

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC

205

Volume 205

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.
205**

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
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- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

Kahlil Gibran 1883-1931	1
<i>Lebanese-born American poet, short story writer, novelist, aphorist, essayist, playwright, painter, and sculptor</i>	
George Bernard Shaw 1856-1950	55
<i>Irish-born English playwright, novelist, critic, essayist, short story writer, and poet</i> <i>Entry devoted to the play Arms and the Man (1894)</i>	
Anzia Yeziarska 1885?-1970	135
<i>Russian-born American novelist, short story writer, essayist, and autobiographer</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 365

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 477

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 493

TCLC-205 Title Index 499

Kahlil Gibran

1883-1931

(Also transliterated as Khalil; also Jibran and Jabran) Lebanese-born American poet, short story writer, novelist, aphorist, essayist, playwright, painter, and sculptor.

The following entry provides an overview of Gibran's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *TCLC*, Volumes 1 and 9.

INTRODUCTION

Lebanese-American author Kahlil Gibran is generally regarded as one of the most popular modern Arabic writers, as well as one of the most successful authors of the twentieth century. Although he wrote plays, short stories, and various works of prose, he is best known for his lyric poetry and, especially, his book *The Prophet* (1923). Often imbued with mysticism, Gibran's work generally examines themes related to self-fulfillment and the quest for wisdom. As a result, his verse is often compared with that of Walt Whitman and William Blake. Some scholars have also emphasized the formal and thematic influence of the Bible on Gibran's poetry, noting, in particular, its reliance on scriptural tone. Despite its popularity with general audiences, Gibran's work has failed to garner serious attention from critics and scholars, many of whom complain that his writings are overly sentimental and rely too heavily on the aphoristic form. Some, however, have championed the uplifting nature of Gibran's themes and celebrated his stylistic techniques. As Antoine G. Karam has stated, Gibran's work "is primarily characterized by a strong, conscious break with the traditional values and assumptions and their forms and techniques of expression," concluding that Gibran was "imbued with a genuine romantic and mystical attitude towards existence," and that his literature "exalts life; glorifies 'nature'; elevates the individual and his inner being over social man and his corrupt human society; and celebrates imagination, passion, and the freedom of the human spirit as more trustworthy than reason, logic, religious dogmas, codified laws, and scientific postulates in guiding mankind to the right path."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Gibran was born in 1883 in Bechari, Lebanon, and raised as a Maronite Christian. He became interested in the arts at an early age, demonstrating particular skill in

painting and drawing. At the age of twelve Gibran immigrated to Boston with his mother and siblings to escape the poverty and hardships of Lebanon. While in Boston he met a social worker named Jessie Fremont Beale, who recognized his artistic talent and introduced him to Fred Holland Day, an avant-garde publisher, photographer, and supporter of the arts. Day had a great influence on Gibran, introducing him to the poetry of Blake, Whitman, and John Keats, and helping him develop his skills as a visual artist. Under Day's tutelage Gibran was able to sell several book-cover designs to the publisher Scribner. Day also encouraged him to cherish his heritage, and with his mentor's support Gibran returned to Lebanon two years after arriving in Boston, to continue his education at a Maronite Christian school in Beirut. He later enrolled in the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris, where he studied under the French sculptor Auguste Rodin.

During this time Gibran began writing, producing several short plays and poems, which were written in his native Arabic. In 1904 he returned to the United States. Shortly after his arrival he suffered the death of his mother and two of his siblings, and survived with the financial support of his remaining sister. In May of that year Day arranged to have Gibran's drawings exhibited at his studio. Mary Elizabeth Haskell, a respected headmistress of a local girl's school, attended the exhibition and became enamored with his work. Haskell eventually became his advisor, and the two developed a close relationship that lasted the rest of Gibran's life. For the next few years Gibran lived in the Chinatown section of Boston. He continued writing during this period, using his fiction and poetry as a means of expressing his melancholy and sense of isolation as an exile in a foreign land. Works from this period include a collection of short stories titled *'Ar' is al-muruj* (1910; *Nymphs of the Valley*), which later appeared under the title *Spirit Brides*; a novel, *Al-agniha al-mutakasirra* (1912; *The Broken Wings*); and a book of poetry and prose titled *Dam 'ah wabtisamah* (1914; *A Tear and a Smile*). These works were well received in the Arabic-speaking community.

