

egesis, we should face texts and problems with a global, holistic and interdisciplinary approach, which treasures postmodern criticism. If it is true that the absolute is unattainable, it is also true that there is a human dimension where communication and understanding are possible. In the ideal space delimited by human possibilities, even an ancient text is understandable and its author can be approached. This rediscovery of a livable human dimension should allow us to finally go beyond the age of the *post*.

BARBARA MICHALAK - PIKULSKA

GIBRAN KHALIL GIBRAN'S SIGNIFICANCE AND ROLE
IN ARABIC AND WORLD LITERATURE
AND HIS CREATIVE RECEPTION IN THE WORLD.

Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883 - 1931) - the Lebanese prose writer, poet, painter and publicist - belongs to the most eminent of Arab creators of the turn of the twentieth century. The position achieved by the author of 'The Prophet' in world literature results, primarily, from the originality and universality of his outlook. His life was led on the border of two diametrically different cultures: brought up in the East he was to spend the majority of his life in the United States. He made use of both. He drew equally from cultural literary output through his equal fascination for the personality of Friedrich Nietzsche and the works of William Blake, as from the philosophy and mysticism of the Arab East, from figures of the magnitude of Ibn Al-Muqaffa or Ibn Sīnā. He loved the Arabic language, was its master and reformer. Equally his English works secured him the acclaim of critics and readers.

Within the pages of the 'Springfield Union' there appeared the following note: 'Gibran's English is characterised by beauty and clarity. He has achieved in this way a perfection which could serve as inspiration for other writers, for whom English is their native language'.¹

All Gibran's book publications and articles constitute a single, long chain of works, linked with each other in their entirety. The first of these links is the essay 'Music' (Al-Mūsīqā) and the last the poem 'The Wanderer', published admittedly posthumously although personally supervised for publication. This is the view point of Mikha'il Nu'aym, friend as well as the writer's biographer, together with the Lebanese poet and critic Jamil Jabr, who specialises in Gibran Khalil's artistic achievements.

¹ Barbara Young, *This Man from Lebanon. A Study of Kahlil Gibran*, New York 1977, pp. 36-37.

Along side his writing there developed his artistic creativity, in which he strove for universalism and timelessness through symbolism. They often present the faces or naked figures of people along with elements of nature. There is, however, a total absence of any motifs whatsoever which could indicate the place or time of their reference, which was Gibran's desired artistic intention in order to stress the timeless nature of concepts and problems. They draw attention by their simplicity and economy of form, being reds, whites and shades of grey.

Gibran considered that whatever he paints or writes expresses him and his views.

In 1905, in New York, there appeared his short literary sketch 'Al-Mūsīqā' (Music). On the mere dozen or so pages of the booklet he presented a poetic vision of music that is the spiritual sister of the sentimental poet-dreamer. This first small link in his creative chain is the presage to the style and language to be used by Gibran. It was poetic prose (shi'r manthūr), the introduction of which to Arabic represents one of the author of 'The Prophet's' undisputed contributions. This form, developed further by him and writers akin to him, was to be only formally defined fifteen years later in the artistic manifesto of the 'Ar-Rābi'a Al-Qalamiyya' association (The Union of People of the Pen) founded on the 28th of April 1920. The programme of the Union was to become the programme for many young Arab creators. Here is a fragment of the manifesto:

*If meaning or beauty of thought demands the breaking of established rules - break them. If you can not find a known word to express your idea - borrow or think up a new one. If the rules of syntax stand in the way of useful or necessary expression - down with syntax. We shall try to keep to rules as long as they don't disturb our thoughts, and when they do we shall change the rules.*³

In 1906 Gibran published in New York a collection of short stories written in poetic prose entitled "Arā'is al-murūj" (The Fiancées of the Meadows). The form of the short story was a complete *novum* in the Middle East at this time and squeezed into the place of the classical rhyming prose *saj'*. This was to place Gibran in the ranks of those pioneers disseminating new literary genres within the Arab world. The short stories from the collection "Arā'is al-murūj" expressed the writer's interests of the time in reincarna-

