



## Ameen Rihani

### Biography and Achievements

(1876-1940)

#### Early Days

Ameen Rihani (1876 –1940), was a Lebanese Arab-American writer, intellectual and political activist. Well known as the Founding Father of Arab-American Literature, Rihani was also a major figure in the *Mahjar* literary movement developed by Arab emigrants in North America, and an early theorist of Arab nationalism. He became an American citizen in 1901.

Born in Freike, Lebanon, on November 24, 1876, Rihani was one of six children and the oldest son of a Lebanese Maronite raw silk manufacturer, Fares Rihani. In 1888, his father sent his brother and Ameen to New York City; he followed them, with the rest of the family, a year later. Ameen, then eleven years old, was placed in a school where he learned the rudiments of the English language. His father and uncle, having established themselves as merchants in a small cellar in lower Manhattan, soon felt the need for an assistant who could read and write in English. Therefore, the boy was taken away from school to become the chief clerk, interpreter and bookkeeper of the business.

During this time, Ameen made the acquaintance of American and European writers. He eventually became familiar with the writings of Shakespeare, Hugo, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Whitman, Tolstoy, Voltaire, Thoreau, Emerson and Byron, to name a few.

He also developed his interest in drawing by taking special lessons in the art of sketches. His early art works included Shakespearean heroes like Hamlet, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and a

number of animal and human caricatures. These sketches were drawn with Chinese ink, or chalk, or pencil.

Ameen had a natural talent in eloquent speaking, and in 1895, the teenager became carried away by stage fever and joined a touring stock company headed by Henry Jewet (who later had his theatre in Boston). During the summer of the same year, the troupe became stranded in Kansas City, Missouri and so the prodigal son returned to his father. However, he returned not to rejoin the business, but to insist that his father give him a regular education for a professional career. They agreed that he should study law<sup>1</sup>. To that end, he attended night school for a year, passed the Regents Exam, and in 1897 entered the **New York Law School**<sup>2</sup>. A lung infection interrupted his studies, and at the end of his first year, his father had to send him back to Lebanon to recover.

Once back in his homeland, he began teaching English in a clerical school in return for being taught his native Arabic language. Rihani had first become familiar with Middle Eastern poets in 1897. Among these poets were Abul-Ala' Al-Ma'arri, whom Ameen discovered to be the forerunner of Omar Khayyam. In 1899 he returned to New York, having decided to translate some of the quatrains of Al-Ma'arri into English. The first version of the translation was published in 1903. He began writing in English, becoming the first Arab to publish in English without renouncing his own Arabic language. During this period, he started to write poetry in English, essays and short stories in Arabic. He joined **The Pleiades Club**<sup>3</sup> in New York, and became a regular contributor to an Arabic daily newspaper, Al-Huda, published in New York

---

<sup>1</sup> Rihani, Albert, *Where To Find Ameen Rihani*, Bibliography, The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, Beirut, 1979, pp. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> **New York Law School** (NYLS) is a private law school in New York City. NYLS has a full-time day program, a part-time evening program, and a two-year accelerated J.D. honors program. Established in 1891. George Chase was the Dean of the School from 1891 till 1918. The School held its first classes in the Equitable Building at 120 Broadway, in Lower Manhattan's Financial District. Rihani was enrolled in the Law School for the academic year 1987-1988.

<sup>3</sup> **The Pleiades Club**, New York, was an association of artists and those with artistic interests in the area of Greenwich Village. It was founded in 1896, was incorporated in 1902, and continued until the 1930s. The Club held weekly performances, and granted scholarships to budding artists. It published a yearbook, *The Pleiades*. Among the members of the Pleiades Club named: Mark Twain, Clara Louise Kellogg, Valerian Gribayedoff, Signor Tagliapietra, Cleveland Moffett, Stephen Crane, Sam Chamberlain, William Garrison, and George Luks. Ameen Rihani joined the Pleiades Club since 1903.

City. He wrote about social traditions, religious tolerance, national politics and philosophy. Thus, he began his extensive literary career, bridging two worlds. He published his first two books in Arabic in 1902 and 1903: *Nubzha fith-Thawra-l Faranciya* (*A Treatise of the French Revolution*), and *Al-Muḥalafa-th Thulathiyya fil Mamlaka-l Ḥyawaniyya* (*The Trilateral Treaty of the Animal Kingdom*) consecutively. The first being a critical study on Carlyle’s work on the French Revolution, and the second a play criticizing religious traditional beliefs; the play was written in a legend form with animal characters: the horse, the mule, the donkey and the fox. In 1904 Rihani joined the National Art Theatre Society<sup>1</sup>. He was the only Arab American member joining this association.

Rihani’s first original work in English was a collection of rhymed verse poetry with the title of *Myrtle and Myrrh* published in 1905, Boston, Gorham Press<sup>2</sup>. The major themes of this poetry collection are: emotional reflections, love, pain, and nature. It is the first collection of English poetry published by an Arab poet at the early twentieth century.

