Autumn," for its Spring Salon and requested more for its Autumn Salon, not one or two but six more, which suggests that his talent was by then recognized in Paris itself.

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After visiting the gallery, Tate Britain, and reading the multitude of articles that have appeared on Blake as a result of the Exhibition, here are some observations on Gibran and his art in this context, which, by comparison and contrast could be helpful for a better understanding and appreciation of Gibran and of his work.¹⁸

- 1- Blake was hardly recognized in his lifetime, although towards the end of his life, the English Romantics, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, gave him some recognition. A member of the Establishment, the poet-laureate, Robert Southey, declared one of his works "perfectly mad." He had to wait some hundred years before a major poet, Yeats, rehabilitated him. Gibran was more fortunate, his genius was recognized immediately and throughout his life, as well as posthumously, ever since his death in 1931. This could lead to complacency, but it should not; on the contrary, it should lead to the further exploration of new dimensions of his genius as Britain has done lately for Blake. The beginning of a new Millennium is a most opportune occasion to do that and I shall touch on this in this paper.
- 2- Critics nowadays believe that many artists in England, even some two centuries after the death of Blake, are actually working under his influence. Is it possible that some Lebanese artists have worked under the influence of Gibran as they did in literature. Some have argued for Gibranic influence while others have denied it. Whatever the truth may be, Gibran might be considered as a participant in the history of Lebanese *art* in much the same way that he is considered in Lebanese Literature.¹⁹

- 3- Both were rebels. Blake, like all English Romantic poets and men of letters, was a supporter of the ideals of the French Revolution. These were Republicans, even Bonapartists at least initially, ranged against the Monarchical system. So was Gibran a rebel against the social and ecclesiastical feudalism that was rampant in the Lebanon of his time. He wrote trenchantly against it and also against the hold of the Ottoman Sultans over not only Lebanon, but also the Arabs. The rebelliousness of both did not remain academic and both were political activists.
- 4- Both had in them deep religious strands. In the case of Blake, it was reflected in many of his pronouncements, in his early career as an engraver in Westminster Abbey, and in his illustration of some of the books of the Bible. So was Gibran, whose background is also reflected in his writings and in the last works he published in English, in which Jesus of Nazareth cuts such a large figure. But both were unorthodox in their understanding of Christianity and disliked organized religion.
- 5- The rebel in both of them against the social, religious and political order found expression in their art, graphic and literary. In his paintings, Blake, although audacious and original, is often, even more often than not, incomprehensible and sometimes repulsive, at least to my taste.²⁰ Gibran remained in the fold of Classical art and in that of the Italian Renaissance and so he remained comprehensible even in his mystical paintings, which do pass the sobriety test. Gibran's rebellious spirit found expression in his literary work, through which he truly revolutionized modern Arabic literature.
- 6- Both were cosmologists in their consciousness. Gibran conceived himself as an atom riding an earth that was a planet revolving around the sun, and so part of a cosmos. For his cosmology, Blake went to the length of constructing a mythology, involving also a cosmogony, the birth of the universe. And it all sounds and seems bizarre especially when provided with paintings. Gibran's feet remained on the ground, and his mythology, unlike that of the occultist that was Blake, belonged to ancient Greece and the Semitic Orient, involving such figures as Orpheus, Astrate and Tammuz, not unfamiliar to the Western reader. His interest in Tammuz, the Semitic God of regeneration, may have had some influence on the rise of the literary Tammuz Movement in Lebanon, which came after him. He believed in a Universal spirit and he expressed his cosmology powerfully and beautifully in the best essay he wrote on the occasion of his twenty-fifth birthday, Yawm Mawliidi. Blake's eccentricities suggest that he may have suffered from hallucinations, but Gibran did not, and the Greek concept of "Divine Madness" could be invoked in his case.
- 7- Gibran never married, but love played the most important role in his life by his own admission. At least five different types of love are associated with Gibran:
 - (1) familial love towards his mother, his sister and brother, all of whom died of consumption;
 - (2) intellectual and spiritual love toward Mary Haskell, his guardian angel and benefactress;
 - (3) carnal or recreational love towards the many women by whom he was always surrounded and adored;
 - (4) epistolary love through a celebrated correspondence with his female counterpart in the Arab World, Mayy Ziadeh, a love that proved to be fruitful as it inspired the most beautiful love letters in the

Arabic language; (5) and finally religious; Christian, the agapê of the Christian faith. Love inspired his best known novella, *Broken Wings*.

Blake on the other hand was totally monogamous. Catherine was his wife of forty-five years, almost the entire span of Gibran's life. She was the most "important force throughout his life," and she sustained him in his isolation till the very end. He died with her at his side and the last he drew was a sketch of her, saluting her as his angel. Gibran died alone. Needless to say, this accelerated Blake's prolificity, but decelerated Gibran's. However, Mary Haskell acted as Gibran's guardian angel, but from a distance, not as his wife, which Catherine was to Blake. Mayy Ziadeh would have been the ideal consort, if the epistolary love affair that budded between them across the oceans had blossomed and had borne fruit.

