

Jibran : a Poet-Philosopher

Md. Nazmul Hoque Nadwi

Jibran Khalil Jibran¹ who inspired a whole generation of writers in developing Mahjar literature was a great philosopher poet of twentieth century. He was born of poor parents and brought up in conditions of squalor and poverty. "His father was indolent and alcoholic whose frequent tantrums terrified the youngster. His mother, the daughter of a priest, was an intelligent woman and resolute but helpless in the atmosphere of tension and brutality"².

Jibran's biographical overview

Jibran Khalil Jibran was born on January 6, 1883 near the Holy Cedar Grove on the edge of Wadi Qadisia (Sacred Valley) in the town of Bishari, Lebanon. His mother Kamilah Rahmeh, the daughter of a clergyman, named Istiphan Rahmeh, was a widow when she married Khalil Jibran, father of the poet. Kamilah's first husband was Hanna Abdus Salam Rahmeh, by whom she had one son, Boutros, who was six years old when Jibran was born. Jibran's first sister Marinna was born in 1885 and his second sister Sultana was born in 1887.³

In 1897 Jibran, his half-brother Boutros, his mother and his two sisters emigrated to the United States, settling in Boston's Chinatown,⁴ while his father remained in Lebanon. Jibran returned to Lebanon in 1897, where he began a course of intensive study at al-Hikmah School. He studied a wide variety of subjects beyond those prescribed in the curriculum and immersed himself in Arabic literature, ancient and modern. He also familiarized himself with contemporary literary movements in the Arab world.⁵

In 1899 during the summer vacation at Bishari, Jibran fell desperately in love with a beautiful young woman. Although there is much conjecture as to the nature of this relationship and the identity of the young woman, it is certain that Jibran found his first love affair both frustrating and disappointing. In the autumn he returned to Boston by way of Paris, and several years later described the unhappy affair in *The Broken Wings*.

Jibran returned to Lebanon once more in 1902, this time as a guide and interpreter to an American family,⁶ but was forced to hurry back to Boston on hearing the death of his sister Sultana and the serious illness of his mother.

In march, 1903 his half-brother Boutros died, and his mother died in June of that year, leaving Jibran and his sister Marinna in Boston. His mother, half-brother and younger sister all died of tuberculosis.⁷

By 1904 Jibran was beginning to attract attention as an artist. Fred Holland Day, a well-known photographer, became Jibran's first patron, holding at his studio in January an exhibition of the poet's paintings and drawings.⁸

In February a second exhibition was held at the Cambridge School, a private educational institute owned and operated by Mary Haskell, who became Jibran's close friend and patroness.

At the Cambridge School he also met a beautiful and impulsive young woman of French origin, Emilie Michel, who was known to all her acquaintances as Micheline and with whom, it is said, Jibran fell in love.⁹

Jibran published his first Arabic book *al-Musiquah* (Music) in 1905 and published a savage attack against the Church and the State in *Ara'is al-Muruj* (Nymphs of the Valley) in 1906 which earned him the reputation of being a rebel and a revolutionary, a reputation which the publication of his later mystical works only partially mitigated.

Besides arranging for the publication of *al-Arwah al-Mutamarridah* (Spirits Rebellious) in 1908, Jibran also worked on *Falasafat al-Din wa'l-Tadayyun* (The Philosophy of Religion and Religiosity) which was never published¹⁰. Through the generosity of Mary Haskell, who was determined to help Jibran fulfill his ambition to become a great artist and thinker, he went to Paris, visiting London on the way, to study art at the Academic Julien and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. During his stay in Paris he came into contact with European literature, and read the works of contemporary English and French writers. He also became especially interested in the work of William Blake, who greatly influenced his thought and art ; and for a while fell under the spell of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; but Nietzsche's influence, unlike that of Blake, was short-lived.¹¹

Jibran continued his studies in Paris, where in 1909 he met again an old classmate from al-Hikmah, Yousuf al-Huwayik, also an art student. The two men became close friends, and together tried to acquaint themselves with modern trends in painting. They found, however, that they had little sympathy with Cubism, which

one of them described as a "lunatic revolution" and instead reaffirmed their loyalty to the classical tradition. They also met the sculptor Auguste Rodin, and although this meeting lasted only for a few seconds, Rodin was to exert a powerful influence on Jibran's art.¹² His teacher in Paris was in fact Maitre Lawrence, whose art Jibran so abhorred that eventually he left him and began to work on his own.

Jibran, Amin Raihani and Yousuf al-Huwayik met in London in 1910 and laid many plans for a cultural renaissance of the Arab world. Among these plans was one for the founding of an opera house in Beirut, the outstanding feature of which was to be two domes symbolizing the reconciliation between Christianity and Islam. After his return to Boston in October 1910, Jibran proposed marriage to Mary Haskell, who was ten years senior to him, but he was not accepted¹³.

At time of intense political activity occasioned by the freeing of Arab territories from Ottoman rule, Jibran founded *al-Halqa al-Zahabiyyah* (The Golden Circle) in 1911, one of many semi-political Arab societies which sprang up in Syria, Lebanon, Constantinople, Paris and New York. But the Golden Circle was not popular among Arab emigrants and was dissolved after the first meeting.¹⁴

Jibran moved from Boston to New York in 1912, where he had hired a studio at 15 West Tenth Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenue. "The Hermitage" as Jibran called his studio, remained his home until his death. He published *al-Ajnihah al-Mutakassirah* (The Broken Wings), his autobiographical narrative, on which he had been working since 1903.¹⁵

A literary and love relationship began between Jibran and May Ziadah, a Lebanese writer living in Egypt. Although they knew each other only through their correspondence, which lasted for more than years, they achieved a rare intimacy and harmony of understanding which was broken only by Jibran's death.¹⁶

Jibran collected a number of his prose poems which had appeared in different magazines since 1904, and published them under the titles *Damah wa Ibtisamah* (A Tear and a Smile) in 1914. In December an exhibition of his paintings and drawings was held at the Montross Galleries, New York. And two other exhibitions of Jibran's works were held: one at the Knoedler Galleries, New York; the other at the Doll and Richards Galleries, Boston in 1917 and Jibran published *The Madman* his first book written in English in 1918.¹⁷

Jibran published *Twenty Drawings*, a collection of his drawings with an introduction by Alice Raphael, and also *al-Mawakib* (The

Processions) a philosophical poem illustrated by Jibran himself and containing some of his best drawings in 1919.