tion, the power of love and the belief that true Christianity is the belief of the first believers. In 1948 he published a translation of the collection in English as 'The Nymphs of the Valley'. In one of the short stories entitled 'Ramād al-ajyāl wa'n-nār al-khālida' (The Ash of Generations and the Eternal Flame) is contained a criticism of the clergy which is to be the augury for the continuation of this subject in a subsequent collection with the significant title 'Al-arwāh al-mutamarrida' (Rebelled Souls) published in 1908 in New York. The very title is sufficient to work out the subject matter. They talk of people rebelling against the rules imposed by man, against violence, against the rule of the aristocracy and the clergy, against the injustice and oppression of the impoverished layers of Arabic society. The most interesting and valuable short story of the collection seems to be 'Khalīl al-kafīr' (Khalil the Heretic), where the narrator - the author's *alter ego* (hence the intentional coincidence of names) - is at the same time the main hero. The uncompromising nature and severity of Gibran's criticism of those relations in existence in the Middle East meant that the book was burnt in a square in Beirut, and he himself was excommunicated from his church and sentenced by the Turkish government to banishment. Despite this Gibran did not lose heart and commented on the event: 'This is a perfect opportunity for the quickest possible print of the second edition'.⁴

Fame and recognition for his output, particularly among the young generation of Arabs grew very quickly. Gibran becomes not only popular, but valued for which he thanked the boldness of the views expressed in his undoubtedly right and correct stand, as well as the beauty of form and the style he had devised, and which was to find many imitators. This period of revolt and protest Gibran closes with a long story 'Al-ajniha al-mutakassara' (Broken Wings) of 1912. Here clearly is the revolt against customs and human laws sentencing the innocent to suffering, criticism of the clergy as well as its autocratic rule and despotism, praise of love, freedom and beauty, a subject to which Gibran was to return at the very close of life seeing in it the essence of human existence. This short story is autobiographical and describes the story of Gibran's first tragic love for Hāli Ad-Dahr. The value of the work is heightened by the opinions of Gibran on the subject of motherhood, love, freedom, beauty, faith and the role of woman in society. These are Gibran's words in a letter to Mayy Ziyāda: 'I inherited from my mother 90% of what we call character and weaknesses. This does not mean, however, that I possess in the inheritance her beauty, humility or greatness of

² Mikhā'il Nu'ayma, *Al-Majmū'a al-kāmila li-mu' allafāt Ġibrān Khalīl Ġibrān*, Beirut 1964, p. 7.

³ *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁴ Barbara Young, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

heart. I remember how she once told me when I was 20 that it would be much better for me, and for people, if I were to become a monk in some monastery or other. I replied: that's true, except for the fact that I chose you for a mother before I appeared on the earth. If you had not appeared - she answered - you would still have been an angel. I answered: I'm constantly an angel. She smiled and asked: where are your wings then? I placed her hands on my shoulders and said: here are my wings. But they're broken - she replied. My mother has passed on to a better place but the words 'broken wings' have remained with me and I've used them as the title for the story I'm sending you now.' ⁵

In summing up the first stage of Gibran's activities it should be emphasised that all the works are written in Arabic, in a new style and form for readers in the Middle East - particularly in the Lebanon - and those in emigration. The action of the works always takes place in the Lebanon and although time is different - from 119 BC to the years contemporary for the writer - the writer talks of actual events. It is characteristic that Gibran recounts his views in the first person identifying with the heroes of the stories and standing out against social structures based on outdated laws and traditions, as well as the oppression on the part of the aristocracy and clergy. The linking motif is, on the whole, unhappy love. The heroes are estranged people, over sensitive, heretics, madmen, generally speaking individuals at odds with society, lonely, helpless and powerless. Besides it should be emphasised that Gibran never rejected the church and religion as such, only standing out against the institutions and the people running them, who had embezzled the very teachings of Christ and traded in faith. In this dislike he was so consistent that one of his heroes in 'Broken Wings', Faris Karma, did not want to see the priest waiting outside the hospital ward at the moment of death.

The picture of Gibran's creative output from the first period is supplemented by numerous articles, essays, poems published within the pages of émigré journals. The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and the poetry of William Blake, the closest Romantic poet and painter to him, are becoming an increasingly strong influence.

The second stage of creativity opens in 1914 with a collection of 56 short works written in poetic prose entitled 'Dam'a wa ibtisāma' (Tears and laughter). Here equally the title explains to us the leading motif intertwining through the individual poems: man lives continually amidst good and evil, joy and sorrow, tears and laughter intermingling with each other and mutually supple-

menting each other. Gibran going along with William Blake, reveals to us the view on the role of the poet who should be a heavenly messenger bringing people eternal truths and leading them through the path of love to God. The title of the whole collection was to be the recollection of the meeting with Hāla Ad-Dahr in the Mar Sarkis monastery when he left her crying, and when he asked what had happened she answered that it was not mere tears but also a smile. This collection appeared in 1949 in an English version entitled 'Tears and Laughter'.