- 8- Both were interested in prophecy and prophets. Three of Blake's prophetic works had some strange titles: *Tiriel*, *Hel*, *America*, *Europe*, and *Urizen*, and he was influenced by the last book of the Bible, *Revelations*. He invented his own creation myth. Gibran identified himself with the figure of the prophet and such was the title of his masterpiece; but he remained intelligible, while Blake did not. And if Gibran's involvement in prophecy is derivative from that of Blake's, it would be another instance of his independent spirit, which accepted what he liked and rejected what he could not stomach.
- 9- When two of their respective poems were set to music and sung, they became extraordinarily popular. Blake's "Jerusalem" had a fateful history. It has been accepted ideologically by the most varied groups, and was set to music by Sir Hubert Parry, a distinguished musicologist and composer, during the First World War in order to arouse sentiments of national pride. A radical singer even suggested it as a replacement for the National Anthem and it has virtually become Britain's second National Anthem. Gibran's final lyric in his monumental poem, *al-Mawakib*, *The Processions*, was set to music by one of the Raḥbānī's brothers, and was sung, as has been said earlier in this lecture, by none other than the foremost singer of Lebanon and the Arab world, Fayrūz. Although a lyric at the end of a philosophical poem, nowadays read only by specialists on Gibran, it has become through the magic vibrations of Fayrūz's vocal chords almost a national song. So, both Blake and Gibran became posthumously the composers of patriotic poems, broadcasting the praises of England and Lebanon respectively.

What has been done for Blake in England in 2000 and for Gibran in Paris four years ago, suggests the following thoughts for doing justice to Gibran's artistic legacy:

- 1- Gibran's works are distributed in six museums: one in Bsharrī, Lebanon, and five in the United States; one in Savannah, Georgia; two in New York; one in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and one in Newark, New Jersey. And there are some in private collections.
- 2- This dispersion of his drawings and paintings is unfortunate, but it cannot be helped. An effort, however, should be made to do something about bringing together these *disiecta membra* of his *oeuvre*. Nothing will do justice to Gibran's art better than having a gallery in New York, which will house those works of his that are in New

York, perhaps as loans from the New York museums, and possibly from those in other parts of the United States. Assembling his work in one place will go a long way towards reviving interest in Gibran, the artist, whom most admirers know in that capacity from the few illustrations that adorn his classic *The Prophet*.²¹

- 3- His New York studio in Greenwich Village²² might be bought by an Arab government or an Arab cultural philanthropist. The Greek Government bought the house of Constantine Cavafy, the foremost modern Greek poet, in Alexandria, where the poet was born and where he lived and worked and it has become a place of pilgrimage for all lovers of Cavafy's work. New York rather than Bsharrî might be the venue for such an exhibition of Gibran's art. The spoken word, especially poetry, has been the artistic *forte* of the Arabs, not the image, the brush, or the pigment. In spite of some progress made by the graphic art in Arab society, painting still has no great resonance in Arab milieus, compared to poetry. And this is especially true of those works of Gibran that reflect nudism. Despite the inroads and dents that modernity has made in Arab artistic sensibility, that society is still unreceptive to nudism, especially when aired in public. Apparently, Gibran inherited nudism in art from Blake, who said "Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed." And this may partly explain why *The Prophet* with its nude illustrations has not had the impact in the Arab world or the reception that it has in the West.
- 4- There is another reason that commends New York, not Bsharrî or Beirut, as the venue for assembling his artistic works. Gibran's genius recognized is in the Arab world on the strength of his Arabic literary oeuvre, while in the West, he is still in limbo with the Literary Establishment in America. But when his place in the history of American art is clarified, this will redound to his advantage in the appreciation of the literary Establishment, when it becomes aware of his achievement in the sister art. The year 2000 was not the only year in which an art exhibition for Blake was mounted in London; some twenty years earlier another one was mounted, thus keeping the memory of Blake alive in the English national consciousness. The same may be done for Gibran, especially in New York. In the second decade of the century, New York used to witness exhibitions of Gibran's art, and a raving review of one of them appeared in the *New York American* for the 1913 Exhibition, was translated into Arabic, and was published in the Arab-American literary journal, *al-Funun*, in which the author rightly understood that he was dealing with a complex artistic figure, who worshipped at the shrine of the two sister Muses of painting and poetry.²³
- 5- Above all, Gibran's artistic legacy needs and deserves a *professional* art historian to give a true evaluation of its significance. Two years ago (December, 1999) at the Conference in honor of Gibran, organized by Professor Bushrui at the University of Maryland, Ms. Tania Simmons gave a paper on his paintings at the Telfair Museum in Atlanta, Georgia. More extensive and significant was the exhibition mounted by the IMA in Paris in 1998, with an evaluation by Isa Makhlûf and Ibrahim al-Alawi. This is a step in the right direction. Important as it is, it is only a step, which should lead to what is really needed and wanted, namely, a work by a professional art historian for Gibran's work in its entirety, preferably by three who will be able to examine in detail the various stages of his artistic growth and development.

An American art historian would be familiar with both the art scene in Boston, where Gibran started under the influence of Fred Holland Day, and the art scene in New York-, and the artistic circles he moved in. The French art historian would be able to give a detailed and intimate account of the *Belle Époque* of Paris in the first decade of the twentieth century where Gibran stayed for two years, the backdrop for his relation to the *Académie Julien* and the *École des Beaux Arts*, the *ateliers* he worked at, the contacts he made there, and the choice of one of his canvases for the Spring Salon. The very distant background, namely, the scene of his childhood in Lebanon will also be fruitful to explore as an influence on his art, as it was on his literary work.