In addition he published *al-Awasif* (The Tempests) in 1920, a collection of short narratives and prose poems which had appeared in various journals between 1912 and 1918, and his second English book *The Forerunner*¹⁸. Jibran became founder president of a literary society called *al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyyaha* (The Pen Association) in 1920. This society, which included among its members such distinguished Arab emigrants as Abdul Masih Haddad, Nasib Aridah, Mikhail Nuaymah, Rashid Ayyub, Nadra Haddad, William Catzflis, Iliya Abu Madi and Wadi Bahut, exerted a powerful influence on the work of emigrant Arab poets (Shura al-Mahjar) and on successive generations of Arab writers.¹⁹

Jibran published a thematic "play" *Iram Dhat al-Imad* (Iram, City of Lofty Pillars) in 1921, written in Arabic and taking the form of a discourse on mysticism. His health began to deteriorate.²⁰

In January 1922 another exhibition of his work was held in Boston, this time at the women's City club and published *al-Badayi' al-Taraif* (Beautiful and Rare Sayings) in 1923, in which he included his own sketches (drawn from imagination when he was seventeen) of some of the greatest Arab philosophers and poets such as Ibn Sina, Al-Gazali, Al-Khansa, Ibn al-Farid, Abu Nuwas, Ibn al-Muqaffa, al-Mutanbbi and others.²¹

He published *The Prophet* his most successful work in 1922 and published *Sand and Foam* in 1926 a book of aphorisms some of which were first written in Arabic and then translated into English, and he published *Jesus, The son of man*, in 1928 his longest work.²²

In 1931 two weeks before his death was published *The Earth Gods*. Jibran died on Friday, April 10, at St. Vincent's Hospital, New York, after long and painful illness, described in the autopsy as "cirrhosis of the liver with incipient tuberculosis in one of the lungs". His body was kept in a funeral parlour for two days and thousands of admirers came to pay their last respects. It was sent to Boston, where a funeral service was conducted in the Church. The body was then taken to a vault to await its return to Lebanon, where it arrived at the port of Beirut on August 21. After a magnificent reception, unique in the history of Lebanon, Jibran's body was carried to Bishari to its final resting place in the old chapel of the Monastery of Mar Sarkis. Not far from Mar Sarkis, a permanent Jibran museum has been established by the people of Bishari with the sponsorship and encouragement of the Government of Lebanon.²³

At his death Jibran left two works which were published

posthumously : the completed *Wanderer* which appeared in 1932; and the unfinished *Garden of the Prophet* , which was completed and published in 1933 by Barbara Young, an American poetess who claimed to have been Jibran's companion during the last seven years of his life.²⁴

Jibran's Poetry & Philosophy

It is by now a truism indeed to say that a whole is always greater than the sum total of its constituent parts. This is even more particularly true of living things, if anything at all in this infinite world of ours can be considered other than alive. The full truth about things, no matter how small and relatively insignificant they can be, is always bound, therefore, to escape analysis and scrutiny. As investigators, whether philosophers, scholars or scientists, we seem destined to remain satisfied with half truths about things as individuals and about reality as a whole. We set forth to dissect and analyze a living body and end up with a corpse. Subjected to analysis a shooting tree becomes a log, a concrete atom is rendered into a mathematical formula. Consequently, our feverish endeavour to know things rationally and scientifically whether they be physical or ideal only leads us, instead, to know a great deal about them. As to knowing them in themselves in their integral living dynamism, as to knowing reality in its unified synthetic intimacy, so to speak, that is a quest that by definition surpasses both science and reason . To attempt it, that is, to seek to know reality itself rather than to know about it, is to cross over from philosophy to poetry, and from science to religion and mysticism. Paradoxically enough, it is a poet and a mystic that we are here attempting to dissect and analyze. In our present endeavour to single out and uncover the underlying thought in the works of Jibran Khalil Jibran, we are tempted to fall into the dangerous predicament. We are trying to break down a poet's world into various parts in order to single out one of them, namely the intellectual, and to expound it. Whereas a poet's world – the world of a good poet or a good mystic—is not made up of parts. It is rather a state of being, where all so- called dualities and constituent parts including thought, are moulded into one living fabric, and should not, if one is not to be satisfied with only half truths about them, be isolated and explained. For what is it for instance to say that part of Jibran's philosophy as a poet is the belief in reincarnation? That he so believed is a fact. But " a fact" as Jibran himself puts it, "is a truth unsexed".²⁵

To know that Jibran believed in the idea of reincarnation is

only half the truth about Jibran. The truth in full; the full-sexed truth, is only achieved when we become alive to the idea of reincarnation as Khalil Jibran in his poetic world was alive, and therefore to see our whole world take a startling different shape in our eyes. A world in which, to say the least, only madmen are sane, only wanderers are at home, and only the out-of-tune are really in tune. This is so because the children of this age are also the children of yester-ages. Because the great majority of us have short memories, only the very few, seemingly out of step with their generation, are the ones in step with the rhythm of life's eternal recurrence.²⁶

I emphasize the point that a good poet's philosophy is a state of being and not a state of mind. "When life does not find a singer to sing her heart" says one of Jibran's Aphorisms, "she produces a philosopher to speak her mind."²⁷

Assuming throughout his works the role of the inspired singer of life's heart, Jibran not only refrains from appealing to our minds but also tends to have us refrain from appealing to his own. It is always to his heart and not to his mind that he wishes his reader to be introduced. "Inspiration" he says in one place, "will always sing; inspiration will never explain"²⁸. At another place he declares that "thinking is always the stumbling stone to poetry"²⁹. His rather disdainful attitude as a poet of the heart towards the mind, as a possible alternative means to truth, verges at times even on biting sarcasm. "Our mind," he tells us, "is a sponge; our heart is a stream. It is strange that most of us choose sucking rather than running".³⁰

As we have here chosen to suck at Jibran's poetry, so to speak, rather than to run with it, we are therefore tempted to fall into two predicaments: the first is a predicament of studying the thought and mind of a poet who is himself averse to thought and mind; the second is of reducing poetry from a state of being and life into a lifeless system of thought which at best can only be half its original version.

