
Mystic Elements in the Works of Khalil Gibran: A Literary Review

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Abstract

A thorough novelist, poet, and artist, Khalil Gibran wrote in English and Arabic. Known for his literary legacy, he explored love, death, a sense of (un)belonging, and mysticism. The present paper is a review of the various aspects of spirituality present in his works. Gibran's works have been published in many languages, focusing on studies in English and Arabic, whether original or translated.

Keywords: Khalil Gibran, spirituality and mysticism, Arabic

Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) was an American Lebanese poet, writer, and a genius of his time. His profound and mystical writings have captivated readers for generations. His works are imbued with mystic elements that explore the depths of human existence, spirituality, and the interconnectedness of all things. This paper delves into the mystic aspects present in the works of Khalil Gibran and examines how they contribute to the persistent appeal of his writings. His works and style are often compared to those of William Blake, Tagore, Dante, and Nietzsche. In the early stages of his writing career, Gibran emphasized the importance of developing awareness of humanity's oneness and the essential unity of all religions in the current era. This central theme became the foundation of Gibran's message, which he expressed most straightforwardly and sincerely. His words were always explicit and direct in their meaning.

“You are my brother, and I love you.

I love you when you prostrate yourself in your mosque, and

Kneel in your church, and pray in your synagogue,

You and I are sons of one faith - the Spirit”.

Gibran's message in the above lines is truly spiritual, but also calls for a personal transformation. It is only with personal change, a person can become ethical and competent for achieving unity. Many of his writing pieces can be taken as didactic advice, which is realistic and achievable.

Gibran delves into the intricacies of human emotions, desires, and fears, providing profound insights into the human experience. His writings often reveal a deep understanding of the human psyche and the common struggles that connect us all. Gibran's mystical elements are evident in his ability to tap into the collective unconscious and express timeless truths that resonate with readers across cultures and generations. Furthermore, Gibran's mystical elements are expressed through his profound insights into the interconnectedness of all things. In his works, Gibran emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity with nature, the cosmos, and the divine. He portrays a holistic worldview that recognizes the interdependence of all living beings and the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms. Through his writings, Gibran invites readers to contemplate the philosophical interconnectedness of all things and to recognize their place within the larger tapestry of existence. The mystic elements in Gibran's works contribute to their enduring appeal and relevance in the modern world. His writings offer a timeless wisdom that goes beyond cultural and historical boundaries, speaking to the universal human experience and the eternal truths that bind us. Gibran's mystic elements inspire readers to contemplate life's deeper meanings, seek spiritual fulfillment, and recognize the interconnectedness of all things.

His years of exile in Boston and New York created a sense of isolation and (un) belongingness in him and made him aware of the significance of unity and globalization. The works of Arabic scholars Ibn al-'Arabi, Ibn al-Farid, and al-Ghazzali influenced Gibran. He drew from their teachings to develop the concept of the Unity of Being, which gave him a deeper understanding of the nature of the universe. The rich culture of the Arab world, with its emphasis on learning and spirituality, was a significant source of inspiration for him. This culture thrived at the intersection of history, and it deeply moved Gibran. Gibran opposed factions and contradictory interests, which he saw as a peril to the light.

Gibran's works prominently feature mystic elements that explore the spiritual realm and the nature of the divine. Throughout his writings, Gibran delves into the metaphysical to understand the mysteries of existence and the unseen forces shaping our lives. His poetic language and evocative imagery transport readers to a realm beyond the mundane, blurring the boundaries between the material and spiritual realms. Gibran's writings often convey a

sense of wonder and awe at the beauty and complexity of the universe, inviting readers to contemplate the interconnectedness of all things and the presence of a higher power that transcends human understanding. Numerous works on Gibran's life and writings have helped to understand his mystic personality.

The comprehensive work "*Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet*" is a good starting point to begin this review, written by Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins (1998). For Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, Gibran is "re-visioning Christianity in the light of Islamic (Sufi) mysticism" to trace spirituality for the people. The book provides a positive and dynamic presentation of Gibran's mystical and spiritual beliefs. It sees Christian mysticism and Sufism as great factors in forming Gibran's character and poetic aspirations. The book offers detailed information for readers interested in the spiritual influences of Gibran. The commentary on the Arabic works of Gibran concludes by describing them as an onslaught of social justice against corruption, hypocrisy, and oppression. At the same time, they are a subtle manifestation of Gibran's "mystical ontology, reforging Sufi thought to express the poetic realities of his creative vision" (Bushrui and Jenkins 15). As for his English works, they are seen as a counterbalance against the mechanical Western worldview that is "arrogantly unresponsive to mysticism" (Bushrui and Jenkins 18). Thus, Gibran attempts to go beyond these soulless, power-driven views and any traditional barriers to permeate his Eastern spirituality into the Western literary and cultural grounds.