Despite the importance of American and French art to Gibran's artistic formation, the dominant influence on his art came from across the English Channel, from William Blake. So here then is the third influence after the American and the French that worked on Gibran-, the English, and it must have been in Paris that it had its impact on him in its most effective way. Much has been written on whether he was inspired by Rodin, who saluted him as the William Blake of the Twentieth Century. I am more than inclined to think that he did,²⁴ and if this was the case, then the judgment of the celebrated sculptor would have been an element of great weight in the artistic course which Gibran charted for himself. The historian of Gibran's art will, thus, in addition to the American and French influences, have to do justice to the English, represented by Blake.

An elucidation of these three influences and their fusion during his biennium in Paris will then be the background for understanding the last twenty years or so of his life, the last leg of his artistic journey. The task of the critic of his visual art will be much easier than that of his literary work. The latter has to deal with Gibran translated into English and something has already been said on the difficulty of translating from a language such as Arabic into one such as English. The Italian phrase *traduttore traditore* "the translator is a traitor or betrayer" comes to mind. But the art historian of Gibran's work will have no such problem in judging his work, since he does not have to wrestle with the medium. The language of art, unlike literature, is universal.

The judgment of this future art historian of Gibran's work may be favorable or adverse. If the former- and the chances are that it will be- then his place in the history of American art will be recognized, and it was in the United States that he spent all his creative life working amid the challenges of the American environment.

The favorable judgment of the art historian will have some bearing on the attitude of the literary critic of Gibran's work, who will now realize that the author of *The Prophet* also was a distinguished visual artist and that the literary artifact he is examining has issued from the same matrix that has yielded the artistic. In certain works of Gibran, this realization needs no special pleading such as *The Prophet* with its illustrations, which make it at one and the same time both a literary and visual work of art. This is what English critics have been recently saying à propos of Blake and his exhibition at Tate Britain. The two facets of his genius, especially in those works of his that he illustrated, must not be separated, but must be treated as one whole, each facet responsive to the other, a two-dimensional form of art, which must be viewed and appreciated in its integrity.

Another exhibition in London titled "Painting the Century: 101 Portrait Masterpieces:

1900-2000” is also very relevant to Gibran the artist. It, too, was held as an event of the Millennium Year, dedicated to portraiture in the twentieth century and was mounted in the gallery, specially devoted to the portraits in London, the National Portrait Gallery. It was a reflection of the significance of this component in visual art, which is still respected in Britain and of the fact that photography, the child of technology, has not been able to replace or superannuate the art of portraiture and make it a “dead duck” as some enthusiasts of photography have maintained. And it is generally understood by art historians that portraiture is not simply the production of a likeness or similitude of the sitter, but is an interpretation. It is a “psychological penetration of character and artistic rendering of interiority.” Some of the great artists of the century, such as Picasso, Lucien Freud, and Oscar Kokoscka, produced memorable portraits, which were displayed at the London Gallery.

This exhibition in London suggested to me that Gibran might be remembered also in this fashion. Within his artistic *oeuvre*, his portraits might be singled out for presentation especially as many think that he was at his best as a portraitist, drawing with a pencil, and that this remained the area he was most skillful at. Apparently, he himself paid special attention to it. While in Paris, Gibran started what he called “Temple of Art,” a series of portraits of living artists, both men and women. He drew the portraits of Paul Bartlett, the American who sculpted the statue of Lafayette, which stands at the steps of the Louvre, and he also did Debussy, Edmond Rostand, and Henri Rochefort. To all these may be added later British and Irish figures; William Butler Yeats, John Masefield, A.E. James Russell, and internationally known figures, such as al-Bahâ’ and Rabindranath Tagore. He also left a self-portrait. Within those he drew or painted, one category deserves special mention, portraits not of those who sat for him or whom he drew from photographs, but personages of the Arab and Muslim past, mostly poets, such as Abû-Nuwâs, al-Mutanabbî, and al-Ma’arri. His conception of what they looked like was derivative from his readings of their poetry.²⁵

In writing the history of Gibran’s art, his own letters on the subject and on his stay in Paris are indispensable and many of them have not been published.²⁶ Valuable also is the monograph of his friend, the Lebanese sculptor Yusuf al-Huwayyik,²⁷ whose works were displayed in conjunction with that of Gibran at the IMA in Paris in 1998. Al-Huwayyik’s book on Gibran’s years in Paris, however, has to be read with care, since although friendly, he seems sometimes ambivalent about Gibran; possibly some feeling of professional jealousy was involved, since Gibran’s prodigious talent may have proved daunting for him. Gibran did steal the show and upstaged every colleague who came within measurable distance of him, such as Amin Rihani, truly the father of Arab-American Literature and Mikha’il Naima, the largest figure, after Gibran, among the Arab-American writers of *al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya*.