That we, nonetheless, persist in our quest may, paradoxically enough, be justified by another aphorism from Jibran which states: "Half of what I say is meaningless; but I say it so that the other half may reach you".³¹

My only hope therefore is that in dwelling on Jibran the thinker, the meaninglessly isolated half of Jibran the poet, I should do justice to the other living half that escapes my analysis.

In speaking about work to the people of Orphaless, Jibran's Prophet, Almustafa, says: "Work is love made visible".³²

It is only fair to Jibran, therefore, that we should treat his literary works, eight in Arabic and eight in English, as various

manifestations of his love. That we are dealing with the underlying philosophy in those works; with Jibran's creative mind of which his writings are but the living expression, is bound to put us at once face to face with his particular concept of love.

In dealing with such a concept, which to us constitutes the main unifying soul of all the works of Jibran, we feel invited for practical purposes to call on the assistance of a kindred master lover who was not in this respect less of a poet but far more of a philosopher. By this master lover is meant Plato.

Love, as depicted in Plato's *Symposium*, is the greatest witness to man's primordial feeling of his individual self-insufficiency. For being in love is being in a state of yearning for some beloved or other, apart from whom we deem ourselves wanting or incomplete.

Hence Plato's allegorical statement that love is the child of want and plenty. It is the child of want in that a lover is always wanting, is ever yearning. It is also the son of plenty in that a lover aims through union with his object of love at self-fulfilment. But so long as man lives in a world of time and place, a world of coming to be and passing away, a world of becoming rather than of being, he is utterly doomed to remain in a state of self-incompletion, and therefore, in a state of love; striving after ends but never arriving at an end which is not in itself another beginning. Only when it is realized, as Plato did realize, that time is the moving image of eternity, and that man though living in the world of time and place is not the son of time and place, do we understand that our life-long yearning for self-completion through love is ultimately and in truth a yearning for reunion with the absolute.

Seen in the light of Plato's concept, love therefore instantly reveals the two ultimate poles in human life between which man, as a conscious being, is continuously strained: Man the God-seed planted in the alien soil of time and place, ever yearning for self-fulfilment at the lower end, and God or the metaphysical reality where man originally belonged, at the higher end posing as the desired final end and the fulfilment. Both the higher and the lower poles of man by virtue of this theory are non-special and non-temporal, yet the road for the one to seek the other and unite with it passes through the world of time and place. Because the great majority of the wayfarers are not platonically aware of their origin as well as of their destination, they get fully absorbed by what the road of life offers in terms of illusory temporal ends. They are the deceived lovers. It is therefore left for the platonically-minded few, the very few whose eyes are ever fixed on the far removed transcendental world of higher truth, to tell the story of the soul's alienation in the world of becoming, of its feverish home sickness

and of its heartrending longing for emancipation. Jibran was in his writings as well as in his drawings one of those very few. There is hardly anything in what Jibran has written or drawn, which is not in essence the expression of a soul in anguish, of a vagrant spirit deeply alienated in the immediate world of his existence, tortuously clamoring for rehabilitation in an ideal home that is helplessly far removed.

To be an emigrant is to be an alien. But to be an emigrant mystical poet is to be thrice alienated. To the geographical alienation is added the estrangement from both conventional human society at large if human society can be other than conventional, and also the whole world of spatio-temporal existence. Therefore such a poet is gripped with a triple longing: a longing for the country of his birth, for a utopic human society of the imagination in which he feels at home, and for a higher world of metaphysical truth. This triple longing provided Jibran with the basis for his artistic creativity. Its development from one stage of his work to another is only a variation in emphasis and not in kind; three strings of his harp are always to be detected and towards the end of his life achieve almost perfect harmony in his master-piece, *The Prophet*, al-Mustafa, the utopic state of human existence and the metaphysical world of higher truth become one and the same.

To *The Prophet* as well as to the rest of Jibran's works *Music* can be considered as a prelude. Published eleven years after Jibran's emigration to Boston as a youth of eleven, this essay of about thirteen medium-sized pages marks the author's debut into the world of letters. Though entitled *Music*, this booklet is more of a schoolboy's prosaic ode to music rather than an objective dissertation on it. As such, it tells more about his subject. Jibran, it reveals, is a sentimental youth of an exceedingly flowery language, who, saturated with a vague nostalgic sadness, sees in music a floating sister-spirit, an ethereal embodiment of all that a nostalgic heart yet yearns to be. Representative of the whole essay, both in style and in spirit, is the following quotation, in which he addresses music:

*Oh you, wine of the hearts that uplifts its drinker to the heights of the world of imagination; ... you ethereal waves bearing the soul's plantoms; you sea of sensibility and tenderness; to your waves we lend our souls, and to your uttermost depths we trust our heart. Carry those hearts away beyond the world of matter and show us what is there hidden deep in the world of the unknown.*³³