In 1912, after Mary Haskell declined his proposal of marriage, Gibran moved to New York City. He acquired a studio apartment and began writing parables in English. These stories, which were inspired by Old and New Testament scriptures, gained positive attention from critics. In 1918 he published a book of poetry and

prose, *The Madman: His Parables and Poems*, his first work written in English. Gibran's growing success during the time of World War I, however, was tempered by his concern for the hardships of his fellow citizens in Lebanon, many of whom were starving to death as a result of the war. His work became increasingly preoccupied with the idea of self-fulfillment and a spirituality that did not rely on organized religion. As a result he was eventually excommunicated from the Maronite Christian church.

During the 1920s Gibran continued writing, publishing *Al-arwah al-mutamarridah* (1922; *Spirits Rebellious*), another collection of stories, and his most successful work, *The Prophet*. This book of poetry was often compared with Whitman's *Song of Myself* and eventually became the best-selling title in the history of publisher Alfred A. Knopf. Gibran had intended that *The Prophet* would be the first volume in a trilogy, the second installment of which, *The Garden of the Prophet* (1933), was not published until after his death. In the 1920s Gibran also published *Sand and Foam: A Book of Aphorisms* (1926) and a work of prose titled *Jesus the Son of Man: His Words and His Deeds as Told and Recorded by Those Who Knew Him* (1928).

Gibran died of liver disease on April 10, 1931, in New York. According to his will, all of his future royalties were to be donated to his hometown of Bechari, Lebanon. Some of his previously unpublished letters, poetry, and works of prose appeared posthumously, including *The Wanderer: His Parables and His Sayings* (1932), a collection of aphorisms and prose. In May of 1991 Gibran was honored by the United States Congress for his literary and artistic accomplishments, with the dedication of the Gibran Memorial Garden, located in Washington, D.C.

MAJOR WORKS

Gibran's best-known work, *The Prophet*, is a collection of poetry that chronicles the life and teachings of a prophet named Almustafa, whose name means "the chosen one." Through his sermons, given to the people of Orphalese, Almustafa ruminates on the human condition. The people of Orphalese believe him to be so enlightened that they consider him a prophet of God. In addition to opening and closing chapters, the book is comprised of twenty-six vignettes, in which the people ask the prophet to speak on different subjects pertaining to human existence. These poetic essays cover a variety of subjects, including love, marriage, children, religion, freedom, and death. Almustafa also speaks on eating and drinking, clothes, houses, pleasure, and beauty. On the subject of marriage, the prophet advises to "let there be spaces in your togetherness, / And let the winds of

the heavens dance between you." Regarding children, he states, "they come through you but not from you, / And though they are with you yet they belong not to you." Speaking on the subject of death, Almustafa asserts that "Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. / And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb. / And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance."

Although the poems cover a variety of universal human themes, the collection is unified by its mysticism, a belief in a benevolent universe, and formal scriptural tone. In the closing chapter of *The Prophet*, Almustafa departs on a ship and leaves the people of Orphalese. Some critics have noted, in addition to biblical influences, the influence of Whitman's *Song of Myself* on the book, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which also features a prophetic speaker in a foreign land. Gibran illustrated *The Prophet* with original drawings, which offer visual interpretations of several of the book's themes.