Although Gibran came to Paris as a student of visual art, his biennium in the city was remarkable also for his career as a man of letters.²⁸ A few words on Paris’s literary influence may therefore be said. It was here that Gibran read voraciously the classics of French literature, Balzac, Rousseau, and also Nietzsche, who inspired him to write later in New York one of his best essays, *The Grave Digger*. He also might have met or read Rainer Maria Rilke, who was Rodin’s devoted secretary and disciple. And it was in Paris that he

wrote his best memoir on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his birth. The literary currents he was exposed to in Paris were almost as important as the artistic, and, so, it was here in Paris that he attained his maturity as an artist and as a man of letters, in whom were united the two Muses that inspired his later works in America, which found their climax in *The Prophet*, his literary and artistic masterpiece, which he himself illustrated.

So much for Paris and Gibran's biennium in it as an artist. I now turn to the third and final part of my paper on Gibran's Message and Relevance.

-III-

It was William Blake who coined the phrase "The New Age" in advertising his hopes and prophesies for a better and newer world. And so did Gibran in effect say, when the rebel in him set forth his hopes and plans for a renaissance in Lebanon and in the Arab World.

The phrase is especially apposite at this juncture in the history of the world, after the end of one millennium and the inception of a new one. So, what is the message and relevance of Gibran in an age that has inherited the conquest of the atom and of space, the fall of Fascism and Communism, the end of Colonialism, and has witnessed what is termed Globalization, a capacious term of many connotations? Does the romantic poet, the writer of *Broken Wings*, whose lyrics Fayrûz sings, have anything nowadays to say?

-A-

Indeed he does, since as is well known, Gibran was not only an artist and man of letters, but was much more than that, a man of many identities who wrote outside the strictly aesthetic context of art and literature. As an emigrant who did not burn his ships behind him and forget his country, Gibran remained a committed writer, grappling with the social, economic, religious and political problems that plagued his Lebanon and the Arab-Muslim Orient in general. The author of *The Prophet* turned out to be a true prophet, as events proved him right on what he had written about, in the first half of the twentieth century, and which his genius foresaw long before they happened. In the short time left, I can only reflect on only some dimensions of his relevance and message, a hundred years after he started his literary and artistic career.

- 1- His general philosophy, especially his optimism and faith in the future of the world, despite discouraging signs, all has been justified and confirmed. Simply put, Gibran turned out to be not a false, but a true literary prophet. And the world, American and other, is even more receptive to his ideas in two important areas, the first of which may be best presented when Gibran is compared or rather contrasted with an American poet who, like Gibran, riveted the attention of the world in this twentieth century.

Before his *Prophet* appeared in print in 1923, another book of verse was published

in the previous year, written by an American poet who shared the fact that he, too, was an *émigré* poet, but in England. This was *The Waste Land*, the most influential poem of the foremost poet of the English language in the twentieth century. Eliot wrote his masterpiece in the wake of the First World War, when the world was still reeling from that disaster and it expressed a pessimistic viewpoint on the future of Western Civilization. In so doing, it was in company with other books that appeared in the twenties and employed the same idiom, such as Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Subsequent events proved Eliot wrong and false in his vision. It was his own country, America, that scored the victories of the century against Kaisarism, Fascism and Nazism in the first half of the century; in the second, it won the Cold War against Communism, which resulted in the disintegration of that system. It was also the country that made the spectacular breakthroughs in science, microscopically by splitting the atom and macroscopically by the conquest of Space and the landing on the moon. This has set the stage, in spite of regional irritations here and there, for a new era in the history of the world, and hope for a better century and a better millennium. These permanent gains have invalidated Eliot's thesis, which nowadays rings false and sounds dated.

Gibran's vision, on the other hand, has been justified. World leaders, secular and spiritual, speak of inter-faith and international dialogue and the advent of the age of conciliation. This was the gospel preached by Gibran in the twenties, in spite of the gloom of the inter-war period; he spoke of hope, conciliation and charity, "the great fellowship of understanding and sympathy" as he worded it. The course of events during the twentieth century has justified his faith and confidence in the progress of mankind. And, in spite of occasional setbacks, that course or trend is irreversible.

- 2- Another area in which Gibran turned out to be a true prophet is that of women's rights. The second half of this century witnessed the victory of the Feminist Movement and Women's Liberation, for which Gibran fought as early as the first decade of this century and so he must be considered one of its early apostles. As has already been mentioned in the course of this paper, Gibran was one of the most articulate champions of women; the vignettes of the Lebanese women he depicted in his short stories are as vivid today as they were almost a hundred years ago. His works that treat women have a ring of modernity about them as they deal with issues that are still burning and being addressed in our times.
- 3- The end of the last millennium witnessed a number of movements and calls for religious tolerance and inter-faith understanding. Its climax was reached in 1962, when Pope John convened Vatican II, which issued its famous pronouncement on Islam and on Muslim-Christian understanding, with all honor going to France in that worthy endeavor, since it was the writings and efforts of the brilliant Louis Massignon on Islam that contributed to that pronouncement. Since then, many symposia and conferences have been held, and centers have been founded in various academic institutes targeting that ideal, such as Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