It is only natural that in his youthful stage Jibran's longing in Chinatown, Boston where he first settled, for Lebanon, the Cedars,

the country of the first twelve impressionable years of his life, should dominate the two other strings of his harp. *Nymphs of the Vally*, is a collection of three short stories; *Spirit Rebellious* consists of another four, while *The Broken Wings* can easily pass for a long short story. Overlooking names and dates, the three books can safely be considered as one volume of eight collected short stories that are similar in both style and conception, even to the point of redundancy; in all of them Lebanon, as the unique land of mystic natural beauty, provides the setting. The different heroes, though varied in names and situations from story to story, are in essence one and the same. They are unmistakably Khalil Jibran the youth himself, who at times does not even bother to conceal his identity, speaking in the first person singular as in *The Broken Wings* and as Khalil in "Kahlil the heretic" of *Spirits Rebellious*. Lebanon and Jibran the youth, therefore, are the two main players on Jibran's stage in all the short stories: Lebanon, the fairyland of Jibran's imagination and longing in Boston, and Jibran the homesick and the infatuated lover of his fairy land. But Jibran the lover, like all infatuated lovers, tends to express his deification of his beloved, mainly through adulterating pretenders to her love. Those pretenders to the full possession of the body and soul of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Lebanon are, in Jibran's reckoning, the feudal lords or Lebanese aristocracy and the church order. The stories are therefore almost invariably woven in such a way as to bring Jibran the hero, or a Jibran-modelled hero, to a direct clash with one another of those pretenders.

In *The Broken Wings* Jibran the youth and Salma Karamah fall in love. But the local archbishop frustrates their love by forcibly marrying Salma to his nephew. Therefore does Jibran find the opportunity while singing love in the virgin beauty of Lebanon, to pour his wrath on the church and the church hierarchy.

In *The Spirits Rebellious*, Khalil the heretic is expelled from a monastery in Mount Lebanon into a raging blizzard, because he was too Christian to be tolerated by the abbot and his fellow monks. At the last moment he was rescued by a widow and her beautiful daughter and was given refuge at their cottage secretly. When he is discovered and captured by the local feudal lord and brought to trial before him as a heretic and an outlaw, he stands among the multitude of humble Lebanese villagers and tenants and speaks like a Christ in his second coming. As a consequence the local feudal lord commits suicide, the priest takes to flight, Khalil marries the daughter of his rescuer, and the whole village lives ever afterwards in a blissful state of natural piety, amity and justice.

"Jhon The Madman" in *Nymphs of the Valley* is almost a

duplicate of Khalil the Heretic. Detained with his calves by the abbot and monks of a monastery simply because the calves have intruded on the monastery's property, Jhon, the poor calf-keeper, in an eloquent speech, accuses his persecutors and all other men of the church of being the enemies of Christ, the modern Pharisees prospering on the poverty, misery and goodness of the very people like himself, in whom Christ abides, "Come forth again, o living Christ" Jhon goes on to say, "and chase these religion merchants out of your temples. For they have turned those temples into dungeons where the snakes of their cunning and villainy coil."³⁴ Because he was so inspired with sincere truth before a domineering social order so unanimously to sincerity and truth, Jhon was dismissed as a madman.

It is easy to label Jibran in this early stage of his career as a social reformer and a rebel, as he was indeed labelled by many students of his literature in the Arab World. His heroes, whose main weapons are their eloquent tongues, are always engaged in struggle that are of a social nature. The main issues in the struggle are almost invariably three. Innocent romantic love, frustrated by a society that subjugates love to worldly selfish interests; a church order that claims wealth, power and absolute authority in the name of Christ but is in fact and for all that utterly antichrist; and a ruthlessly inhuman feudal system. But in spite of the apparent social revolt in his stories Jibran remains far from deserving the title of a social reformer.

To be a reformer in revolt against something is to be basically in possession of a positive alternative. But nowhere do Jibran's heroes strike us as having any real alternative. The alternatives, if any, are nothing but the mere negation of what those heroes revolt against. Thus their alternative for a corrupt love is no corrupt love, the sort of utopian love that we are made to see in *The Broken Wings*; the alternative for a feudal system is no feudal system, or the kind of systemless social system we end up with in *Spirits Rebellion*; and the alternative for a Christless church is a Christ without any kind of church, a madman in the kind of role in which Jhon has found himself. Not being in possession of an alternative, a social reformer in revolt is instantly transformed from a hero into a social misfit. Thus Jibran's heroes have invariably been heretics, madmen, wanderers, and even prophet and Gods. As such they all represent Jibran the emigrant misfit in Chinatown, Boston drawn in his imagination and longing to Lebanon, his childhood's fairyland, who is not so much concerned with the ills that corrupt its society. What kind of Lebanon Jibran has in mind becomes additionally clear in a relatively late essay in Arabic, in which his

ideal of Lebanon and that of the antagonists whom he portrays in his stories are set against one another.

The best that Jibran the rebel could tell those corruptors of Lebanese society in his essay entitled "You Have Your Lebanon and I Have Mine" is not how to make Lebanon a better society, but how beautiful Lebanon is without any society at all:

*You have your Lebanon and its problems, and I have my Lebanon and its beauty. You have your Lebanon with all that it has of various interests and concerns, while I have my Lebanon with all that it has of aspirations and dreams.....Your Lebanon is a political riddle which time attempts to resolve, whereas my Lebanon is hills rising in awe and majesty towards the blue sky....Your Lebanon is ports, industry and commerce, while my Lebanon is a far removed idea, a burning emotion, and an ethereal word whispered by earth into the ear of heaven....Your Lebanon is religious sects and parties, whereas my Lebanon is youngsters climbing rocks, running with rivulets and playing ball in open squares. Your Lebanon is speeches, lectures and discussions, whereas my Lebanon is songs of nightingales, swaying branches of oak and poplar, and echoes of shepherd flutes reverberating in caves and grottoes.*³⁵

