CHAPTER II

JIBRAN KHALIL JIBRAN: LIFE AND WORKS

Introduction:

The Lebanese poet and philosopher Jibran Khalil Jibran (also spelt Gibran) is widely regarded as a man of the East who brought much needed element of spirituality to the West. Many epithets have been given to Jibran and they are probably all correct, for he was a versatile man: poet, artist, philosopher, peacemaker, visionary, revolutionary etc. He holds a unique place among the modern Arabic as well as English writers, in as much as he wrote well in both English and Arabic and was widely acclaimed in both cultures. Sitting astride two worlds, Jibran created his own unique literary style, one that has won fans in every generation. In the 1930s Jibran's works influenced especially American popular culture; his most famous book, *The Prophet* (1923), has been a best-seller from the 1920s. Jibran believed that if a sensible way of living and thinking could be found, people would have mastery over their lives.

The full name of Khalil Jibran is Jibran Khalil Jibran, the middle name being his father's name in keeping with the traditions of the Arabic East. He always signed his full name to his Arabic works but dropped the first name in his English writings.[1]

Birth and Parentage:

Jibran Khalil Jibran was born on 6th December, 1883 in a village called Bisharri, a mountainous area in Northern Mount-Lebanon. Mount-Lebanon was a Turkish province, part of Greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine) and subjugated to Ottoman dominion, which granted the Mount-Lebanon area autonomous rule. The people of Mount-Lebanon had struggled for several years to gain independence from the Ottoman

[1]. As recorded in the footnote of the biography *Khalil Jibran: His Life and Works* by Mikhail Naimy, 2nd ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, p. 3

rule, a cause Jibran was later to adopt and become an active member in. The Mount-Lebanon area was a troubled region, due to the various outside and foreign interferences that fostered religious hatred between the Christian, especially the Maronite sect and Muslim populations, especially the Druze sect. Later in his life, Jibran was to seek to unite the various religious sects, in a bid to abolish the religious snobbery, persecution and atrocities witnessed at his time. The Maronite sect, formed during the schism in the Byzantine church in the 5th century A.D. was made up of a group of Syrian Christians, who joined the monk St. Marun to lead their own sectarian thought.

Jibran Khalil Jibran's mother is Kamila Abdus Salam Rahmeh and his father is Khalil. His mother was thirty when she begot Jibran from her third husband Khalil Jibran, who proved to be an irresponsible husband leading the family to poverty. Jibran had a half-brother six years older than him namely Peter and two younger sisters, Mariana and Sultana, whom he was deeply attached to throughout his life, along with his mother. Kamila's family came from a prestigious religious background, which imbued the uneducated mother with a strong will and later on helped her raise up the family on her own in the United States of America.[1]

Childhood and Early Education:

Jibran Khalil Jibran was brought up in the lush region of his native village Bisharri. He proved to be a solitary and pensive child who relished the natural surroundings of the cascading falls, the rugged cliffs and the neighboring green cedars, the beauty of which emerged as a dramatic and symbolic influence to his drawings and writings. Being

[1]. Josephine, *Al-Mufid fil Adab al-Arabi*, Part II, p. 600

laden with poverty, he did not receive any formal education or learning, which was limited to regular visits to a village priest who doctrined him with the essentials of religion and the Bible, alongside Syrian and Arabic languages. Recognizing the inquisitive and alert nature of Jibran Khalil Jibran, the priest began teaching him the rudiments of alphabet and language, opening up to Jibran the world of history, science, and language. At the age of ten, Jibran fell off a cliff, wounding his left shoulder, which remained weak for the rest of his life ever since this incident. To relocate the shoulder, his family strapped it to a cross and wrapped it up for forty days, a symbolic incident reminiscent of Christ's wanderings in the wilderness and which remained etched in Jibran's memory.[1]

At the age of eight, Khalil Jibran, Jibran's father, was accused of tax evasion and was sent to prison as the Ottoman authorities confiscated the Jibrans' property and left them homeless. The family went to live with relatives for a while; however, the strong-willed mother decided that the family should immigrate to the United States of America, seeking a better life and following in suit to Jibran's uncle who immigrated earlier. Jibran's father was released in 1894, but he was undecided about immigration and remained behind in Lebanon.[2]

Immigration to the United States of America:

On June 25, 1895 the family members of Jibran Khalil Jibran embarked on a voyage to the American shores of New York. They settled in the South End of Boston City, which at that time hosted the second largest Syrian Community in America following New York. The

[1]. Ibid

[2]. Naimy, Mikhail, *Khalil Jibran: His Life and Works*, 2nd ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, p. 23

culturally diverse area felt familiar to Kamila, who was comforted by the familiar spoken Arabic, and the widespread Syrian customs. Kamila, now the bread-earner of the family, began to work as a peddler on the impoverished streets of the South End of Boston City. During this time, peddling was the major source of income for most Syrian immigrants, who were negatively portrayed due to their unconventional Syrian ways and their supposed idleness.[1]

Life in the United States of America:

Growing up into another impoverished period, Jibran was to recall the pain of the first few years, which left an indelible mark on his life and prompted him to reinvent his childhood memories, dispelling the filth, the poverty and the slurs. However, the work of charity institutions in the poor immigrant areas allowed the children of immigrants to attend public schools and kept them off the street. Jibran was the only member of his family to pursue scholastic education. His sisters were not allowed to enter school, frustrated by Middle Eastern traditions as well as financial difficulties. Later on in his life, Jibran was to champion the cause of women's emancipation and education and surround himself with strong-willed, intellectual and independent women.