This fulfills Gibran's hope and it chimes well with his ideas and ideals. He was one

of the earliest of Lebanese and Arab figures who called for religious tolerance. He started with a campaign for the reform of the Christian Church in Lebanon, called for the redress of ecclesiastical abuses, and the end of feudalism in the church, which led him to the brink of anti-clericalism and opposition to organized religion. Especially important was his call for Christian-Muslim understanding. He went to the length of expressing himself trenchantly in an open letter, addressed to the Muslim community, which was published in two Arab-American journals, titled "To the Muslims from a Christian Poet."²⁹ It was a model of tolerance and understanding and it rang true partly because it was derivative from his doctrinal position on Christology, an important point unnoticed by his biographers. Gibran evidently spoke the language of Arianism, a fourth century perception of Christ in which that Christian theologian, Arius, argued that Christ was not a God, but the ideal man. This, as is well known, is one of the barriers and hurdles in the Muslim-Christian dialogue and Gibran's twentieth century vision of Christ as the Perfect Man sent by God reflects the orthodox Koranic Christology. The appeal for Muslim-Christian understanding was remarkable, coming as it did, from one who was born only a few days after the events of the year 1860, which took place in the Hawrân region in Syria and later in Lebanon.

Gibran's call for religious tolerance and understanding is related to the wider circle of his sympathies, which encompassed all religions and all peoples, and led him to a cosmopolitanism and a citizenship of the world.³⁰ His statements and his *obiter dicta* on this are well known. One of them is "The whole earth is my home and all mankind is my family," a statement made early in the last century long before the century witnessed the end of colonialism, the denunciation of racism, the assertion of human rights, the information revolution, and that of communications and transportation, which have made of the globe a village, or what is nowadays termed "globalization" in one of its semantic dimensions.

Thus the *fin de siècle*, not with the connotation of *décadence* given to this phrase when referring to the nineteenth century, finds Gibran alive and relevant and very much so in the wide circle of his readers, wherever they may be found in the four corners of the earth.

- 4- In spite of the fact that Gibran lived the last thirty years of a short life away from Lebanon, he remained a Lebanese to the core all of his life. No writer has remembered Lebanon as much or as well as he did. In the first decade of this century, he wrote those short stories and a *novella*, which were inspired by the Lebanese scene, and he appeared there not only as a literary artist, but as a cultural analyst and a social reformer, who intelligently perceived the problems that plagued his country and addressed them in his compositions. Lebanon had not in ancient and medieval times been part of the Arabic poetic landscape, but Gibran placed it in that landscape unmistakably and indelibly, in compositions that in their charm almost approached the Biblical heights of the Song of Songs, with its evocations of Lebanon. His paradise on earth in his most mature poem, *al-Mawakib* was *al-ghab*, the forest, undoubtedly the forest of Cedars in his Lebanon. Of this forest he sang:

في قبضتي لغدت في الغاب تنتثر

فكلما رمت غاباً راح يعتذر

والناس في عجزهم عن قصدهم قصرُوا

العيش في الغاب والأيام لو نظمت

لكن هو الدهر في نفسي له أرب

وللتقادير سبيلٌ لا تُغيّرُها

With Amin Rihani, he dreamt in 1910 of having an opera house built in Beirut for the promotion of the arts. During the First World War, when famine hit Lebanon mercilessly, he wrote, spoke, and contributed towards saving Lebanon from its horrors.³¹ He remained concerned about its political future after the War, and his wish was to return to Lebanon and be buried there.

All this is in sharp contrast with George Shehade, the other distinguished Lebanese writer who emigrated to France, and became one of the most famous representatives of surrealism in French and European literature. In his work, Lebanon has little or no prominent place.³² The same may be said of the foremost poet of modern Greek literature, Constantine Cavafy, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and was almost, if not quite completely oblivious of his Greek homeland in Europe.

Gibran's emotional attachment to Lebanon was not a one way romance: Lebanon reciprocated his passionate love of his country. His literary works were saluted in Lebanon when they were first published, and since then they have continued to be loved and admired, unlike the work of his colleagues in *al-Rabita*, who, with the exception of two or three, live in partial eclipse. Beirut had never known a funeral like the one Gibran had, when his casket arrived in 1931, and has not known anything like it since then. Nor did the Lebanese countryside witness a funeral procession such as the one accorded to Gibran, as it was greeted in every village that lay from Beirut to his own Bsharrî.³³ His tomb at Mar Sarkis in Bsharrî quickly became a national shrine, a pilgrimage center for his admirers, Lebanese and other. Stamps were issued in his memory and anniversaries have been held. Lebanon has never rallied round a Lebanese figure as it has around Gibran. Although he lived all his creative life outside Lebanon, perceptive historians of the Lebanese literary tradition look upon his work as a chapter in *Lebanese* literature and hail it as the climax of Lebanese literary creativity.

After three quarters of a century since his death in 1931, what is his relevance and what is his message to his two countries, native and adoptive?

As has already been pointed out, Gibran, the romantic and mystic that he was, was also a writer, firmly committed and fiercely patriotic. What is more, as a literary artist, he was equal to the magnitude of the problem that Lebanon presented. He is still alive today as a cultural analyst, a social, and a political reformer, because the problems he addressed at the beginning of the century have persisted, even have grown worse, much worse, as their size and dimensions have grown and multiplied, especially after the long Civil War. Gibran had foreseen all the consequences of sectarian and denominational strife, and the plight of

the country during the Civil War could only confirm his apprehensions at their worst. The tragedy of this war is indeed a tribute to Gibran's perspicacity and diagnostic power.