Gibran's seminal work has been revered by some readers and condemned by others. Geoffrey P. Nash has noted, somewhat sarcastically, that "by mixing an anti-materialist transcendentalism with a gratifying individualism and wrapping it in an 'oriental' biblical idiom, Gibran managed to produce the twentieth-century's most successful piece of consumerist 'spiritual' writing." But Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, Gibran's principal English biographers, have suggested that the "existing critical apparatus of Western literary criticism lacks the relevant criteria by which to judge Gibran," and by extension his most successful work. The critics conclude that "*The Prophet* does indeed hold an ambiguous position in the field of English literature—it is neither pure literature, nor pure philosophy, and as an Arab work written in English it belongs exclusively to a unique tradition—and some critics suggest that it is time to adopt a new critical mechanism for assessing this type of literature deriving from two separate cultural traditions and bound by the prejudices and restrictions of neither."

In recent years critics have increasingly turned their attention to Gibran's early Arabic prose writings. These works, including *Spirit Brides* and *Spirits Rebellious*, are generally unknown to Western audiences but reveal, according to some scholars, important thematic and formal developments in Gibran's work. In both *Spirit Brides* and *Spirits Rebellious*, Gibran emphasizes the message of love in the Christian faith, while censuring what he perceives to be the corruption and materialism of organized religion and society. For example, in the stories that comprise *Spirits Rebellious* Gibran depicts heroes falling victim to unjust societal or religious constraints, and he expresses particular sympathy with the

plight of women, whom he believed were the most oppressed by these institutions. Because of the controversial themes in *Spirits Rebellious*, especially its views on organized religion, Gibran was excommunicated from the Maronite Christian church. In the three stories that comprise *Spirit Brides* Gibran explores a broad range of themes, including: love, death, and jealousy in "The Ash of Centuries and the Immortal Flame"; good and evil in "Marta al-Baniyah"; and exploitation and organized religion in "Yuhanna the Madman." In his introduction to his 1993 translation of the book, translator and critic Juan R. I. Cole maintained that Gibran's experimentation with the short story form, which was not generally practiced in the Middle East, had a profound effect on Arabic literature, noting that "*Spirit Brides* is among the first widely read books of short stories in the Middle East, so that Gibran must be seen to some extent as a sort of Arabic-language Edgar Allan Poe."

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Despite Gibran's success and popularity, and even his influence on other Arab-American writers in the early decades of the twentieth century, his works have been largely ignored by the critical community. Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins have observed that "although Kahlil Gibran's name is widely known throughout the world, his achievements in the West have, to date, received only scant attention by scholars. It is doubtful whether any writer who has attained such global popularity has been so neglected." Many critics have dismissed Gibran's work as sentimental or melodramatic, while others have complained that his writings rely too heavily on clichés and adages. Still others have been suspicious of the popularity of such works as *The Prophet* and have questioned the seriousness of Gibran's art because of its commercial success. Regarding *The Prophet*, in particular, Eugene Paul Nassar has argued that "the book has been too highly praised by the True Believers, but it also has been too roundly and imprecisely attacked." Nassar concludes that Gibran "was a man of considerable talents" and that many of the "merits and defects" of his work "are intimately bound to Gibran's struggle to live in two cultures, the Lebanese-Arab and the American."

Gibran's dual cultural identity, in fact, has been the subject of debate for a number of critics. Geoffrey P. Nash has insisted that Gibran abandoned the concerns of his native heritage and his "Arab identity," not for "aesthetic or mystic" reasons, but in order "to accommodate his discourse to the requirements of an audience that was proximate, and by whom he might be received as a modern 'living master.'" Emphasizing the influence of Western, as opposed to Eastern, thought in Gibran's work, Juan R. I. Cole has asserted that "despite his

Lebanese origins and the influence on him of Arabic literature, from *A Thousand and One Nights* to the Koran and the Arabic Bible, Gibran is a quintessentially American writer, a celebrator of the individual, of progress, of initiative. Like Whitman, Gibran combines his faith in progress with a love of nature, and his belief in the individual with a mystical pantheism." Bushrui and Jenkins, however, have contended that "in his work, as in his thought, Gibran achieved lasting eminence and fame as a writer in two completely disparate cultures and represents the meeting of two worlds." They conclude that "as an oriental who wrote his most celebrated work in the major language of the Western world, Gibran's style and philosophy is characteristic of the East, and of the Arab in particular. His constant inspiration was his own heritage, which colored his English and exercised an inescapable hold over his mind, its insistence being upon the wholeness of visionary experience and the perpetual availability of another realm of being."