In the school, a registration mistake altered his name forever by shortening it to Khalil Jibran, which remained unchanged till the rest of his life despite repeated attempts at restoring his full name. Jibran entered school on September 30, 1895 merely two months after his arrival in the United States of America. Having no formal education, he was placed in an un-graded class reserved for immigrant children, who had to learn English from scratch. Jibran caught the eye of his teachers with his

[1]. Ibid, p. 27

sketches and drawings, a hobby he had started during his childhood in Syria.[1]

With Kamila's hard work, the family's financial standing improved as her savings allowed Peter to set up a goods store, in which both of Jibran's sisters worked. The financial strains of the family and the distance from home brought the family together, with Kamila providing both financial and emotional support to her children, especially to her introverted son Jibran. During this difficult period, Jibran's remoteness from social life and his pensive nature were deepened, and Kamila was there to help him overcome his deservedness. The mother's independence allowed him to mingle with Boston's social life and explore its thriving world of art and literature.

The curiosity of Jibran led him to the cultural side of Boston, which exposed him to the rich world of the theatre, opera and artistic galleries. Through his artistic drawings, Jibran caught the attention of his teachers at the public school, which saw an artistic future for the Syrian boy. They contacted Fred Holland Day, an artist and a supporter of artists who opened up Jibran's cultural world and set him on the road to artistic fame.

Jibran met Fred Holland Day in 1896, and from then his road to recognition was reached through Day's artistic unconventionality and his contacts in Boston's artistic circles. Day introduced Jibran to Greek mythology, world literature, contemporary writings and photography, ever prodding the inquisitive Syrian to seek self-expression. Day's liberal education and unconventional artistic exploration influenced Jibran, who was to follow Day's unfettered adoption of the unusual for the sake of

[1]. Robin Waterfield. *The Life and Times of Khalil Jibran*, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 48

originality and self-actualization. Other than working on Jibran's education, Day was instrumental in lifting his self-esteem, which had suffered under the immigrant treatment and poverty of the times. Not surprisingly, Jibran emerged as a fast learner, devouring everything handed over by Day, despite weak Arabic and English. Under Day's tutelage, Jibran uttered his first religious beliefs, when he declared, "I am no longer a Catholic: I am a pagan," after reading one book given by Fred Day.

During one of Fred Holland Day's art exhibitions, Jibran drew a sketch of a certain Miss Josephine Peabody, an unknown poet and writer who has later become one of his failed love experiences; lateron, Jibran was to propose marriage and be met with refusal, the first blow in a series of heartaches dealt to Jibran by the women he loved.

Continually encouraging Jibran to improve his drawings and sketches, Day was instrumental in getting Jibran's images printed as cover designs for books in 1898. At the time, Jibran began to develop his own technique and style, encouraged by Day's enthusiasm and support. Gradually, Jibran entered the Bostonian circles and his artistic talents brought him fame at an early age. However, his family decided that early success could cause him future problems, and with Jibran's approval, the young artist went back to Syria to finish his education and better master Arabic.[1]

Back to Lebanon:

Jibran Khalil Jibran was very much interested to learn his mother tongue and this earnestness brought him back to Beirut, Lebanon in 1898. Although he spoke Arabic fluently, he could not read nor write it

[1]. Ibid, pp. 50-52

properly. So, he chose to enroll in *Madrasah al-Hikmah* [1], a Maronite founded school which offered a nationalistic curriculum partial to church writings, history and liturgy. Jibran's strong-willed nature refused to abide by the parochial curriculum, demanding an individual curriculum catering to his educational needs and aimed at college level, a gesture indicative of Jibran's rebellious and individualistic nature. Nonetheless the school acquiesced to his request, editing course material to liking of Jibran. He chose to immerse himself in the Arabic language bible, intrigued by its style and writing, features of which echo in his various works. As a student, Jibran left a great impression on his teachers and fellow students, who were impressed with his peculiar and individualistic behaviour, self-confidence and his unconventional long hair. His Arabic teacher saw in him a loving but controlled heart, an impetuous soul, a rebellious mind, an eye mocking everything it sees. However, the school's strict and disciplined atmosphere was not to Jibran's liking, which flagrantly flouted religious duties, skipped classes and drew sketches on books. At the school, Jibran met Joseph Hawaik, with whom he started a magazine called *Al-Manarah* (the Beacon), both editing while Jibran illustrated.[2]

Josephine Peabody, the twenty four year old Bostonian beauty who caught Jibran's attention during one of Fred Day's exhibitions, was intrigued by the young Syrian artist who dedicated a sketch to her, and began corresponding with Jibran throughout his stay in Syria. Soon, he became romantically involved with Josephine, and they kept exchanging

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[1] . Mahdi, Ismat. *Modern Arabic Literature*, Dairatul Ma'arif Press, Hyderabad, 1983, p. 144

[2]. Robin Waterfield. *The Life and Times of Khalil Jibran*, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 12

letters until the relationship fell apart, following the rejection of Jibran's marriage proposal and Josephine's eventual marriage in 1906.[1]

Jibran Khalil Jibran finished his college in 1902 and inclined towards Arabic Learning and French Literature. He was excelling in his studies, especially poetry. His relationship with his father became strained over his advanced erudition, driving him to move in with his cousin and to live an impoverished life he detested and was ashamed of until the rest of his life. The poverty in Lebanon was compounded with news of illness striking his family, with his half-brother's consumption, his sister Sultana's intestinal trouble and his mother's developing cancer. Upon receiving news of Sultana's dire illness, Jibran left Beirut in March of 1902.

Return to the United States of America:

To his misfortune, Jibran arrived too late; Sultana died at the age of fourteen on April 4th 1902, the first in a series of three family deaths which would fall upon him in the coming months. Jibran was very fond of his sisters and of his family as a whole. At the time of mourning, both Fred Day and Josephine provided distractions for him, in form of artistic shows and meetings at Boston's artistic circles. Jibran's artistic talents and unique behavior had captured earlier the interest of the Bostonian society, which welcomed this foreign talent into their artistic circles.