His relevance, however, does not stop at diagnosis, but extends to the healing process. His message of charity and reconciliation already referred to is still relevant and corresponds to the catchword, used by the political figures in Lebanon, namely, al-Musalaha al-Wataniyya, which could be identified with the al-Maslaha al-Wataniyya, the national interest. What exemplar of national accord and reconciliation is better than this Maronite, who wrote a book titled *The Prophet*, in which the main figure carries one of the names of the Prophet Muhammad himself, al-Mustafa, in the Koran?

-B-

So much for Gibran and Lebanon. But what about Gibran and America, the country to which he addressed *The Prophet* and the rest of his English works. The question is especially à propos at this juncture in the history of the United States and indeed the world. A new century and a new millennium have begun and men are reflecting also on the *meaning* of the new millennium and what it means in American terms. The question is especially apposite because the century has truly been identified as the American Century, which furthermore closed with the United States as the sole super-power.

Gibran's *The Prophet* has been a success story in this century in view of the constant demand for it in each and every decade, since its appearance some seventy years ago, a record of unrelieved success;³⁴ and the secret of its success has been that it has struck the universal American chord and has supplied the emotional and spiritual needs of people by the message it transmits. But at this turning point in American and World history, it is necessary to re-evaluate it in this larger context of American paramountcy, politically, militarily, and economically in world affairs and its emergence as the sole super-power. So, what relevance does or can Gibran have in this new century of American dominance, especially in the Near East to which Lebanon belongs; and in more concrete and explicit terms in relation to Lebanon's last wound, which remained open for some sixteen years of the Civil War?

Artists, literary, musical, and visual, are the passionate few who promote the image of their respective countries and peoples, especially when their countries are small. The five luminaries in the galaxy of the Irish literary renaissance: Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, John Synge, and George Bernard Shaw were those who polished the image of the Irish people, and their literary activities roughly coincided with Gibran's *floruit* as a poet and painter. It was the works of this quintet, more than any political agitation on the part of Irish activists such as Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell, that contributed to the granting of Home Rule and the creation of the Irish Republic early in the century. The same may be said of other small countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia. The first lives in the consciousness of most people partly because of Frederick Chopin, and the latter, even more relevantly for our purpose, because of the music of Antonin Dvořák, who actually came to the United States, where, for three years, he conducted and headed the National Conservatory of Music, and wrote his Ninth Symphony- the "New World."

When the two countries emerged as independent states after the havoc of the First World War, their artistic image cannot have been entirely absent from the consciousness of the Big Four, who at Versailles mediated the midwifery that brought about the birth of the two states.

Even in ancient times, and more relevantly, there are examples of soldiers and statesmen who admired literary talent and did something for the places whence the literary artists hailed. When Alexander the Great conquered Thebes and destroyed it, he spared the house of the lyric poet, Pindar; and when the Spartans vanquished Athens in the Peloponnesian War and wanted to destroy the city, their commander, Lysander, did not allow this to happen, after hearing a Phocian sing the first chorus from Euripide's *Electra*.³⁵

The principal figure among the Big Four, who redrew the map of Europe at the end of the First World War, was the American President, Woodrow Wilson, whom Lebanon remembers for his sending the King-Crane Commission to report on public opinion concerning the proposed mandate for Lebanon and Syria.³⁶ Gibran was then active and constantly thinking of the political future of Lebanon in the post-War period. Members of his literary circle, the *al-Rabita*, even journeyed to the White House to discuss that future. Long before President Kennedy read his inaugural speech in which he asked the now famous question, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country," Gibran had asked the same question in almost identical terms in one of his essays titled *al-'Ahd al-al-Jadid*.³⁷

On the 13th of June of the year 2000, the President of the United States, William Clinton, addressed a Washington Arab-American group. The occasion was the Second Annual Khalil Gibran Spirit of Humanity Awards, sponsored by the Arab-American Institute Foundation. The President had read Gibran in college, and to the Director of the Institute, James Zogby, he said "I am going to quote Khalil Gibran tonight for the first time since I was in college . . . I am very glad you named this award after him, another way of smashing stereotypes." The President then cited his favorite Gibran quote, "All work is empty save when there is love. When you work with love, you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God." Gibran thus entered the White House during the Presidency of William Clinton.³⁸ Even before that Presidency, the White House had been involved with Gibran, as when President George H. Bush attended the ceremony that officially opened the Khalil Gibran Memorial Garden on Massachusetts Avenue, in Washington, and actually cut the ribbon himself.

I should, therefore, like to end this address with an apostrophe to his namesake and son, the present incumbent of the American Presidency, and sanguinely ask: Will he not look benignly on the tiny country of this versatile genius, whom America made and who reciprocated by making millions of Americans happy with his *The Prophet*, and who wrote,

وليس من يكتب بالحبر كمن يكتب بدم القلب

Even Gibran's ancestor in the spirit, William Blake, wrote a work which he titled *America*; and looked at her as the land of liberty and freedom. Will not the President effect a lasting peace in Lebanon now, that its last wound from the Civil War has stopped bleeding, and a glimmer of hope is visible on the horizon? In so doing, he will be in line with such historical personalities as Alexander and Lysander, who evinced profound respect to literary genius

and acted accordingly. Should this happen, it would be Gibran's triumph posthumously, namely, that he was an element in the restoration of peace and amity to his beloved Lebanon.