Critics have also emphasized the influence of other writers on Gibran's work, such as Nietzsche and Blake. George Nicolas El-Hage has studied the links between Blake's poetry and Gibran's, concluding that "although Gibran was immensely influenced by Blake, he was not a mere copy of him. Like that of his mentor, Gibran's originality resides in the fact that he absorbed influences from different channels but he transformed them to suit the climate of his own universe, and marked them with the colors of his own personality." Despite the importance of the debates on the cultural and literary influences in Gibran's work, more critical studies in English need to be written, Bushrui and Jenkins have argued, in order to form a true assessment of the author's contribution to modern literature. "Gibran's message is a healing one and his quest to understand the tensions between spirit and exile anticipated the needs of an age witnessing the spiritual and intellectual impasse of modernity itself," Bushrui and Jenkins insist. "His work, set forth in the form of a simple lyrical beauty and a profound depth of meaning for all who endeavor to seek it, applies dynamically and with striking timelessness to the momentous challenges of today."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- 'Ar' is al-muruj [*Nymphs of the Valley*] (short stories) 1910; also published as *Spirit Brides*
- Al-agniha al-mutakasirra [*The Broken Wings*] (novel) 1912
- Dam 'ah wabtisamah [*A Tear and a Smile*] (poetry and prose) 1914

- The Madman: His Parables and Poems* (poetry and prose) 1918
The Forerunner: His Parables and Poems (poetry and prose) 1920
Al-arwah al-mutamarridah [*Spirits Rebellious*] (short stories) 1922
The Prophet (poetry) 1923
Sand and Foam: A Book of Aphorisms (aphorisms) 1926
Jesus the Son of Man: His Words and His Deeds as Told and Recorded by Those Who Knew Him (prose) 1928
Ālihat al-ard [*The Earth Gods*] (poetry and prose) 1930
The Wanderer: His Parables and His Sayings (aphorisms and prose) 1932
The Garden of the Prophet (poetry and prose) 1933
Manzumat [*Prose Poems*] (poetry) 1934
The Secrets of the Heart (poetry and prose) 1947
The Procession (poetry) 1958
Kahlil Gibran: A Self-Portrait (letters) 1959
Thoughts and Meditations (poetry and prose) 1960
Spiritual Sayings (poetry and prose) 1962
Mirrors of the Soul (poetry and prose) 1965
The Wisdom of Gibran: Aphorisms and Maxims (aphorisms) 1966
Beloved Prophet: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell, and Her Private Journal [with Mary Haskell] (letters and diary) 1972
Between Night and Morn (poetry and prose) 1972
Lazarus and His Beloved (play) 1973
Dramas of Life (plays) 1981
Blue Flame: The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran to May Ziadah (letters) 1983
The Storm (short stories and poetry) 1993
The Beloved: Reflections on the Path of the Heart (poetry and prose) 1994
The Vision: Reflections on the Way of the Soul (poetry and prose) 1994
The Kahlil Gibran Reader: Inspirational Writings (poetry, prose, and aphorisms) 1995
The Collected Works (poetry, prose, short stories, and aphorisms) 2007

CRITICISM

Eugene Paul Nassar (essay date summer 1980)

SOURCE: Nassar, Eugene Paul. "Cultural Discontinuity in the Works of Kahlil Gibran." *MELUS* 7, no. 2 (summer 1980): 21-36.

[In the following essay, Nassar disagrees with the assessment of Gibran as an "oriental wise man," claiming instead that he was influenced more by Western ideals and his experiences as a "Lebanese-American émigré writer" than by Islamic or Arabic traditions.]