Josephine, who slowly captured Jibran's heart, became an inflectional person in his life, the Bostonian poet constantly referring to Jibran as her young prophet. Greatly intrigued by his oriental background, Josephine was charmed by Jibran's vividly illustrated correspondences and conversations. Josephine's care and attention were the inspiration

[1] . Ibid

behind his book *The Prophet*, the title of which is based on an eleven-stanza poem Josephine wrote in December of 1902 describing Jibran's life in Bisharri as she envisaged it. Later on, when Jibran was to publish *The Prophet*, he dedicated it to Josephine, whose care and tenderness helped him advance his career.[1]

Illness struck again when Jibran's mother underwent an operation in February to remove a cancerous tumor. To compound his misery, Jibran was forced to take on the family business and run the goods store, which was abandoned by his half-brother Peter to pursue his fortune in Cuba. This new burden weighed on Jibran's spirit, depriving him from dedicating his time to artistic pursuits. During this time, Jibran tried to shy away from the house, to escape the atmosphere of death, poverty and illness. In the following month, Peter returned to Boston from Cuba fatally sick only to die days later on March 12 of consumption. His mother's cancer continued to spread and she died later that year on June 28, a scene which left Jibran fainting and foaming blood from the mouth.[2]

Literary Career:

Following the three family deaths, Jibran sold out the family business and began immersing himself in improving both his Arabic and English writings, a twin task which he was to pursue for the rest of his life. However, Fred Hollen Day and Josephine were helping him launch his debut art exhibition, which was to feature his allegorical and symbolic charcoal drawings that so fascinated Boston's society. The exhibition opened on 3rd of May, 1904 and proved a success with the critics. However, the exhibition's significance lay elsewhere. Josephine, through her fiancé, invited a schoolmistress called Mary Haskell to examine

[1]. Ibid
[2]. Ibid

Jibran's drawings. This introduction to the schoolmistress was to mark the beginning of a lifetime relationship, which would greatly influence Jibran's writing career. Jibran had sought Josephine's opinion about his Arabic writings, translating them into English. With the language barrier, Josephine could only provide criticism over ideas and thoughts, leaving Jibran alone to tackle his linguistic problems. Josephine's role was to be taken over by Mary Haskell.[1]

Mary Haskell, who was thirty at the time and ten years older than Jibran, went on to finance Jibran's artistic development and encourage him to become the artist that he aspired to be. As a school head mistress, Haskell was an educated, strong-willed and independent woman and an active champion of women's liberation, who was set apart to Josephine Peabody's romantic nature. Mary was the reason behind Jibran's decision to explore writing in English, as she persuaded Jibran to refrain from translating his Arabic works to English and concentrate instead of writing in English directly. Mary's collaboration and editing of his various English works polished Jibran's work, most of which first underwent Mary's editing before going to the publishers. She would spend hours with Jibran, going over his wording correcting his mistakes and suggesting new ideas to his writings. She even attempted learning Arabic to gain a better grasp of Jibran's language and his thoughts.[2]

In 1904, Jibran started to contribute articles to the Arabic-speaking immigrant newspaper called *Al-Mahjar* (The Emigrant), marking his first published written work. His first publication was called *Vision*, a romantic essay that portrayed a caged bird amid an abundance of

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[1]. Naimy, Mikhail, *Khalil Jibran: His Life and Works*, 2nd ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, pp. 56-59

[2]. Ibid

symbolism. Despite spending four years in Lebanon learning Arabic, Jibran's written Arabic left something to be desired. To master Arabic, Jibran relied on his ear for capturing traditional vocabulary, depending heavily on the Syrian stories narrated in his hometown of Bisharri. Hence his Arabic writing had a colloquial feel to it, which was comfortable to his audiences. According to Jibran, rules of language were meant to be broken and he went on to advocate Arab émigré writers to break out of tradition and seek an individual style. Throughout his life, Jibran's Arabic writings did not receive the critical acclaim his English books had, leading him later on to concentrate on his English writings and abandon the cause of improving his Arabic style.[1]

Jibran's first Arabic written work came out in 1905 with the publication of *Al-Musiqa* (The Music). During that year, Jibran started a column in *Al-Mahjar* called *Tears and Laughter*, which was to form the basis of his book *A Tear and a Smile*. While writing in *Al-Mahjar*, a certain Arabic immigrant writer called Amin al-Rihani wrote to the magazine lauding Jibran's article which attacked contemporary Arab writers for imitating traditional writers and using poetry for financial gain. Rihani was to become an important Arabic writer and a friend of Jibran's, whom he later left for the life-long friendship of Mikhail Nu'aima. At the time, Jibran published several Arabic poems and wrote in newspapers, about various subjects relating to love, truth, beauty, death, good and evil. Most of his writings had a romantic edge to them, with bitter and ironic tones.

In 1906, Jibran published his second Arabic book called *Ara'is al-Muruj* (The Nymphs of the Valley), a collection of three allegories which

[1]. For details please turn, Josephine, *Al-Mufid fil Adab al-Arabi*, Part II, p. 612

take place in Northern Lebanon. The allegories-*Martha*, *Yuhanna the Mad* and *Dust of Ages and the Eternal Fire* dealt with issues relating to prostitution, religious persecution, reincarnation and pre-ordained love. The allegories were heavily influenced by the stories he heard back in Bisharri and his own fascination with the Bible. Jibran was to return to the subject of madness in his English book *The Madman*, whose beginnings can be traced to Jibran's early Arabic writings. What characterized Jibran's early Arabic publications was the use of the ironic, the realism of the stories, the portrayal of second-class citizens and the anti-religious tone, all of which contrasted with the formalistic and traditional Arabic writings.[1]

Jibran published his third Arabic book *Al-Arwah al-Mutamarridah* (Spirits Rebellious) in March of 1908, a collection of four narrative writings based on his writing in *Al-Mahjar*. The book dealt with social issues in Syria, portraying a married woman's emancipation from her husband, a heretic's call for freedom, a bride's escape from an unwanted marriage through death and the brutal injustices of 19th century Lebanese feudal lords. These writings received strong criticism from the clergy for their bold ideas, their negative portrayal of clergymen and their encouragement of women's liberation. Jibran was to later recall to Mary the dark period in which *Al-Arwah al-Mutamarridah* was written, during a time when he was haunted by death, illness and loss of love. The anti-clerical content of the book threatened Jibran with excommunication from the church, with the book being censored by the Ottoman government.[2]

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[1]. For details please turn Mcharek, Sana, *Khalil Jibran and other American Prophets*, The Florida State University, 2006, p. 7

[2]. Ibid

In 1911, Jibran switched writing in *Al-Mahjar* to the immigrant newspaper *Mir'at al-Gharb* (The Mirror of the West), to which he continued to contribute articles until 1912. On April 26 of the same year, Jibran moved to New York to seek a new artistic life, boosted by Mary's letters of introduction which promised to raise his contacts.