It is no wonder that this kind of rebel should wind up his so-called social revolt at this stage of his career with the publication of a book of collected prose poems, entitled *A Tear and a Smile*. The tears, which are much more abundant than the smiles, are those of Jibran the misfit rather than the rebel in Boston, singing in an exceedingly touching way his frustrated love and estrangement, his loneliness, homesickness and melancholy. The smiles, on the other hand, are the expression of those hitherto intermittent but steadily increasing moments in the life of Jibran the emigrant when Lebanon, the land of mystic beauty, ceases to be a geographical expression, and is gradually metamorphosed in his imagination into a metaphysical homeland. His alienation as we find in his short-story 'The Ash of Generations and the Eternal Fine' in *Nymphs of the Valley* and his prose-poems *A Tear and a Smile* has become the alienation of the human soul entrapped in the foreign world of physical existence, and his homesickness has become the yearning of the soul so estranged, for rehabilitation in the higher world of metaphysical truth whence it had originally descended. It is for this reason that human life is expressed by a tear and smile: a tear for the departure and alienation and a smile for the prospect of a home-coming. The historic analogy of the sea in this respect becomes common from now on in Jibran's writings: rain is the weeping of water estranged over hills and dales from the mother sea, while running brooks sound the happy song of

home-coming. Speaking of the soul in one of his prose poems Jibran states:

*Separated from the universal doll it assumes its course in the world of matter, passing like a cloud over the mountains of sorrow and the plains of happiness until she is met by the breezes of death, whereby she is brought back to where she originally belonged, to the sea of love and beauty, to God.*³⁶

When Jibran's homeland, the object of his longing, was Lebanon, his anger was directed against those who, in his view, had defiled its beauty. But now that Jibran's homeland has gradually assumed a metaphysical platonic meaning, his attack was no longer centered on local clergy, church dogma, feudalism and the other corrupting influences in Lebanon, but rather on the shamefully defiled image that man, the emigrant in the world of physical existence, had made of the world of God, his original homeland. Not only Lebanese society, but rather human society at large has become the main target of Jibran's disgust and bitterness throughout the second stage of his career. This kind of disgust and bitterness constitutes the central theme in Jibran's long Arabic poem *The Processions* of 1919 and his book of collected Arabic essays *The Tempests* of 1920, his last work in Arabic, as well as in his first two works in English, *The Madman* of 1918, and *The Forerunner* of 1920, both of which are collected parables and prose poems.

It is not being an alien which really alienates. For, platonically speaking, all men, are in one and the same boat. It is one's of being the only one aware of human alienation, in a physical world every citizen of which is stupidly feeling at home, which creates the loneliness and the disgust; loneliness because one's loyalty to one's metaphysical origin makes a man too proud to belong where he is, and disgust because, through his metaphysical pride, the rest of his worldly contented fellow-men appear as human forgeries. This is precisely the feeling of Youssef al-Fakhry, the hero in Jibran's poetico-fictional title piece, *The Tempests*. Proudly removed in his cottage among the forbidding mountains, he becomes a mystery to the awe-stricken neighbourhood. Only to Jibran the narrator, seeking refuge in the cottage one stormy evening, does he reveal the secret of his heroic silence and seclusion, "It is a certain awakening in the uttermost depth of the soul" he says, "a certain idea, that takes one's conscience by surprise at a moment of forgetfulness, and open his vision whereby he sees life....projected like a tower of light between earth and infinity."³⁷

Looking at the rest of men from the tower of life, from his giant God-self which he has so recognized at a rare moment of awakening,

Youssef al-Fakhry sees them in their forgetful, day-to-day earthly existence, at the bottom of the tower. In their placid unwillingness to lift their eyes to the divine in them, they appear to him as disgusting pigmies, hypocrites and cowards. "I have deserted people," he explains to his guest, "because I have found myself a wheel turning right among wheels invariably turning left". "No, my brother" he adds in another place, "I have not sought seclusion for prayer or hermetic practices. Rather have I sought it in escape from people and their laws, teachings and customs, from their ideas, noises, and wailings. I have sought seclusion so as not to see the faces of men selling their souls to buy with the price thereof what is beneath their souls in value and honour."³⁸

In "The Grave Digger" another poetico-fictional piece in *The Tempest*, these men who have sold their souls, and who constitute in Jibran's reckoning the rest of human society, are dismissed as dead. "But" in the words of the hero, a prototype of Youssef al-Fakhry, "finding none to bury them, they remain on the face of the earth stinking disintegration".³⁹

The hero's advice to Jibran the narrator is that for a man who has awakened to his giant God-self the best service he can render society is digging graves. "From that hour up to the present" Jibran concludes, "I have been digging graves and burying the dead, but the dead are many and I am alone with nobody to lend me a hand".⁴⁰

To be the only sane man among fools is to appear as the only fool among sane men. If life, as Youssef al-Fakhry says, is a tower whose bottom is the earth and whose top is the world of the infinite, then to clamour for the infinite in one's life is to be considered an outcast and a fool by the rest of men clinging to the bottom of the tower. This is precisely how the Madman in Jibran's first English work, *The Madman*, gained his title. His masks stolen, he was walking naked as every traveller from the physical to the metaphysical is bound to be. Seeing his nakedness, someone on a house-top cried: "He is a madman". Looking up, the sun, his higher self, kissed his naked face for the first time. He fell in love with the sun and wanted his masks, his physical and social attachments, no longer. Thereafter he was always known as the Madman. And as a madman he was at war against human society.

The processions, Jibran's long poem in Arabic, is a dialogue between two voices. Upon close analysis, the two voices seem to belong to one and the same man: another one of those Jibranian madman or men who have become Gods unto themselves. This man would at one time cast his eyes downwards at people living at the bottom of the tower, and consequently raise his voice in derision and sarcasm, poking fun at their unreality, satirizing their Gods, creeds

and practices, and ridiculing their values, ever doomed, blind as they are, to be at loggerheads. At another instant he would turn his eyes to his own sublime world beyond good and evil where dualities interpenetrate giving way to unity, and then he would raise his voice in praise of life absolute and universal.