From 1913 Gibran together with Amīn Ar-Rayḥānī and Nasīb 'Arīḍa publish in New York the monthly 'Al-Funun as-sab' (Seven Arts), in which appear essays, literary sketches and verse, the style and content of which led to the propagation in the Arab world of new literary genres.

In 1919 he publishes his thoughts and reflections in the strophic poem entitled 'Al-Mawākib' (Marches). Illustrated with his own drawing that serve as the author's pictorial commentary at one with the poem. The poem is clearly linked to the views of J.J. Rousseau where the hero - a wise, experienced man though disillusioned with the world - claims that if he was to again be young he would choose a gentle, free life among nature.

Gibran's decisive poem from 1920 is entitled 'Al-Awāṣif' (The Storms). The main theme in which is criticism of society which ruins the chance for a happy life through the quest for temporal goods, forgetting the true values such as love, truth, freedom. In several works - 'Al-aḍrās al-musawwasa' (Rotten Teeth), 'Māta ahlī' (My Nation has Died), Gibran severely evaluates his own country and fellow countrymen considering them to have striven for trifles, buying with their very bodies and souls. Gibran thought that few succeeded in finding what was important and significant - in finding oneself. The poet, all the time more exhausted by illness, yearns increasingly for the idealised picture of the Lebanon of his childhood.

In the final stage Gibran started to write in English. The first work that can be considered here is 'The Madman' of 1918. In a way similar to 'The Storms' it is a collection of verse and parables. The work was initially written in Arabic, however the writer translated it himself into English and enriched it with several new, original fragments. Here equally clear are the influences of Friedrich Nietzsche. Gibran comes to the conclusion that the process of creation is the participation of God and man, for in them, and in the world, there is a particle of something common. At the same time the criticism of human society is continued.

Despite Gibran's continuing illnesses - tuberculosis and cancer of the liver - 'The Forerunner' appears in 1920, which is the link joining Gibran's work to date with his life's work 'The Prophet'.

⁵ Joseph Sheban, *Mirrors of the Soul*, New York 1965, p. 115.

In 1923 Gibran presents the opus magnum of his life 'The Prophet'. This small, black book (Gibran published all his works in a similar style) had an interesting and long story. Its first three versions were written in Arabic (the earliest version came into being when the poet was just 15 and studied in Beirut). After returning from his first stay in Paris, Gibran read the amended work to his mother just before she died. She is to have said: 'It's a good work, Gibran. But the time is not right. Put it aside.'⁶ He listened to her then, and many years later admitted she was right. It was definitely not the time. He waited twenty years to publish 'The Prophet' until he finally agreed only because of the thought of his own death. He turned then to people and their every day affairs: work, love, faith, children, joy, suffering, marriage, pain, friendship. Just such titles form the individual parts of 'The Prophet' being the judgements and opinions given by the poet's *alter ego* - the prophet Al-Mustafa (The Chosen One). The work quickly became as if a 'second Bible' for many people, the poet himself affirmed his popularity and respect among his readership in the west. In his poem the writer returns to the idea of the superiority of Love, Freedom and Beauty. There takes place a definite retreat from the criticism of people and the role of the 'gravedigger' which Gibran had taken on himself previously. Its place is taken by comforting and giving advice based on his own experience of life. One can also clearly see Gibran's coming to terms with the thought of death, when he claims that love, life and death are one, for they are eternal and constant, changing everything but not themselves.

One of the symptoms of interest in Gibran and his life philosophy was the identification of him with an authentic prophet or equally propagator of a new religion, a phenomenon very typical for mass culture in the USA. Gibran himself renounced this, however in Al-Mustafa's utterances there sound echoes of our poet's interests in the philosophy of India, old beliefs as well as the mystic current in Islam - Sufism. Fundamentally Gibran was interested only in the search for one's own way of self-awareness and the bringing in this of help for one's fellow man.

In 1926 Gibran's collection of aphorisms and parables 'Sand and Foam' appeared. Here the main hero and narrator walk at the same time along the shore of the sea contemplating the essence of existence, watching as the water and wind erase the traces of footprints from the sand, covering them with foam. The mood and style of many aphorisms recall the work of William Blake. A significant part of the text was written by Gibran earlier in Arabic,

⁶ Barbara Young, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁷ Joseph Sheban, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

with time, however he changed the conception of the whole, added several new works and translated the whole into English.