In New York, Jibran began to work on his next book *Al-Ajnihat al-Mutakassirah* (The Broken Wings), a work he had started in 1906 and which was published in January 1912. According to Jibran, *Al-Ajnihat al-Mutakassirah* was a spiritual biography, despite recalling to Mary that the experiences in the book are not his. The book, the longest of his Arabic novels, dealt with the story of Selma Karameh, a married woman, and her ill-fated love affair with a young man, with the end leaving Selma dead at childbirth.

The story of Selma Karameh was linked to Jibran's love affair with a Lebanese widow, Sultana Thabit, during his education in Lebanon. Jibran was to tell Mary of his story with this young widow of twenty-two, with whom he exchanged love, poetry and books, only to die and leave him mementos of her in the form of jewelry and clothes. Other critics allude to another doomed love relationship with a Lebanese teenager related to his childhood mentor Selim Daher. Another influence is revealed in Josephine's one-act play called The Wings, written in 1904 during Jibran's close relationship with her.[1]

Jibran began to enjoy the new attention he was receiving in New York, especially with Mary's financial backing providing him with a secret source of income, in addition to Mary's artistic contacts which worked to promote Jibran's works. In 1913, Jibran joined the board of the

[1]. Mcharek, Sana, *Khalil Jibran and other American Prophets*, The Florida State University, 2006, pp. 29-32

newly founded Arab immigrant magazine *Al-Funun*, a periodical published by the Syrian-American Nasib Arida of New York and dedicated to the advancement of literary and artistic issues. The magazine's reflection of Jibran's liberal approach to style and taste led him to contribute several articles, which later on formed the basis of his first English book, The Madman.

The love relationship between Jibran and Mary dwindled as quarrels over money, sex and marriage led to an interesting development. Soon Mary was to become Jibran's mentor and editor, initiating a tutorial course which was aimed at improving his English writing and developing his cultural education. Jibran had started working in 1913 on *The Madman*, a subject which fascinated him ever since he learned about the history of treating the mad in Lebanon; in his hometown of Bisharri, he heard how the mad were thought to be possessed by the spirit of the *jinn* (the devil), with the church in charge of exorcising the devil out of the possessed people.[1]

As early as 1908 when Jibran wrote *Al-Ajnihat al-Mutakassirah* (Spirits Rebellious), he had tried translating his Arabic works to English, in order to attain Josephine's opinion. In 1913, Jibran attempted to translate his works, now for Mary to read and edit. Jibran was frustrated with the difficulties of translating and the language barrier which prevented Mary from helping him improve his writings. Mary, who uselessly tried to learn Arabic, devised a tutorial course for Jibran, aimed at improving his written English and educating him culturally. At the same time, Mary was encouraging Jibran to drop translating his Arabic works and concentrating instead on writing directly in English.

[1]. Naimy, Mikhail, *Khalil Jibran: His Life and works*, 2nd Ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, pp. 132-135

Nonetheless, Mary urged immigrants to retain their mother tongue while pursuing their second language education. Mary's educational program worked. In no time, Jibran began to get over his grammatical mistakes, spelling errors and adopt a reading appetite. During this time, Jibran took a liking to Nietzsche's style and his will to power concept, which went against Jibran's interpretation of Christ. To Jibran, Christ was not the weak person portrayed by Nietzsche, but an admirable mortal to whom he dedicated his longest English writing *Jesus: The son of Man*. Meanwhile, Mary and Jibran worked together on editing and revising *The Madman*. In 1914, Jibran published his fifth Arabic book *Dam'a wa Ibtisama* (A Tear and A Smile), an anthology of his works based on his column in *Al-Mahjar* newspaper.[1]

In 1915, the pain he had suffered in his shoulder when he was young began to come back, and he underwent electrical treatment on his left shoulder, which had remained weak and in quasi-paralyzed state following the childhood accident. In 1918 he joined the literary magazine *The Seven Arts*. Jibran prided himself in being the first immigrant to join the board of this magazine, which reflected Jibran's literary style. At the time, Jibran's presence began to be demanded in literary circles, who craved to hear recitations from his books and writings.[2]

By 1918, Jibran began to tell Mary of an Arabic work he had been working on the seeds of his most famous book *The Prophet*. Based on a Promethean man's exile to an island, *The Prophet* evoked the journey of the banished man called *al-Mustafa*, or the Chosen One. In her diary, Mary recounted Jibran's using about the book, which he later called 'the

[1] . Mahdi, Ismat. *Modern Arabic Literature*, Dairatul Ma'arif Press, Hyderabad, 1983, p. 151

[2]. Ibid, p. 139

first book in my career my first real book, my ripened fruit. Soon Jibran added to the work the title of the Commonwealth, a separate work he had attached to the story of *al-Mustafa*. Jibran was to later link the seeds of *The Prophet* to an Arabic work he did when he was sixteen years old, where a man at an inn discusses with the rest of the attendants various subjects. However, Jibran still worried about his English writing and he sought Mary's advice constantly. Jibran had always been fascinated by the language of the Syrian Bible, which reflected Jibran's views on the creation of an absolute language, a task he tried to achieve through his various English writings, through the creation of a unified universal style.