To achieve self-fulfilment is to achieve serenity and peace. That Jibran and his heroes are still mad Gods, grave-diggers and enemies of mankind, filled with bitterness despite their claim to have arrived at the summit of Life's tower, reveals that Jibran's self-fulfilment throughout this second stage of his work is still a matter of wishful thinking and make-believe rather than an accomplished fact. Too preoccupied with his own painful aloneness in his transcendental quest, Jibran the madman or superman, it seems, has failed hitherto not only to feel the joy of self-realization at the summit, but also to recognize the tragedy of his fellow-men supposedly lost in the mire down below. Consequently instead of love and compassion, people could only inspire in him bitterness and disgust.

The stage of anger and disgust was succeeded in Jibran's development by a third stage, that of *The Prophet*, his *chef-d'oeuvre*, *Jesus the Son of Man* and *The Earth Gods*. The link is to be found in *The Forerunner* of 1920, his book of collected poems and parables. To believe, as Jibran did, that life is a tower whose base is earth and whose summit is the infinite is also to believe that life is one and indivisible. A summit can only be as high as its foundation can make it. For the one on top of life's tower to reject those who are beneath, as Jibran had been doing up to this point, is to undermine his own height and become even lower than the lowest he rejects. Thus one of Jibran's poems in *The Forerunner* says, as though in atonement for all his Nietzschean revolt:

Too young am I and too outraged to be my free self.

And how shall I become my free self unless I slay my burdened selves, or unless all men become free?

*.....How shall the eagle in me soar against the sun until my fledglings leave the nest which I with my own beak have built for them?*⁴¹

Jibran's belief in the unity of life, which has hitherto made only intermittent and at times confused appearances in his writings, has now become with all its implications with regard to human life and conduct, the prevailing theme in the rest of his works. If life is one and infinite, then every man is the infinite in embryo. "Every seed is" says Jibran in one of his later works, "is a longing".⁴²

This longing is presumably the longing of the tree in the seed for self-fulfilment in the actual tree that it had previously been.

Every seed therefore bears within itself the longing, the self-fulfilment and the means by which this can be achieved. To carry the analogy to man is to say that every man, as a conscious being, is a divine seed; is life absolute and infinite in embryo. Every man, therefore, according to Jibran, is a longing: the longing of the divine in man for man the divine whom he had previously been. But to quote Jibran again, "No longing remains unfulfilled".⁴³ Therefore every man is destined for Godhood. Like the seed, he hears within him the longing, the fulfilment which is God, and the road leading to this fulfilment. It is in this context that Jibran declares in *The Forerunner*, "you are your own forerunner, and the towers you have built are but the foundations of your giantself".⁴⁴

Seeing man in this light, Jibran can no longer afford to be a grave-digger. A new stage has opened in his career. Men are divine and, therefore, deathless. If they remain in the mire of their earthly existence, it is not because they are mean and disgusting, but because the divine in them, like the fire in a piece of wood, is dormant though it needs only a slight ignition to be released into a blaze of light.

Consequently, it is not a grave-digger that men need, but an igniter; a Socratic mid-wife, who would help man release the God in himself into the self that is one with God. Therefore in this new stage Jibran the grave-digger and the madman gives way to Jibran the prophet and their igniter.

In *The Prophet* of 1923, Almustafa that "who was a dawn unto his own day" sees his ship, for which he had waited twelve years in the city of Orphalese, returning to "bear him back to the isle of his birth". The people of Orphalese leave their daily work and crowd around him in the city square to bid him farewell and beg for something of his knowledge before he leaves, whereupon he answers their various questions on subjects of their own choosing.

It is not hard to see that *al-Mustafa* or *the Prophet*, is Jibran himself, who in 1923 had already spent almost twelve years in New York city, the city of Orphalese, having moved to it from Boston in 1912, and that the isle of his birth is Lebanon to which he had longed to return. But looking deeper still, al-Mustafa can further symbolize the man who, in Jibran's reckoning, has become his freer self; who has realized the passage in himself from the human to the divine, and is therefore ripe for emancipation and reunion with life absolute. His ship is death that has come to bear him to the isle of his birth, to the Platonic world of metaphysical reality whence we have all originally emerged. As to the people of Orphalese, they stand for human society at large in which men, exiled in their spatio-temporal existence from their true selves,

that is from God, are in need in their God-ward journey of the guiding prophetic hand that would lead them from what is human in them to the divine. Having made that journey himself, al-Mustafa poses in his sermons throughout the book as that guide.

Stripped of its poetical garb, Jibran's teaching in *the Prophet* is found to rest on the sole idea that life is one and infinite. As a living being, man in his temporal existence is only a shadow of his real self. To be one's real self is to be one with the infinite to which man is inseparably related. Self-realization, therefore, lies in growing out of one's spatio-temporal dimensions, so that the self is broadened to the extent of including everyone and all things. Consequently man's only path to self-realization, to his greater self, lies in love. Hence love is the opening sermon of al-Mustafa to the people of Orphalese. No man can say "I" truly without meaning the totality of things apart from which he cannot be or be conceived. Even less can one loves oneself truly without loving everyone and all things. So love is at once an emancipation and a crucifixion: an emancipation because it releases man from his narrow spatio-temporal confinement and brings him to that stage of broader self-consciousness whereby he feels one with the infinite, with God; a crucifixion because to grow into the broader self is to shatter to pieces the smaller self which was the seed and the confinement. True self-assertion is bound to be a self-negation. Thus al-Mustafa says to his hearers: " For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning".⁴⁵

Consequently, love which is our guide to our larger self, is inseparable from pain. "Your pain" says al-Mustafa, " is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding. Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain".⁴⁶

Thus conceived, pain becomes at once a kind of joy. It is the joy of the seed dying as a tree in embryo in a process of becoming a tree in full.