The Prophet has been among us since 1923; by 1976 the volume of counsels had been bought in America alone by more than six million people, read certainly by three times that many. The book has been too highly praised by the True Believers, but it also has been too roundly and imprecisely attacked. Gibran was a man of considerable talents, and a critical sketch of his work and life is in order now, a half century after their publication; it is necessary both to correct these imprecisions and to probe the actual merits and defects in the works.¹ Many of those merits and defects are intimately bound to Gibran's struggle to live within two cultures, the Lebanese-Arab and the American. In Gibran's case, the struggle led him to adopt a pseudo-wisdom posture which can be called "exultant dualism." Gibran's personal psychic suffering in maintaining the posture before his audience is variously demonstrated in some of his best, certainly most poignant, lyrical moments. These lyric passages, which constitute the most authentic Gibran, dramatize the pangs of cultural discontinuity. Gibran's life and work and the small body of critical comment on that life and work are, however, so little and poorly known, despite the popularity of *The Prophet*, that I find it necessary, for the purposes of this introductory essay, to outline both.

In 1974, through the New York Graphic Society, there appeared a reliable biography of Gibran by Jean and Kahlil Gibran (the writer's cousin-namesake). This biography goes a long way toward the necessary demystification of Gibran. The work had already been accomplished in part—brilliantly, I think—back in 1934 by Mikhail Naimy, a writer of great stature in the Middle East, in an impressionistic critical biography in Arabic. The book did appear in English, translated by the author in 1950 (Philosophical Library) but too late or little known, it seems, to counter the still-fashionable tendencies to either deify or damn Gibran. One will learn from either biography that Kahlil Gibran is best, most realistically, understood as a Lebanese-American emigre writer, not as an oriental wise man.²

Born of Christian parents in the Lebanon in 1883, in 1895 Gibran, his brother and two sisters were brought over to Boston's immigrant South End by their mother. They left their homeland partly to escape the poverty and restrictions of Ottoman rule, partly to escape from a drunken husband and father. Gibran, then a poor and uneducated boy of thirteen, wandered into the Denison Settlement House on Tyler Street. When a social worker, Jessie Fremont Beale, was apprised of Kahlil's talent for drawing, she wrote to her friend, Fred Holland Day, asking if he would assist the boy. It was Day, an eminent publisher (Copeland and Day), photographer, collector, and man of taste, who developed the boy's talents for draftsmanship and his attitudes towards the arts. It was Day who introduced Gibran to Blake, Keats, Shelley, Emerson, Whitman, and various turn-of-the-

century British, American, and Continental poets. Day was fascinated by Gibran's Near-Eastern heritage, which was Christian, not Islamic, and thus partly kin to the Western tradition. Apparently Day encouraged the impressionable young man to be proud of that heritage. As a consequence, Gibran went with some enthusiasm back to Lebanon for three years of advanced secondary schooling in a Maronite Christian school in Beirut. Before he left for Lebanon at the age of fifteen, Gibran had already sold some book-cover designs to Scribners, and, by his own account, had been inveigled into a love affair with a patroness of the arts. He left for Lebanon having just met and been impressed by the young poet, Josephine Preston Peabody, who was about to be published by Copeland and Day. In 1902 he returned at the age of nineteen; he then had to face the deaths, in quick succession, of a sister, a brother, and his mother. Terribly bereaved, weighed down by a melancholy which later became the ground base of all his work, the young Gibran found spiritual and cultural companionship with Miss Peabody.

The immigrant boy of nineteen knew what he wanted: to be a "pure artist" in the sense of the term as understood by Day and Peabody. But he had no money, was being supported by his sister, and his command of English was more comic than effective. An exhibition of his drawings was arranged by Fred Day in Day's own studio in 1904, and to that exhibition came a friend of Miss Peabody's: Mary Haskell, headmistress of Miss Haskell's School for Girls. Haskell was immediately taken by the drawings; she made Gibran's acquaintance, and by 1908 was so convinced of his "genius" that she financed a year's schooling in art for him in Paris.