Mary was crucial to the development of *The Prophet*, for she advised Jibran to adopt the English language for this book. Jibran was further encouraged to pursue writing in English following the attention given to his soon to be published book *The Madman*. The conversation Jibran had with Mary over the issues of marriage; life, death, love etc. infiltrated his chapters in *The Prophet* and various other works. However, Mary was against the title of *The Prophet*, which Jibran came up with in 1919, preferring the title *The Counsels*, the name which she continued to use after the publication of the book. By the fall of 1918, Jibran was preparing to publish his first English book, and another Arabic poem called *Al-Mawakib* (The Processions), his first serious attempt at writing a traditional Arabic poem with rhyme and meter.

Jibran's first English book *The Madman* came out in 1918 and received good reviews from the local press, who compared him to the Indian writer Tagore, famous for bridging the gap between the East and the West, and the English poet William Blake. *The Madman*, a collection of parables which was illustrated by Jibran, revealed the influence of Nietzsche, Jung and Tagore. Following the success of *The Madman*,

Jibran's popularity began to soar and gradually Jibran started losing touch with his old acquaintances, Fred Holland Day, Josephine, and now he dissolved his relationship with Rihani. Jibran relished the aura of mystery which he evoked among people, given his undisclosed accounts of his oriental background and his personal reserve.[1]

In 1919, Jibran published his Arabic poem *Al-Mawakib*. During the same year, Jibran joined the board of yet another local magazine *Fatat Boston*, to which he contributed several Arabic articles. Throughout his life, Jibran joined societies and magazines such as *Al-Mahjar*, *Al-Funun*, *The Golden Links Society* and *Fatat Boston*, in order to create a mouthpiece for avant-garde Arabic writing and unite Arabic literature abroad. In *Fatat Boston*, Jibran developed a close relationship with the Syrian immigrant writer Mikhail Nu'aima, whom he had met earlier in 1914. Nu'aima, a critical thinker at the time, was among the first Syrian writers to acknowledge Jibran's efforts at advancing the Arabic language, and correctly making use of Syrian customs and background. He treated Jibran's *The Broken Wings* as an example of the universal language of literature, pointing out that Salma Karamah could have easily come from a Russian, English or Italian background. However, following Jibran's death, Nu'aima immortalized Jibran, replacing the man with a godly image.

With Nu'aima, Jibran formed in April 1920 a ten-member Syrian immigrant organization called *Al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyyah* [2] which promoted the publication of Arabic writings and the transmission of world literature. Throughout its life, *Al-Rabitah* was led by Jibran's call

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[1]. Ibid

[2]. Naimy, Mikhail, *Khalil Jibran: His Life and works*, 2nd ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, p. 155

for greater artistic freedom, ever encouraging writers to break the rules and seek individual styles. During the time, Jibran's involvement in his Arabic writings distracted him from completing *The Prophet* for a while. Moreover, Jibran vacillated between resuming works on *The Prophet* or embarking on a lecture tour, as his spreading popularity demanded more artistic presence from him. However, he continued to view himself as a spokesman of both the Arab and English worlds, a role whose difficulty he admitted.

Jibran's political ideas were incensing local politicians in Syria, who reacted against his article which stated "You have your Lebanon and I have my Lebanon". Jibran disapproved of the way the Syrian territories were being managed, and he wrote extensively on the identity of the emerging Arab countries, as the Greater Syria region began to be divided into Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. On the makeup of emerging countries, Jibran called on politicians to adopt the positive aspects of the Western culture and refrain from importing the surface values of guns and clothes. His political thought sooner gave way to a general view on the cultural makeup of countries and the way citizens ought to lead their lives.

In 1922, Jibran started to complain about heart trouble, which was later attributed to his nervous psychological state. Near the completion of *The Prophet*, Mary and Jibran acknowledged Nietzsche's great influence on the book, which is reminiscent of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Mary had advised Jibran about the style of *The Prophet*, covering issues such as the use of capitalization, the use of punctuation marks and the form of paragraphs. Jibran had insisted that he wanted his paragraphs to remain short. Mary had always pointed out that Jibran was a man of few words, who limited his letters to a minimum of words.

By 1923, Jibran had a well-established reputation in the Arab world through his Arabic articles, which he contributed to the various local and immigrant Arabic newspapers. During this time, Jibran was gradually depending less on Mary as a financier and editor. He had agreed earlier with Mary to pay off his loans by sending her several of his paintings. And as Jibran's confidence in his English writings grew, his reliance on Mary's opinion dwindled. However, Mary's face remained an inspiration in his illustrations, for soon Jibran will decide to restrict his paintings to book illustrations. *The Prophet* finally came into print in October of 1923.[1]

Death:

By 1930, Jibran's excessive drinking to escape the pain in his liver aggravated his disease, and hopes of finishing the second part of *The Prophet*, *The Garden of the Prophet*, dwindled. Jibran revealed to Mary his plans of building a library in Bisharri and soon he drew the last copy of his will.

Jibran Khalil Jibran died on 10th April, 1931 at the age of forty eight in a hospital at New York, as the spreading cancer in his liver left him unconscious. His death was mourned in the United States of America and Syria. His will left large amounts of money to his country, since he wanted his Syrian citizens to remain in their country and develop it rather than immigrate. Mary, Mariana and Henrietta all attended to Jibran's studio, organizing his works, sorting out books, illustrations and drawings. To fulfill Jibran's dream, Marianna and Mary travelled in July of 1931 to Syria to bury Jibran in his hometown of Bisharri. Upon arrival, the Lebanese Minister of Arts opened the coffins and honoured his body

[1]. Naimy, Mikhail, *Khalil Jibran: His Life and works*, 2nd ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, p. 194

with a decoration of Fine Arts. Marianna and Mary started negotiating the purchase of the Carmelite monastery Jibran wished to obtain. By January of 1932, the Mar Sarkis monastery was bought and Jibran moved to his final resting place. Upon Mary's suggestion, his belongings, the books he read and some of his works and illustrations were later shipped to provide a local collection in the monastery, which turned into a Jibran museum.[1]