It is only pain understood and unheeded which is really painful. If our larger self is God, then anything that gives us pain is only a witness that our self is not yet broad enough to contain it. For to contain all is to be in love and at peace with all. Pain truly understood is thus an impetus for growth and therefore for joy. "Your joy" says al-Mustafa, "is your sorrow unmasked. The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain".⁴⁷ If pain and joy are one and inseparable, so are life and death. In a universe that is one and infinite nothing can die except the finite, and no finite can be other than the infinite in disguise. Death

understood is the pouring of the finite into the infinite, the passage of the God in man into the man in God. "..... Life and death are one" says al-Mustafa, "even as the river and the sea are one.And what is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered."⁴⁸

If life and death are one even as joy and pain, it must follow that life is not the opposite of death, nor death the opposite of life. For to live is to grow and to grow is to be in a continuous process of dying. Therefore every death is a rebirth into a higher state of being, in the Wordsworthian sense of "the child is the father of the man." Just as every birth is a kind of reincarnation. Thus in a continuous chain of birth and rebirth does man persist in his God-ward ascent, gaining at each step a broader consciousness of himself until he finally achieves the absolute. "It is a flame spirit in you" says al-Mustafa, "ever gathering more of itself".⁴⁹

Similarly, nothing can ever happen to us which is not in fact self-invited and self-entertained. If God is our greater self, then nothing can befall ourselves from without.

The Murdered is not unaccountable for his own murder;

And the robbed is not blameless in being robbed.

The righteous is not innocent of the deeds of the wicked.

*And the white-handed is not clean in the doings of the felon.*⁵⁰

If God is our greater self then there can be no good in the infinite universe which is not the good of every man, nor can there be any evil for which anyone can stand irresponsible. Hence al-Mustafa's lofty pronouncement.

"Like a procession you walk together towards your God self".

"....even as the holy and righteous cannot rise beyond the highest which is in each one of you, so the wicked and the weak cannot fall lower than the lowest which is in you also.

And as a single leaf turns not yellow but with the silent knowledge of the whole tree.

*So the wrong-doer cannot do wrong without the hidden will of you all".*⁵¹

It would follow that the spiritual elevation of a Christ is part and parcel of the material villainy of Judas. For in God Christ and Judas are one and inseparable.

No man, therefore, no matter how elevated, can emerge into his larger self alone. An eagle, however high it can soar, is always bound to come down again to its fledgelings they too become strong of wing, and the same is true of an elevated human soul or a prophet.

So long as there remains even one speck of bestiality in any man no other human soul, no matter how near to God it may be,

can be finally emancipated and escape the wheel of reincarnation. Like the released philosopher-prisoner in Plato's allegory, he will again return to the "cave" so long as his fellows are still there in darkness and in chains. Jibran's Prophet, as he prepares to take leave and ride his ship, says:

But should my voice fade in your ears, and my love vanish in your memory, then I will come again.

A little while, and my longing shall gather dust and foam for another body.

*A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me.*⁵²

In literary terms, this moment of rest upon the wind for al-Mustafa was brief indeed. Only five years elapsed on his departure from Orphalese before he was given birth again; not by another woman, as he had foretold, but by Jibran himself. His name this time was not al-Mustafa but Jesus. *Jesus the Son of Man*, Jibran's second book after *The Prophet*, appeared in 1928, the first being only a short collection of aphorisms under the title of *Sand and Foam*.

To the student of Jibran's literary art, *Jesus the Son of Man* may offer some novelty, but not so to the student of his thought. Jibran in this book tries to portray Jesus as he understands him by inviting a number of Christ's contemporaries to speak of him each from his own point of view. Their views combined in the mind of the read are intended to bring out the desired portrait. But names, places and situations apart, the Jesus so portrayed in the book is not so much a new development of the Biblical Christ, as he is the old Biblical Nazarene, transformed into another Jibranian al-Mustafa. Like al-Mustafa he is described as "the chosen and the beloved"⁵³ who after several previous rebirths comes and will come again to help lead men to their larger selves. He is not a God who has taken human form, but an ordinary man of an ordinary birth who has been able through spiritual sublimation to elevate himself from the human to the divine. His several returns to earth are the several returns of the eagle who would not taste the full freedom of space before all his fledgelings in the nest are also taught to fly. "Were it not for a mother's desire" says Jibran's Jesus, "I would have stripped me of the swaddling clothes and escaped back to space. And were it not for sorrow in all of you, I would not have stayed to weep".⁵⁴

Therefore Jibran's Jesus was neither meek nor humble nor characterized with pity. His return to earth is the return of an eagle, a winged spirit, intent on appealing not to humble frailties, but to the power in man which is capable of lifting him from the finite to the infinite.

One reporter on Jesus says, "I am sickened and the bowels within me stir and rise when I hear the faint-hearted call Jesus humble and meek, that they may justify their own faint-heartedness; and when the down-trodden for comfort and companionship speak of Jesus as a worm shining by their side. Yes, my heart is sickened by such a man. It is the mighty hunter I would preach, and the mountainous spirit unconquerable".⁵⁵

Jibran's Jesus is even made to re-utter the Lord's prayer in a way appropriate to the heart and lips of al-Mustafa, teaching man to enlarge himself to the point of becoming one with the all-inclusive:

Our father in earth and heaven sacred is Thy name.

Thy will be done with us, even as in space.....

*In Thy compassion forgive us and enlarge us
to forgive one another.*

*Guide us towards Thee and stretch down
Thy hand to us in darkness.*

*For Thine is the kingdom, and in Thee is
our power and our fulfilment.*⁵⁶

To dwell further on the character and teachings of Jesus as conceived by Jibran is to risk redundancy. In *The Prophet*, Jibran the thinker reaches his climax. His post-*Prophet* works, with the possible exception of *The Earth Gods*, of 1931, the last book published in his lifetime, have almost nothing new to offer.