By 1908, the twenty-five-year-old Gibran had published two books of short fiction in Arabic as well as dozens of short poetic essays in Arab-American newspapers; in literary circles in both the Near East and in the New York-Boston Lebanese-American community he was well-known as one of the vanguard of artists who were infusing Western attitudes and modes into Arabic literature. However, because of his lack of formal training he thought himself stalemated as a painter. With the Haskell offer of the Paris year began the spiritual and patronage relationship that was to last up to and even past Gibran's death in 1931. Mary Haskell kept voluminous journals (now at the library of the University of North Carolina) during all of these years; these journals are a mine of information about Gibran, and are the primary base for the biography by Jean and Kahlil Gibran. From these journals emerge two very decent people: Mary, deeply committed to things of the spirit—art, ethics, humanitarianism—and afraid of sexuality; Gibran, deeply grateful, eager to please, puzzled and uncertain of his role with Mary. Was he to worship, or teach, or love, or marry this admirable woman? What did she

want; what was the decent thing to do? One learns much about Gibran through Mary's eyes; yet one must also be cautious about Mary's Gibran. It seems clear from Gibran's writings, his letters, and in other accounts of the man, that there is much in Gibran, the Lebanese rather than the American Gibran, that did not find expression in the relationship with Mary Haskell. Gibran proposed to Mary, and was rejected. Either because of this rejection or because he needed wider artistic horizons (or perhaps for both reasons), in 1912 Gibran left Boston and acquired a studio apartment on West Tenth Street in New York City, where he remained for the rest of his life.

The early New York years were overcast for Gibran by the terrible fate of Lebanon during the Great War (fully one-third of the population of the Mountain starved). His chronic melancholia pervades the prose-poems in Arabic of this period. But he was finding success in America, where he most wanted it; here, both his symbolic drawings and his life drawings of famous artists and other notables, were popular. He then began to experiment with writing in English, under the tutelage of Mary Haskell. His early parables, which stemmed far more from Old and New Testament sources than from anything in Islamic literature, gained much critical attention, especially through the pages of the prestigious *Seven Arts Magazine*. The 1918 publication in English of *The Madman*, a collection of Gibran's parables, and the publication of *The Procession* in Arabic in 1919 mark a watershed for Gibran. Though his reputation in the Arabic world grew in the Twenties as a result of further collections of his earlier prose-poems in Arabic, Gibran now turned all of his literary energies and aspirations to the slim books of poems, parables, and aphorisms in English, and he turned his draftsman abilities to the illustration of these books.

The continuity of tone that runs throughout the works of Gibran is that of lonely alienation, of a yearning for connections. Beneath all his prophetic masks, Gibran's lyric cry for connection reveals his most authentic voice. Hungering for real unity, Gibran is ever attempting to lift himself up by his own bootstraps to deliver truths or at least prolegomena to the multitudes in old societies or new on social and cosmic questions. But ever behind these pronouncements is the Gibran of unsureness, of profound melancholy, of tragic vision. Gibran is at home neither in the old culture nor in the new, and an unresolved dualism vitiates much of the work when, as so often occurs, it pretends to resolution.

The reader of the translations from the Arabic and of the English works of Gibran will find in each a confusing series of self-projections and investitures. Gibran was of the mold of William Blake: both angry social reformer of old cultural contexts and the prophet of an expanding cosmic consciousness beyond any need of a

given cultural context. Most often and fundamentally, however, he emerges as a lonely poet finding solace only in the poetic consciousness or imagination. He wants desperately to trumpet a Humanism with absolutist foundations, but at the center of his vision (a center he keeps trying to shroud in mist), he is a tragic dualist whose exultation is fixed only in the idea of an ever-upwards-striving human spirit:

We are the sons of Sorrow; we are the poets
And the prophets and the musicians. We weave
Raiment for the goddess from the threads of
our hearts . . .