Literary Production of Jibran Khalil Jibran:

Jibran left behind a rich literary production and four hundred pieces he drew and painted. As a successful litterateur Jibran Khalil Jibran contributed enough for the development of Arabic as well as English literatures. The most outstanding contributions are:

In Arabic:

1. *Al-Musiqa* (The Music, 1905)
2. *Arais al-Muruj* (Brides of the Valley, 1906)
3. *Al-Arwah al-Mutamarrida* (Spirits Rebellious, 1908)
4. *Al-Ajniha al-Mutakassira* (The Broken Wings, 1912)
5. *Dam'a wa Ibtisama* (A Tear and A Smile, 1914)
6. *Al-Mawakib* (The Processions, 1919)
7. *Al-Awasif* (The Tempests, 1920)
8. *Al-Badai' wal-Tara'if* (The New and the Marvelous, 1923)

[1]. Ibid, p. 135-137

In English:

1. *The Madman* (1918)
2. *Twenty Drawings* (1919)
3. *The Forerunner* (1920)
4. *The Prophet* (1923)
5. *Sand and Foam* (1926)
6. *Kingdom of The Imagination* (1927)
7. *Jesus, The Son of Man* (1928)
8. *The Earth of Gods* (1931)
9. *The Wanderer* (1932)
10. *The Garden of The Prophet* (1933)
11. *Lazarus and his Beloved* (1933)
12. *Prose and Poems* (1934)
13. *A Self-Portrait* (1959)
14. *Thought and Meditations* (1960)
15. *Spiritual Sayings* (1962)
16. *Voice of the Master* (1963)
17. *Mirrors of the Soul* (1965)
18. *The Vision* (1994)
19. *Eye of The Prophet* (1995)

Timeline of Jibran Khalil Jibran:

1883	:	Jibran was born in Bisharri, Mount Lebanon
1895	:	His mother took him and his brothers and sisters to New York, was enrolled in the school
1902	:	Returned to Boston
1904	:	Held his first art exhibition of his drawings in Boston at Fred Day's studio
1908	:	Went to Paris to study art under Auguste Rodin
1911	:	Met Abdul-Baha, the leader of the *Baha-i- Faith*.
1918	:	His first book, *The Madman* was published by Alfred A. Knopf
1923	:	His most famous book, *The Prophet* was first Published
1931	:	Died in New York

Jibran Khalil Jibran as a Litterateur:

Jibran Khalil Jibran is one of the most daring writers who liberated Arabic literature from its sterile form. He combines prose with the art of the painter, the sculptor, the musician and the poet. Many people, the Arabs and the orientalists viewed that the merging of different art forms appears for the first time in Arabic in Jibran's works. With his artistic background he paints with the pen and his expressions become pictures filled with life.

Jibran Khalil Jibran was one of the outstanding figures of the Arab-American writers who contributed to the ongoing Arabic literary

renaissance. This movement had started by the end of the 19th century with revivalist figures in the Arab world like Butrus al-Bustami, Khalil Mutran, and Al-Aqqad, among others who were attracted to Western poetry and particularly English Romanticism. Living in the American environment undoubtedly helped the Arab-American literature in their quest to revolutionize the classically conservative Arabic literature. In a way, they reflected the culture of freedom they found themselves in. They freely developed new styles whereas their counterpart modernizers in the East had to moderate them. The Arab-American modernists were highly influenced by Western cultures in attempting to reform the traditional use of Arabic language and applying new ideas to Arabic literature. They developed the prose-poem and also introduced Western themes like romanticism, individualism, humanism, and secularism.

Jibran often depicts himself as a lonely poet who is more sensitive than other people and who is capable of revealing eternal truths. Again in *Sand and Foam* he writes: There lies a green field between the scholar and the poet; should the scholar cross it, he becomes a wise man; should the poet cross it, he becomes a prophet. This more elevated role that Jibran started to play continued to live with him. It, however, reached its most profound expression through The Prophet in which al-Mustafa seems to voice Jibran's own spiritual teachings.[1]

Jibran's writings are known for their prophetic tone against the evils that reigned in his beloved homeland at the time and against other evils that bring humanity to decadence. His message, however, is a healing one. He asserts that this modern world, corrupted by conventions, oppression, and hatred is redeemable through love, good will, and freedom.

[1]. Josephine, *Al-Mufid fil Adab al-Arabi*, Part-II, pp. 612- 620

Jibran embraced the American transcendentalists like Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau. His work bears the influence of their ideas of self reliance, reincarnation, and the presence of a greater self that each individual is able to grow into. For Jibran human beings are able to progress toward a divine world. He repeatedly celebrates joining the metaphysical realm as the key to better understand the world and discover higher meanings of life. Together with Nietzsche, William Blake's works also contributed in shaping Jibran's religious ideas. From an early age, he started to question the religion of his birth and the role of priests. He, however, never questioned the existence of some kind of God and continued to be fascinated with Jesus throughout his life. Jibran, indeed, found in Christ a source of inspiration, an idea that was recurrent in his earlier stories like *Khalil the Heretic* and then later in his English book *Jesus: the Son of Man* (1928). He considered Jesus a lasting leading figure of humankind. He once wrote in a letter to Mary Haskell:

> My art can find no better resting place than the personality of Jesus. His life is the symbol of humanity. He shall always be the supreme figure of all ages and in Him we shall always find mystery, passion, love, imagination, tragedy, beauty, romance and truth. [1]

Jibran's unique poetic expression, characterized by beauty and spirituality, became known as Jibranism. His language touches the inner souls of readers and his parables teach them spiritual lessons. His early short stories, prose poems, and later collections of aphorisms made him widely acclaimed as the greatest of Arab romantics.