The wanderer of 1932, published posthumously, is a collection of parables and sayings much in the style and spirit of *The Forerunner* of 1920, published three years before *The Prophet*. As to the *Garden of The Prophet*, also published posthumously in 1933, it should be dismissed outright as a fake and a forgery. Jibran, who had planned the *Garden of The Prophet* to be an expression of al-Mustafa's state of being and teachings after he had arrived in the isle of his birth from the city of Orphalese, had only time left to write two or three short passages for that book. Other passages were added, some of which are translations from Jibran's early Arabic works, and some possibly written by another pen in imitation of Jibran's style. The result was a book attributed to Jibran, in which Jibran's poetry and thought are brought to a most unhappy state of chaos and confusion.

This leaves us with *The Earth Gods* as the complete work in which Jibran's career comes to its conclusion. And a fitting conclusion it is indeed.

The book is a long prose poem where, in the words of Jibran, "The three earth-born Gods, the Master Titans of Life"⁵⁷ hold a discourse on the destiny of man.

Jibran, who throughout his career was a poet of alienation

and longing, strikes us in *The Prophet* and in *Jesus the son of Man*, al-Mustafa's duplicate, as having arrived at his long-cherished state of intellectual rest and spiritual fulfilment. Al-Mustafa and Christ, who in Jibran's reckoning are earthborn Gods, reveal human destiny as being man's gradual ascent through love and spiritual sublimation towards ultimate reunion with God, the absolute and the infinite. It is possible that Jibran began to have second thoughts about the philosophy of his prophet towards the end of his life. Otherwise why is it that instead of one earth God, one human destiny, he now presents us with three who apparently are in disagreement ?

Shortly after *Jesus, the Son of Man*, Jibran, who had for some time been fighting a chronic illness, came to realize that the fates were not on his side. Like al-Mustafa, he must have seen his ship coming in the mist to take him to the isle of his birth, and on the lonely journey towards death: armed as he was with the mystic convictions of al-Mustafa, he must have often stopped to examine the implications of his philosophy.

In his farewell address to the people of Orphalese, al-Mustafa saw his departure as "A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me". But what of this endless cycle of births and rebirths ? If man's ultimate, then that destiny is a virtual impossibility. For the road to the infinite is infinite, and man's quest as a traveller through reincarnation is bound to be endless and if anything, boring and fruitless.

Therefore comes the voice of Jibran's first God:

Weary is my spirit of all there is

I would not move a hand to create a world

Nor to erase one.

I would not live could I but die,

For the weight of aeons is upon me,

And the ceaseless moan of the seas exhausts my sleeps.

Could I but lose the primal aim

And vanish like a wasted sun;

Could I but strip my divinity of its purpose

And berth my immortality space

And be no more;

Could I but be consumed and pass from time's memory

Into the emptiness of nowhere.⁵⁸

In another place this same God would again say:

For all that I am, and all that there is on earth,

And all that shall be, invited not my soul.

*Oh my soul,
 Silent is thy face,
 And in thine eyes the shadows of night are sleeping.
 But terrible is thy silence,
 And thou art terrible.⁵⁹*

If man in his ascent to the infinite is likened to a mountain climber, then those moments of gloom and helplessness only occur when he casts his eyes towards the infinitely removed summit beyond. It is not so when he casts his eyes downwards and sees the heights he has already scaled. The loneliness and gloom then give way to optimism and reassurance. For a journey that can be started is a journey that can likewise be concluded. Jibran on his lonely voyage must also have turned to see this other implication in al-Mustafa's philosophy. There we hear the voice of the second God, but whose eyes are now turned optimistically downwards. His philosophy is that the height of the summit is but a part of the lowliness of the valley beneath. That the valley is now transcended is a reassurance that the summit can be considered as already conquered. For to reach the highest point to which a valley could raise its depth. Man's journey to God is therefore a journey inwards and not an external quest.

*The second God says to the first:
 We are the beyond and we are the most high
 And between us boundless eternity
 Is naught save our unshaped passion
 And the motive thereof.
 You invoke the unknown,
 And the unknown clad with moving mist
 Dwells in your own soul.
 Yea, in your own soul your redeemer lies asleep
 And in sleep sees what your waking eye dose not
 see.
Forbear and look down upon the world.
 Behold the unearned children of your love.
 The earth is your abode, and the earth is your throne;
 And high beyond man's furthers hope
 Your hand upholds his destiny.⁶⁰*

Yet in Jibran's lonely journey towards death, a voice not so pessimistic as that of his first God nor so optimistic as that of the second is heard. This voice, coming perhaps from his youthful past of *The Broken Wings* and *A Tear and a Smile*, though not part of al-Mustafa's voice, is yet not out of harmony with it. It is the voice of someone who has come to realize that man has so busied

himself philosophizing about life that he has forgotten to live it. Rather than the climber terrified by the towering height of the summit or reassured by the yielding lowliness of the valley, here is a love-intoxicated youth in the spring meadows on the mountain side.

The third God rebukes his two other fellows, begging them to leave their empty discourse and turn their eyes towards a youthful couple in love, in the distant valley:

*Brothers, my brothers,
There is a wedding in the valley.
A day too vast for recording.
... We shall pass into the twilight;
Perchance to wake to the dawn of another world.
But love shall stay,
And his finger-marks shall not be erased.
The sparks rise, and each spark is a sun.
Better it is for us, and wiser,
To seek a shadowed nook and sleep in our earth divinity.
And let love human and frail, command the coming day.⁶¹*

Thus Jibran concludes his life-long alienation. His thought in the twilight of his days seems to have swung back to his youth where it had first started.

It is a complete cycle, in conformity, though perhaps unconsciously, with his idea of reincarnation. The tenacious cedar tree which was Jibran the Prophet went back again to the seed that it was: to love, human and frail—"perchance to wake to the dawn of another worlds". □

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