Thoughts on Lebanon in times of crises and how it ought to be treated have been movingly expressed by two poets with whose verses I bring to a close this lecture, for connoisseurs of Arabic poetry among you, and surely they echo what Gibran would have felt and said, had he been alive:

A triplet by Saïd 'Aql:

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| هو بين الله والناس كلام | أنا حسبي أنني من جبل |
| عند تغريدي وبنهار الظلام | تقف النجمة في دورتها |
| تلد النور وتعطيه الأنام | قمم كالشمس في خدمتها |

And a quatrain by Nizar Qabbani:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| هل وجدتم بعد لبنان البديلا... | آه يا عشاق بيروت القدامى |
| فأعيده كما كان جميلا | كل قبح فيه قبح منكم |
| سوف يبقى عدماً أو مستحيلا | إن كونا ليس لبنان به |
| أن تحبوه تحبوه، قليلا | كل ما يطلبه لبنان منكم |

-NOTES-

*I would like to thank Professor Michael A. Williams, Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, for inviting me to deliver this lecture on Gibran, and what is more, for delivering it as the Inaugural Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture in Arabic and Islamic Studies, in honor of a scholar who has donated half a century of his life on earth for the promotion of these studies in the United States, both as a teacher and as a scholar: *ad multos annos!*

The lecture was delivered on April 30, 2002, and it is now reproduced in printed form substantially as it was delivered. Hence, it has retained traces of oral presentation.

- 1 - Under this rubric on February 8, 2001, at Clore Auditorium in Tate Britain, London, some internationally known poets such as Michael Horovitz, Adrian Mitchell and Christopher Logue performed and discussed their poetry in relation to that of Blake.
- 2 - On Rodin and Gibran, see a forthcoming publication by the present writer.
- 3 - For this open letter, titled "To Young Americans of Syrian Origin," see *The Syrian World*, (New York), July 1926, Vol. I, pp. 4-5.
- 4 - In view of its contents and tenor, the notes and bibliography in this paper on Gibran are limited only to what is strictly relevant to its tripartite structure and its three inspirations.
- 5 - See Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet* (One World, Oxford, 1998), now the standard biography of Gibran.
- 6 - See Robin Waterfield, *Prophet: The Life and Times of Kahlil Gibran*, (Penguin Books, 1998).
- 7 - The *Prophet* was published by Alfred Knopf in 1923. The publicity department of this publishing house was approached by my student at Georgetown, David Marcus, for an authoritative estimate of the number of copies; the number was over eight million copies. This was on 24 May, 1991. Since then, the figure of ten million must have been reached.
- 8 - *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Lexington, Massachusetts, D. Heath and Company, 1994), Vols. I-II.
- 9 - See Salmâ Kh. Jayyûsi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, (E.J. Brill, 1977), Vol. I, pp. 91-107 and her short "Forward" in Jean Gibran and Kahlil Gibran, *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World*, (Interlinks Book, New York, 1991).
- 10 - On this, see the present writer in "Gibran and the American Literary Canon: the Problem of *The Prophet*," in *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature*, (Festschrift Issa J. Boullata, Brill, 2000), pp. 321-334.
- 11 - See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 11.
- 12 - See Muḥammad Ibn-Sallâm al-Jumahî, *Ṭabaqât al-Shu'arâ'*, ed. M. M. Shâkir, (Cairo, 1974), Vol. I, p. 7.

- 13 - The reasons behind the success of this English translation were discussed by the present writer in his Inaugural Lecture, *Omar Khayyam, The Philosopher-Poet of Medieval Islam* (Georgetown University Press, 1981).
- 14 - See Sir Hamilton Gibb, in *Arabic Literature*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963), p. 7. The difficulty of translating an Arabic literary work was well expressed by him, while he was discussing the translation of the Qur'ân; *ibid.*, p. 36:
- “Muslims of all ages are united in proclaiming the inimitability not only of its contents but of its style. But, as in the case of the old poetry, the very qualities which give it its literary distinction render it impossible to translate with any success into another language, and Islamic orthodoxy wisely discountenances any attempt to do so. The vigour and intensity of its language becomes vapid, the grammatical forms lose their subtle implications, the arresting rhetorical constructions become shapeless, and little is left but a seemingly confused and repetitious compilation, loosely strung together without life or artistry, and redeemed only by occasional flashes of mystical beauty or profound insight.”
- 15 - See “The Cruelty of Memory,” *New York Review*, November 30, 2000, Vol. 47, issue 19, pp. 46-50.
- 16 - In addition to the catalogue, ‘Îsâ Makhlûf contributed a perceptively appreciative article on Gibran’s attitude to religion, women, and language, which appeared in two installments in the issues of November 1 and 11, 1998, of the Arabic London daily *al-Ḥayât*.
- 17 - See Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.
- 18 - On Gibran and Blake, see *ibid.*, pp. 101-110 and a Doctoral Dissertation by G.N. El-Hage submitted to SUNY at Binghamton, 1980.
- 19 - Controversy surrounded Gibran’s place in the history of Lebanese art. Some have considered him the founder of Modern Lebanese art at the beginning of the twentieth century, while others have contested this. So, while ‘Îsâ Makhlûf stands for Gibran, Aṣad ‘Irâbî does not; see the latter in the daily *al-Ḥayât*, 13 November, 1998, no. 13037, p. 17, section, Culture and Art.
- 20 - Such is Plate no. 43 on p. 53, in William Vaughan, *William Blake*, British Artists Series, (Tate Publishing, Hong Kong, 1999).
- 21 - This would be consonant with Gibran’s own wish. In 1913, Gibran wrote, “One of the dearest dreams of my heart is this- somewhere, somewhen a body of work, say fifty or seventy-five pictures will be hung together in a museum;” see Jean and Kahlil Gibran, *op. cit.*, p. 411.
- 22 - His studio was at 51 West Tenth Street, and was popularly referred to as *al-Sawmâ’a*, the Hermitage.
- 23 - Two exhibitions were mounted by the poetess, Barbara Young, in New York in 1935 and 1946, but were marred by the sour relations that obtained between her and Mary Haskell: see *ibid.*, pp. 416 and 420.
- 24 - See *supra*, note 2.