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[1]. Naimy, Mikhail, *Khalil Jibran: His Life and works*, 2nd ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, p. 255

As Jibran's interest shifted to mysticism and primitivism, his writings returned again and again to the beauty and purity of nature. He romanticized nature and found in it an inspirational power for his poetry. He identifies the divine essence with the natural world, a pantheism he had absorbed from his readings under Fred Holland Day's tutelage. Jibran's writings establish a mystical union with nature, a relationship of love and harmony. The natural beauty of Jibran's home village Bisharri was a strong source of inspiration and nurture to his imagination. His poetry is nostalgic of the magnificent scenery of his childhood. It portrays Jibran rejoicing in peace and freedom among the immortal cedars of Lebanon, the famous holy valley of *Qadisha*, and the mountains of Sannin and Famm al-Mizab.

Yet, inspired by Rousseau's ideas on the innocence of the natural man as opposed to the man corrupted by civilization and materialism, Jibran repeatedly points out to the contrast between the natural world and the human world. In the former there is peace, harmony, and innocence whereas in the latter there is chaos, injustice, and sorrow. In a letter to Mikhail Nu'aima dated 1922, he writes:

> …the future shall find us in a hermitage at the edge of one of the Lebanese gorges. This deceptive civilization has strained the strings of our spirits to the breaking point. We must depart before they break.[1]

Jibran's romantic philosophy was influenced by the Platonizing stream. As we have already seen, the autobiographical tone of his writings depicts him as a poet-prophet with a sacred mission to humanity.

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[1]. Naimy, Mikhail, *Khalil Jibran: His Life and works*, 2nd ed., Khayats, Beirut, 1965, p. 255

In one of his aphorisms in *Sand and Foam* Jibran compares himself to Jesus saying:

> Crucified One, you are crucified upon my heart; and the nails that pierce your hands pierce the walls of my heart. And tomorrow when a stranger passes by this Golgotha he will not know that two bled here.[1]

In a prose poem entitled *You Have Your Language and I Have Mine*, a response to the old school Arab critics' attack and what they labeled as excessive sentimentality and weak style Jibran writes:

> You have of the Arabic language whatever you wish and I'll have what pleases my thought and emotions. You have its words and I'll have its hidden powers you have its preserved stiff corpse and I'll have its soul you have its dried up rules of grammar and I'll make of it melodies that echo in the mind and overwhelming dashes of affection that calm the senses. [2]

Jibran's early works written in Arabic popularized the already burgeoning romantic tradition. They are considered crucial to the development of modern Arabic literature as they paved the way to a new kind of creativity. Critics even went further in drawing a similarity between Jibran's impact on 20th Century Arab romantic writers and that of 19th century Western romantic figures on their fellow writers.

Jibran's Arabic pieces were part of a new literary culture that experienced a shift from craftsmanship to inspiration. Jibran indeed sought the beauty of thought more than the beauty of form. He created new imagery and seemed to adopt a blacken approach to imagination as

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[1]. Ibid, pp. 61-62

[2]. Badawi, M.M. *Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 182-83

the Divine Vision. His writing did not match traditional forms of the past that the neoclassical poets of the 19th and early 20th Centuries were faithful to. Jibran, for example, rejected complex grammar, flamboyant rhetoric as well as meters of classical Arabic poetry. In his Arabic poem *Al-Mawakib* (The Procession) for example, Jibran promoted the idea of using more than one meter in a single poem. The delicate tones of the lines, however, are deeply felt.[1]

Jibran challenged what was considered to be the criteria of great poetry. He preferred a free and spontaneous verse, and blended classical Arabic with colloquial Arabic. He embraced a simplified diction and a language that unsophisticated audience could understand and relate to; yet his simple style is elegant, resonant, and able to communicate profound thoughts. It touches on aspects of our experience as humans. It appeals to our hearts as well as to our minds. Jibran's writings strikingly create an element of timelessness and universality that penetrate even the translated work. In *The Broken Wings,* for example, Jibran talks about love as:

> …the only freedom in the world because it so elevates the spirit that the laws of humanity and the phenomena of nature do not alter its course.[2]

For Jibran, true religion is not an organized but a liberating and personal one. His poem *The Crucified* echoes his life-long belief that the mission of Jesus was not to build institutions and structures, but to build the human spirit. His interest in the teaching of the Bible, Torah and

[1]. Ibid

[2]. Jibran, Khalil Jibran, *The Broken Wings*, e-book, p. 35

Buddhism, and in the personalities of Christ, Muhammad and Imam Ali were to have far-reaching influence on his writings.[1]

Jibran's other early Arabic writings also point out to the ignored rights of Arab women and call for their emancipation and education. *Al-Arwah al-Mutamarridah* (Spirits Rebellious), for example, portrays a married woman's emancipation from her husband and a bride's escape from a forced marriage through death, themes that had remained untouched in Arabic literature. Jibran's attempt at bridging the gap between Arabic and Western literature in terms of both form and content presents him as a mediator between both worlds. Jibran communicated a message of reconciliation between his own heritage and the new environment he grew in. He imported Western themes and infused an element of avant-garde experiment into Arabic literature, but he in return had something to offer to the West.

Jibran considered himself as a spokesman of both cultures. He admired America's achievements and its values of individualism, dynamism and freedom. On the other hand, he praised the Arabs' contributions to the world, but advised them to evade the past and build one's own future, and to adapt the good aspects of Western civilization instead of blind imitation. Jibran appealed to the new generation of the Arab-Americans to be proud of both their Eastern and Western backgrounds. In his famous poem *I Believe in You*, Jibran writes:

[1] . Mahdi, Ismat. *Modern Arabic Literature*, Dairatul Ma'arif Press, Hyderabad, 1983, p. 145

> I believe that you have inherited from your forefathers an ancient dream, a song, a prophecy, which you can proudly lay as a gift of gratitude upon the lap of America.[1]