"We And You," *Secrets of the Heart* (p. 41)

And Wisdom opened her lips and spoke:
"You, Man, would see the world with the eyes of
God, and would grasp the secrets of the hereafter
by means of human thought. Such is the fruit of
ignorance. . . .
"The many books and strange figures and the lovely
thoughts around you are ghosts of the spirits that
have been before you. The words your lips utter
are the links in the chain that binds you and your
fellow men.

"A Visit From Wisdom," *A Second Treasury* (p. 37)

My departure was like Adam's exodus from Paradise,
but the Eve of my heart was not with me to make
the whole world an Eden. That night, in which I
had been born again, I felt that I saw death's
face for the first time.

Thus the sun enlivens and kills the fields with
its heat.

Broken Wings (p. 47)

Though the child was dead, the sounds of the
drinking cups increased in the hall. . . .
He was born at dawn and died at sunrise. . . .
A lily that has just blossomed from the bud of
life and is mashed under the feet of death.
A dear guest whose appearance illuminated
Selma's heart and whose departure killed her soul.
This is the life of men, the life of nations, the
life of suns, moons and stars.

Broken Wings (pp. 118-19)

These passages are, I think, "touchstones" for the central drama of Gibran's soul, a dualism that longs for unity, a belief only in the "divinity" of man's ability to create and to love, and a struggle to "make do" with this humanism. The humanism is much like both the humanism of Gibran's mentor, William Blake, and the early humanism of Percy Shelley. The young poet aspires to the energy of Blake, the social ardency of the early Shelley, and the cosmic euphoria of the Whitman of the *Song of Myself*; what Gibran really achieves, however, are dramatizations of the inextricable dual-

isms in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the tragic tone of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, the solitary laments of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle" or "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

Gibran always struggles to extricate himself from a melancholic position; at times he attempts this with a shell of toughness and bitterness which he, according to Naimy, fashioned after Nietzsche; often he attempts it through a brand of transcendentalism that seems a fusion of his own intuitions with his knowledge of Emerson, Naimy, and others. Neither role convinces as much as does the lyric voice of the poet who is often ashamed of both roles.

The bitter Yusif El Fakhri, in the philosophic dialogue, "The Tempest," has withdrawn from civilization, and he tells the questioning poet:

"No, my brother, I did not seek solitude
for religious purposes, but solely to
avoid the people and their laws, their
teachings and their traditions, their
ideas and their clamour and their wailing. . . .
What I really know to be true is the crying
of my inner self. I am here living, and in
the depths of my existence there is a thirst
and hunger, and I find joy in partaking of
the bread and wine of Life from the vases
which I make and fashion by my own hands.

Secrets of the Heart (pp. 15, 20)

But though Fakhri sought solitude only to avoid civilization, he has had "religious" experiences:

"And among all vanities of life, there is only
one thing that the spirit loves and craves.
One thing dazzling and alone. . . . It is an
awakening in the spirit; it is an awakening
in the inner depths of the heart; it is an
overwhelming and magnificent power that
descends suddenly upon man's conscience and
opens his eyes, whereupon he sees Life amid
a dizzying shower of brilliant music,
surrounded by a circle of great light, with
man standing as a pillar of beauty between
the earth and the firmament. . . ."

Secrets of the Heart (p. 22)

Such momentary psychic experience is not to be denied; Gibran's poetry is often of such moments. The question is whether in Gibran's mind such moments of "mysticism" or "cosmic consciousness" are in fact intuitive glimpses into a higher reality for an immortal soul, or only esthetic apprehensions of the evolutionary potential in man's creative imagination. And the truth of the matter, demonstrably so, is that Gibran was tortured by the question, wanting to assert the one to his audience, while believing the other.

The poet's dilemma is indicated in any number of pieces in both the Arabic and English writings. *The Proces-*

sion consists of an internal debate between Age's desire to make sense of things and Youth's disdain for all formulation:

The truth of the flute will e'er remain,
While crimes and men are but disdain. . . .
Singing is love and hope and desire,
The moaning flute is the light and fire. . . .