- 25 - How attractive a collection of Gibran's portraits, drawn by pencil or otherwise, would be, may be measured by the *Guide* which the National Gallery of Art issued in London on the occasion of the Exhibition it mounted, authored by the head of education at the Gallery, John Cooper; see his *National Portrait Gallery: A Visitor's Guide*, (London, 2000).
- Gibran himself was aware of the desirability of collecting his portraits, and of their value not only as works of art, but also as historical documents. In a letter to Mary Haskell, dated February 18, 1913, he wrote:
- "I want also the series of drawings [portraits] to be kept together. Someone said to me not long ago that the New York Public Library should buy the series when completed (...) In twenty-five years, most of these big men will be dead and the value of the drawings will be great, not only as works of art, but also as documents."
- Kahlil Gibran: Horizons of the Painter*. (Nicolas Sursock Museum, Beirut, n.d.).
- 26 - Gibran was one of the masters of the art of epistolography in Arabic. His letters have not yet been edited and published in their entirety. For what has been, see the section "letters" in the bibliography in Bushrui and Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 350.
- 27 - For an English version of Ḥuwayyik's book, see *Gibran in Paris*, trans. and intro., M. Moosa (New York, Popular Library, 1976).
- 28 - For Gibran in Paris, see Bushrui and Jenkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-110.
- 29 - For the Arabic text of this open letter, see Ḥabīb Maṣ'ūd, *Gibran Ḥayyan wa-Mayyitan*, (Beirut, 1966), pp. 37-38. The open letter appeared in the Arabic journal *al-Ṣā'ih* (New York, December 15, 'Abd a-Masīḥ 1913), Vol. II, no. 120, p. 1. The editor, Ḥaddād, says in the introduction to the open letter that it had appeared, apparently fairly recently, in another Arabic journal published in New York, *Mir'āt al-Gharb*, whence he reproduced it in *al-Ṣā'ih*.
- 30 - Charles Fleischer, an editor of the *New York American* and, earlier, associated with Tor Israel in Boston, spoke warmly at the memorial service for Gibran on April 29, 1931; for his touching words on this occasion, see Jean and Kahlil Gibran, *op. cit.*, p. 405. Gibran's message appealed to men of all faiths.
- 31 - On this, see Phillip K. Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, (Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1967), pp. 484-486.
- 32 - Critics have noted that although Lebanon did not figure in his oeuvre as an artist, it was always present in his consciousness as a man; see 'Abdo Wazin in the daily *al-Ḥayāt*, (19 October, 1999), no. 13372, p. 22, in the section "Culture and Art."
- 33 - On this, see Ḥabīb Maṣ'ūd, *op. cit.*, pp. 537-561.
- 34 - Apparently there is nowadays a resurgent vogue for Gibran in England.
- 35 - For Alexander and Pindar, Lysander and Euripides, see Arrian, *Anabasis* I. ix. 10; and Plutarch: *The Life of Lysander*, XV. ii-iii, respectively.
- 36 - See George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, Reprint, 1945), pp. 294-298; 443-458.

- 37 - See *al-'Ahd al-Jadîd* in *The Collected Works of Gibran, al-Majmû`a al-Kâmila*, ed. Mikhail Naima, (Beirut, 1964), pp. 566, lines 18-19.
- 38 - Possibly even earlier in the century. In a work on Gibran, titled *The Meaning of Khalil Gibran*, the author says that President Woodrow Wilson greeted Gibran by saying "You are the first Eastern storm to sweep this country, and what a number of flowers it has brought?" See M.S. Daoudi, *The Meaning of Khalil Gibran*, (Citadel Press, Secaucus, N.J., 1982), pp. 11-12. The author does not document this quotation and, so, it is not clear when the President said it and on what occasion. Since it was he who dispatched the King-Crane Commission, it would be important to know whether his appreciation of Gibran was an element in his dispatch of that Commission to the Near East, including Gibran's Lebanon.

Irfan Shahîd

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