Waterfield, however, argues that the cultural dualism Jibran experienced made him act out different roles among his Western friends of literary circles and his Syrian compatriots. The first were often radicals and socialists, whereas the latter were rather nationalists. He describes Jibran as a chameleon who adapts himself to the demands of both worlds.[2] Nevertheless, it could be argued that Jibran balanced both the Eastern and Western sides of his identity and came to resolve his cultural division. Mostly in his early Arabic writings, such as *Al-Ajnihat al-Mutakassirah* (The Broken Wings) and *Dam'a wa Ibtisama* (A Tear and a Smile), Jibran perfectly blended his being an exotic Easterner with being a wounded romantic. But, broadly speaking, he harmoniously merged his mystic beliefs in a sense of continuity among various faiths and in an inner, personal experience of the divine with his romantic ideals of universal love and unification of the human race. As a firm believer in the Divine Unity, his work addresses the common and the universal. This can be traced to the poet-prophet image that Jibran started to evolve into in the 1920s. For Waterfield this romantic fusion of poet and prophet was undoubtedly Jibran's best opportunity for bringing the East and the West together.[3] This is because Jibran is known in the Arab world mostly as a sensitive poet, whereas to his English speaking readers, he is rather a wise philosopher and a prophet.

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[1]. Waterfield, Robin. *The Life and Times of Khalil Jibran*, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 149

[2]. Ibid

[3]. Ibid, p. 238

The astonishing success of Jibran Khalil Jibran in America is a success matched by no other writer whose mother tongue was not English as he succeeded uniquely in articulating the noblest values of this great country in terms that are powerfully direct and simple, but enlightened by his Oriental soul. Impressed by the great technological achievements of America, and mindful of the material well-being of the majority of its citizens, Jibran viewed his adopted home from the vantage-point of his own cultural heritage and recognized that the picture was incomplete. Consequently he sought to infuse some Eastern mysticism into Western materialism, believing that humanity was best served by a man capable of bestriding the two cultures and acknowledging the virtues of each.

His English writings, especially *The Prophet*, represent the best of both worlds, a richly harmonious blend of the East and the West. Jibran, however, was not only a man from the East who brought a much needed element of spirituality to the West. He equally became a man of the West, benefiting from an environment in which freedom, democracy and equality of opportunity opened doors before him as would have been possible nowhere else in the world. His achievement thus symbolizes the achievement of America herself, a nation of immigrants which through its ingenuity and largesse has created a truly international society thriving on unity in diversity.

The Prophet, the finest work of Jibran Khalil Jibran, is written in the language of unity in diversity. It carries with it themes of unity of religions and oneness of mankind. Al-Mustafa's message in the book is a passionate belief in the healing power of universal love and the unity of being. Many critics point to the autobiographical dimension of *The Prophet*. The fact is there is evidence that al-Mustafa is a mouthpiece for

Jibran's own teachings. This, however, does not seem to be a turning point in Jibran's life.

Paintings of Jibran Khalil Jibran:

Jibran was primarily a painter. Painting was not a secondary interest or a hobby supplementing his literary career, rather, he established a complementary relationship between his literary vision and artistic representations.

Jibran held his first art exhibition of his drawings in 1904 in Boston. During this exhibition, Jibran met Mary Elizabeth Haskell. The two formed an important friendship that lasted the rest of Jibran's life. Haskell influenced not only Jibran's personal life, but also his career and she encouraged him to become the artist that he aspired to be. With the financial assistance of Mary, Jibran went to study art with Auguste Rodin in Paris for two years.

Jibran kept drawing the same thing or drawing from the same vision, approaching paintings with the same method, without significant changes over the years. This repetition becomes especially clear when examining the differences between the drawings, paintings, and watercolours. Jibran used pencil in drawing both ideas and human faces, an approach marked by deliberate planning, craft, and meticulousness. One observes this in a series of drawings, including Jibran's own face, the face of Amin al-Rihani, and others, all of which appear absorbed and contemplative as in his photographic pictures. These drawings are somewhat time-bound, as Jibran has drawn a face at a particular moment, appearing in a traditional position consistent with photographic pictures in the early decades of the last century. Yet his drawings somehow breach time and prevail over it, despite adhering to a visible stereotype.

Jibran's artistic focus changes significantly, when it comes to painting and watercolours. His paintings are a creative record of their subjects and all links to time are totally detached. Jibran obtains the subjects of his oil and watercolour paintings from his overall visions rather than his own vision, from his perceptions of the world and man instead of his own life experiences. Thus he paints all bodies completely naked, a symbolic nudity. With few exceptions, Jibran's works do not include furniture or other accessories of the man-made world, but all unfold in a neutral space lacking materiality or worldliness, appearing to the viewer as a gradual color backdrop dominated by quiet darkness.

Even the naked figures in the paintings possess a transcendent quality, and some of them are of a perplexing gender, exhibiting no distinguishing qualities even the long hair could belong to both man and woman. Man appears without sexual identity; Jibran documents mankind's state pre-and post-sex, before and after humans are limited by form. The nude, regardless of sex, appear young and vigorous. He rarely portrayed an elderly body, or wrinkled, bruised, or injured ones. Instead, they are absorbed in agitations beyond the physical realm, showing only invisible worries, with closed eyes devoted to their internal lives. Jibran's vision portrayed in his art transcends the works themselves, and this is what makes him a modernist. He did remain separate from the artistic scene, both in Paris where he studied painting and in New York where he practiced his art and painting.

The affection in Jibran's spirit for humanity was great. He demonstrated this through his writings, his art and even more clearly through his daily life. For many years his studio was a Mecca for seeking people to come and share, to ask and learn. In *The Garden of the Prophet*, Jibran reminds us of the greatest spiritual teachings: that all people

everywhere are connected and are linked in slight but real ways, reminding us that the saint and the sinner are twin brothers and that within each person is the potential for wrong as well as for good. Science and religion admit to be the answers for humanity, but Jibran spoke with annoyance against the unspeakable stupidities committed in the name of science and religion. Jibran was primarily a painter. Painting was not a secondary interest or a hobby supplementing his literary career, rather, he established a complementary relationship between his literary vision and artistic representations. Jibran was a writer with optical perceptions who may be characterized as a painterly writer.