A Key Biography on Gibran is "*Kahlil Gibran: His Life and His Works*" (1974), by Mikhail Naimy, which offers valuable insight into his spiritual side. Naimy mentions in his book that Gibran is essentially a spiritual person; his beliefs revolve around truth and spirituality.

Another work that discusses the other aspects of mysticism is "*Spiritual Tendency in the Literature of Gibran and Naimy*", by Raymonde Cobin. The book explains the various spiritual concepts practiced by both poets, such as repentance, spiritual beauty, eternal wisdom, real happiness, controlling desires, silence, inner perfection, overcoming the self, nirvana, pain, peace, and humility. The book provides insight into the mystical hold of Gibran.

The writers of Arabic had a deep influence on Gibran's thought process and lifestyle. "Al-Mutanabbī (915-65), 'Al-Ma'arrī (973-1057), Ibn Sīnā (980-1037), 'AlGhazālī (1058-1111), Ibn 'Al-Fāriḍ (1181-1234) and Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406)" are some major influences that led Gibran to Islamic mysticism. Similarly, the New Testament, Christianity, Western Romanticism, and the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche are responsible for developing a

prophetic vision in Gibran. Another Arabic book that aims to shed light on Gibran's literary talents is titled "*Gibran Khalil Gibran: A Genius from Lebanon*." It was published in Beirut in 1989 and written by "Fūzī 'Aṭwī". The work sums up Gibran's life, highlighting travel and diverse environments as significant influences on his character and literary works.

One prominent biography, "*Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World*," by Gibran's relative was written in 1974. The significance of this biography lies in the fact that it is the first in-depth, detailed account of Gibran. The book presents a thorough analysis of his beliefs and philosophy. As Gibran's mysticism and spiritual influences earned him fame, nevertheless, many considered his philosophy fake and held an antagonistic opinion of Gibran. "*The Death of the False Prophet Gibran Khalil Gibran*," written in Arabic by George Mikhail Dīb, is one book that attempts to depict his ideology as irrelevant and unreasonable. It describes mysticism and spirituality as the adversaries of reason, science, and development.

Numerous articles have analysed Gibran's interest in spirituality and his position in the literary world. Nasrollah Shameli and Sohbatollah Hasan V's article, "*Philosophical Sources of Northern Émigré Literature*," vividly explains the role of Islamic philosophy in Gibran's life and career. The article offers an insightful description of how European, Indian, Chinese religions, and Islamic mysticism shaped his thought process later in his life.

Another article discussing the philosophy of Gibran and its evolution is "*The Mind and Thought of Khalil Gibran*" by Nadeem Naimy. Nadeem beautifully describes the three desires that make up an individual like Gibran. The yearning for truth, an imaginary perfect place, and a permanent homeland typically describes the poet and writer Gibran. An immigrant poet, Gibran always wanted to strike a balance between three desires as he was fully aware of the value of a homeland and desired to live in Utopia.

"*Gibran and Orientalism*" describes the success story of Gibran. Wail S. Hassan says that, influenced by the writings of Edward Said, Gibran developed a post-colonial perspective that made him phenomenal. Many other works discuss the fascinating and vital characteristics of Gibran's spirituality and mysticism. In the late years of his life, Gibran brought a new concept of oriental spiritualism, which was an amalgamation of Hinduism, Sufism, Christianity, and romanticism. He even declared himself a mystic guru who transcended other beliefs. Gibran's description of his life is perhaps the best, as he says,

"I came to be for all and in all.

That which alone I do today shall be proclaimed

before the people in the days to come.

And what I now say with one tongue, tomorrow

will say with many”.

"Gibran's *The Procession in the Transcendentalist Context*" is an article by Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh that discusses the transcendentalist effect on Gibran. Living in Boston, the birthplace of both Thoreau and Emerson, Gibran was exposed to the transcendentalists' writings through education and libraries. Gibran originally developed an appreciation for Buddhism and Neo-Platonism from reading Emerson. According to the author, the form or content of several Gibranian works is reminiscent of transcendentalist works. In terms of content and style, *The Procession* is heavily Thoreauvian and Emersonian. This can be seen in "its dualistic structure, its language, and its basic philosophic assumptions and ideas (particularly its conception of human society, human nature, and individual life)" (Majdoubeh 480). Although the author admits that there are other influences in the poem as well.

To conclude, the mystic elements in the works of Khalil Gibran are a testament to his profound insights into the spiritual realm, the human psyche, and the interconnectedness of all things. Through his poetic language and evocative imagery, Gibran invites readers to contemplate the mysteries of existence and to identify their place within the larger perspective of life. His writings resonate with readers across cultures and generations, offering a timeless wisdom that speaks to the universal human experience. Gibran's mystic elements are a testament to his enduring legacy as a writer, poet, and philosopher whose works continue to inspire and enlighten readers worldwide.

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