Give me the flute and let me sing;
Forget what we said about everything.
Talk is but dust, speckling the
Ether and losing itself in the vast
Firmament. . . .

Why do you not renounce the
Future and forget the past?

Secrets of the Heart (pp. 150, 155, 157, 158)

Fakhri's bitterness and "Youth's" bitterness and also their estheticism or mysticism are reflected again in another internal debate, *The Earth Gods*, a poem in English finished and published just before Gibran's death in 1931, but sketched out in the period 1912-18, which seems to have been the time of greatest ferment, turmoil, and creativity for Gibran. Indeed, most of *The Prophet* was also written in 1918, though not published till 1923. The reason Gibran often gave for delay of *The Prophet* was that he wanted to make the book as perfect as he could. A profound unsureness about whether he was in fact prophet or "false alarm" (as he once confessed he felt to Mikhail Naimy), prophetic "forerunner" or mere bitter "wanderer," honey or poison for his readers, is more likely the reason.

There is a very moving and revealing Arabic poem of nightmare, confession, and self-analysis called "Between Night and Morning" in *The Tempests* volume of 1920. This poem consists of two related nightmares. The first is of the poet's harvesting fruit trees of his own planting. After the harvest is given away to the people (his Arabic readers, specifically the Christian-Lebanese), the poet discovers his fruit is as bitter as gall:

Woe to me, for I have placed a
Curse in the mouths of the people, and an
Ailment in their bodies.

Secrets of the Heart (p. 60)

Another tree is planted "in a field afar from the path of Time," watered with "blood and tears," but not one of the people will now taste of this sweet fruit of sadness, and the poet withdraws to his solitude. The second nightmare is of a boat of the poet's own building, "empty . . . except of rainbow colors":

and I said to
Myself, "I shall return with the empty
Boat of my thoughts to the harbour of the

Isle of my birth." . . . And on the masts and
On the rudder I drew strange figures that
Compelled the attention and dazzled the
Eye. And as I ended my task, the boat of
My thoughts seemed as a prophetic vision
Sailing between the two infinities, the
Sea and the sky.

(pp. 61-62)

And the people *are* dazzled:

Such welcome was mine because my boat
was beautifully decorated, and none
Entered and saw the interior of the
Boat of my thoughts, nor asked what
I had brought from beyond the seas. Nor
Could they observe that I had brought
my boat back empty. . . .

(p. 62)

The guilty poet then sails the seas to fill his boat with worthy cargo, but his people will not welcome him back, though the boat is full. And he withdraws, unable to speak or sing, even as dawn approaches. Both nightmares are obvious allegories of Gibran's guilt feeling with regard to his art and his audience. Gibran later, at the full tide of success of *The Prophet*, confided to Mary Haskell his plans for sequels, in which Almustafa, back at the isle of his birth, is first rejected by his disciples, and is then stoned to death by "his people" in a marketplace.

The "Seven Selves" parable is likewise deeply personal and poignant, as are others in *The Madman*, *The Forerunner*, and *The Wanderer*:

"Ah! could I but be like one of you, a self
with a determined lot! But I have none, I
am the do-nothing self, the one who sits
in the dumb, empty nowhere and nowhen, while
you are busy re-creating life. . . ."
the seventh self remained watching and
gazing at nothingness, which is behind all
things.

"The Seven Selves," *The Madman* (p. 23)

The "forerunner" preaches a new gospel of a new John the Baptist to his people, but as he closes, he exclaims:

"Like moths that seek destruction in the
flame you gather daily in my garden: and
with faces uplifted and eyes enchanted you
watch me tear the fabric of your days.
And in whispers you say the one to the other,
'He sees with the light of God. He speaks
like the prophets of old. . . ."

"Aye, in truth, I know your ways, but only
as an eagle knows the ways of his fledglings.
And I fain would disclose my secret. Yet in
my need for your nearness I feign remoteness,