### **Khalid and the Rihani Essays**

In 1905 he returned to his native mountains. During an ensuing six-year period of solitude, he published, in Arabic, two volumes of essays, entitled *Ar-Rihaniyyāt* (*The Rihani Essays*), Beirut, 1910, the book that established him as a forward thinker and a visionary<sup>3</sup>. Book One comprises: “Who Am I”, “Religious Tolerance”, “The Lights of Thought”, “From Brooklyn Bridge”, “From the Rooftops of New York”, “Modern Civilization”, “The Spirit of Our Times”, “The Great City”, “Ethics”, “The Talking Trees” ...; Book Two consists of: “The Trilateral Wisdom”, “Armies of the Future”, “In the Spring of Despair”, “The Scattered Truth”,

---

<sup>1</sup> **The National Art Theatre Society**, New York, was an association of American dramatists to promote activities related to the performing arts, particularly to the art of acting on stage. It was established in 1903. A year after, the society published the Manual of the National ART Theatre Society of New York, 1904, including its mission, rules and regulations, membership, and a list of its members.

<sup>2</sup> Another edition was published commemorating the centennial of this first English poetry collection of Ameen Rihani entitled: *Myrtle and Myrrh*, 2005, Platform International, Washington D.C., 59 pages.

<sup>3</sup> In celebration of the first Centennial of the book *Ar-Rihaniyyat* (1910-2010) a translation of the book, from the original Arabic into English, was completed by Mrs. Rula Zuheir Baalbaki and revised by Dr. Amal Saleeby Malek, and published at Platform International, Washington, D.C., 2010, 531 pages.

“Optimism”, “Between Me and Myself”, “The Great Truth”, “The State of the Future”, “The Book of Dawn”, “Trinities”, “The Most Exalted Prophet”, “In Defense of Light” ... Major themes of *The Rihani Essays* are: religious tolerance, the spirit of our times, the Great City, ethics, trilateral wisdom, the spring of despair, the exalted Prophet... The Philosophy of the book could be summarized in the following statement: The Great City is based on tolerance, ethics, truth, freedom, optimism, and the spirit of our times.

As a result of *Ar-Rihaniyyāt*, the Egyptian media hailed him as "The Philosopher of Freike"; and his literary moto, “Say your Say and Go Thy Way”, published in the book, became quite famous in Lebanon and the Arab World. Also, during that period, he published a book of allegories and a few short stories and a play. From 1907 till 1910 Rihani worked on writing his philosophical novel in English entitled *The Book of Khalid*, the first English novel to be written by an Arab author.

Rihani, who was influenced by the American poet Walt Whitman, has introduced free verse to Arab poetry. His new style of poetry was published as early as 1903. This new concept flourished in the Arab world and continued to lead modern Arab poetry after Rihani's death in 1940 and throughout the second half of the 20th century. Additionally, he lectured at the Syrian Protestant College (later The American University of Beirut) and in a few other institutions in Lebanon and the Arab World, as well as in the cities of Aleppo, Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem, and others. He also worked, along with other national leaders, for the liberation of his country from the Turkish rule. During that period Ameen wrote his English play entitled *Wajda*, a “Shakespearean” drama verse tragedy, Greek in its style, and Arab Eastern in its historical background.

On October 1, 1909, Rihani’s play *Abdul Hamid in The Astana* was produced on stage in Beirut. Also his speech entitled "*The Great City*", was published in the newspapers in Lebanon and the Arab World. Consequently, the Ottoman authorities considered that the dignity of the state and the reputation of the empire have been offended by Rihani’s play and speech. Rihani became in danger of being arrested and prosecuted based on charges of insulting the Ottoman

Government (the High Door). For these reasons Rihani decided to emigrate again and go back to the USA<sup>1</sup>.

### Paris and London

On his way to New York Rihani stopped in Paris where he met Kahlil Gibran.<sup>2</sup> However, it looks as if Gibran had surely an earlier dear friendship with Rihani. This is evident in Rihani's visit to Paris in 1910, when Gibran was still there, and they spent more than one month together, then they left together to London where they have spent another month. Afterwards, Gibran came back to Paris, and Rihani moved to the States.

Scholars have suggested different dates and aims of this visit. However, after many researches done by Professor Ameen Albert Rihani, in addition to the documents he owns, all doubts related to the date and goal, in addition to the real relationship between these two leading writers have been clarified. Accordingly, on the fifth of June 1910<sup>3</sup>, Rihani met, in Paris, Kahlil Gibran who writes to Mary Haskell saying: "My friend Rihani is a great poet. He is coming from the East to produce a play in London... We will go together to England. I am delighted to see him. He has a bright face and a cheerful soul"<sup>4</sup>. The Paris days were running at a full schedule. Rihani met also Joseph Huwayek in Paris, and the three friends clicked together for almost a whole month. They visited together the Louvre Museum, Chateau Versailles, several art museums, the Opera House and other historical Chateaux<sup>5</sup>.