During this stage the poet's fascination with Christianity is equally renewed, and particularly the very personage of Christ, the fruit of which is the mystic poem 'Jesus, Son of Man', published five years after 'The Prophet'. The figure of Christ always intrigued the writer. In the poem he is embodied in 78 characters, part historical or biblical, and part imagined, alone as 'the man from Lebanon nineteen centuries later' is the last character. The utterances of certain people form into the image of the Saviour that Gibran himself saw: wise, emotional, sensitive, not devoid of many human weaknesses and vices and therefore is seen as authentic, deserving love and respect. Gibran gave the character of Christ an extremely personal, intriguing shape which resulted from his own reflections. The writer criticises severely the priesthood and their warped celebrations which are not, in his opinion, intended for the Saviour but for them themselves, erasing the true visages of he who was the human son not understood by many in life and in death.

For the Arab world Gibran Khalil Gibran remains a poet, mystic, reformer and innovator of literary style, rebel, freedom fighter and fervent patriot. He was one of the pillars *adab al-mahjar* (Émigré Literature) and co-founder of the Writers' Union (Ar-Rābiṭa Al-Qalamiyya) in New York which played a significant role in the task of regenerating Arabic literature and had enormous influence on the activities of Arab poets and prose writers. He was a pioneer of new literary genres on Arab soil - novels, short stories and poetic prose, the latter seeing Gibran's greatest artistic successes. Many other eminent Arab creators belonging to the so-called Syrian-American School made use of his experiences.

He was the author of a sentence that later was to become President John F. Kennedy's central idea: 'Don't ask what your country can do for you - but what you can do for your country'⁸

Equally the western world became convinced of the worth of this Lebanese poet, prose writer and painter. He is one of the few Arab writers who achieved popularity and recognition the world over. August Rodin - teacher and friend of Gibran called him the 'William Blake of the twentieth century'.

In the 1960s, on the wave of ecological movements there took place a widening of interest in Gibran's literary output which was undoubtedly connected with the ideas voiced by him of: love, freedom and beauty as well as questioning by him of the civilised Moloch created by people for their own

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 66.

destruction. Following the thought of the philosopher and writer J.J. Rousseau, Gibran tried to save man from this destructive influence. He also foresaw the evil following him, social apathy and isolation of man in the anonymous crowd of others. He called in his works for a return to nature, for life in harmony with it, for peace and quiet.

To conclude I would like to present the words of the American critic Claud Bragdon on Gibran:

'The appearance of the word 'Gibranism' gives the nature and depth of his influence on the entire Arab world. But equally English-speaking readers will not have difficulty in predicting what the word means: mystical vision, charm, simplicity, a fresh approach to the problems of life, exceptional dramatic force, deep erudition, stunning intuition, a total passion for life, mastery, finally Beauty which in a perfect way infuses everything he touches. (...) His force comes from some great spiritual reservoir, otherwise it would not be so universal and versatile, but the majesty and beauty of his words, in which he adorns it - are his very own.'⁹

⁹ Barbara Young, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

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LOOKING AT THE PROBLEM OF IRAQI AGGRESSION ON KUWAIT ON THE BASIS OF "MUḌAKKIRĀT ĠUNDĪ IRĀQĪ"

What sort of phenomenon was the war in the eyes of the other side - in the eyes of the aggressor? Few Kuwaiti short stories pay attention to, remark upon or cite behaviour which would articulate the attitude of the Arab community or the demoralising uneasiness of both sides. In point of fact I have been able to find only one short story which conjures up a certain positive image of the occupier. The most human description is to be found in Laylā Al'Uṭmān's story 'Ḥawāğiz muḥtalifa al-wuğūh' (Control Points with Various Faces). This is a collection of nine meetings of the occupier with Kuwaiti citizens at check points. At check point 5 the person checking does not identify himself as an Iraqi but as a Kurd. The conversation that evolves shows the similarity of attitudes:

- I'm a Kurd.
- You mean an Iraqi!
- I don't belong to the Baath party.
- What's the difference?
- There is a difference! Just like you, we've drunk poison.
- Do you take pity on us?
- I take pity on myself and my children.
- How many children do you have?
- Seven.
- You left you're children to come here and kill us?
- If We don't do it they'll kill our children and family!' ¹

Further on in the conversation are expressed a desire to see Kuwait liberated, the cessation of hostilities and all threats to peace.

¹ Laylā Al'Uṭmān - short story 'Ḥawāğiz muḥtalifa al-wuğūh' from the collection *Al-ḥawāğiz al-sawdā'*, pp. 108-109.