In Paris, Rihani met several friends, such as Chukri Ghanem, author of *Antar*, Khairallah Khairallah, assistant editor of *Le Temps* newspaper, and Abbas Bijjani, a Lebanese businessman living in France.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Faylasuf-ul Furaika Sahib-ul Madinat-il Uzhma, (The Philosopher of Freike, Author of the Great City)*, a critical study, Al-Jeel Publishers, Beirut, 1987, pp. 48-52.

<sup>2</sup> We have no evidence whether the friendship of Rihani and Gibran started in Lebanon before their meeting in Paris in 1910 or not.

<sup>3</sup> Ameen writes to his brother Joe on May 17, 1910 saying: "I am leaving on the Messagerie steamer for Marseilles on the 24<sup>th</sup>, arriving in Paris about the second of June...", *English letters of Ameen Rihani*, Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon, computer typewritten copy, Vol. I, Chap. II, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> Otto, Annie Salem, *The Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell*, Southern Printing Company, Houston, 1967, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Huwayek, Joseph, *My Memories with Gibran*, ed. By Edwik Juraidini Shayboub, Al-Ahad Publishers, Beirut, n.d., pp. 183-199.

By the end of June, Rihani left Paris to London where they stayed all the month of July. In London they met the Irish General Mr. F. P. O’Conner and went with him to visit the House of Senators and the House of Commons. They also visited Windsor Palace accompanied by Major Welap. At the intellectual level, both friends were invited to a poetry recital upon the invitation of Madam the Baron De Bert-ouch at the Poetry Society.<sup>1</sup>

The London days were for Rihani and Gibran quite rich in art and literature. They have visited museums, opera houses, theaters, galleries, palaces and other places of interest<sup>2</sup>. In one of his Arabic letters, dated July 7, 1910, Rihani wrote to Joseph Huwayek, saying: “We stood proudly face to face, in front of the drawings of H(omer) Watson, the poet of painters, and D(ante) G(abriel) Rossetti, the painter of poets, and we saw the drawings of A(ugustus) E(dwin) Burn John, that bring back to the 20th century what S(andro) Botticelli imagined in the 15th century”<sup>3</sup>.

While in London, Rihani discussed the possibility of producing his play *Wajda*, a tragedy about Imam Ali, with one of the English stages and performing arts centers<sup>4</sup>. It was not accepted, and the reason was that the audience is not ready to be interested in such an Oriental historic theme.

The London visit of Rihani and Gibran was fruitful in another sense, it was significant in ending up their discussion on the idea of creating, or encouraging, an opera house in Beirut. Ameen asked Gibran to design a plan for the suggested opera house. They both reviewed the proposed sketch, commented on it and both signed it on "late July 1910"; the comment reads: “the first word of an unwritten poem, uttered in London”<sup>5</sup>.

## Back to New York

Arriving to New York in August 1911, Ameen spent some time to reestablish himself in the city that he always admired, inspired, loved and criticized. *The Book of Khalid* was published in

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Arabic Letters of Ameen Rihani*, Volume Five of *Ameen Rihani the Complete Arabic Works*, Librairie du Liban Publishers, Beirut, 2016, Vol. V, pp. 4639-4641; and *The Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell*, p. 47. 8

<sup>2</sup> Rihani, Albert, *Where to Find Ameen Rihani*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *The Arabic Letters of Ameen Rihani*, Volume Five of *Ameen Rihani Complete Arabic Works*, 2016, Volume V, pp. 4637-4638.

<sup>4</sup> Rihani, Albert, *Where to Find Ameen Rihani*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> A copy of the sketch, the comment and the two signatures, are published in *The Arabic Letters of Ameen Rihani*, p. 4638.

1911 after he returned to New York. It was the first English novel ever written by a Lebanese/Arab. The illustrations for this book, were provided by Khalil Gibran. The novel is devised in three parts: Book The First: In the Exchange, dedicated To Man, and comprises: “The City of Baalbek”, “Via Dolorosa”, “The Cellar of the Soul”, In the Twilight of an Idea”, “With the fairies”...; Book The Second: In The Temple, devoted To Nature, and includes: “The Dowry of Democracy”, “Sub Transcendental”, “The False Dawn”, “The Last Star”, “The Hawdaj of Falsehood”, “The Kaaba of Solitude”, “Signs of the Hermit”...; Book The Third: In Kulmakan, committed To God, and embraces: “The Voice of the Dawn”, “The Self Ecstatic”, “On the Open Highway”, “A Dream of Empire”, “The Stoning and Flight”, “The Desert”... The basic themes of the novel are: The Great City, The Superman, The Futurist Prophet, the Trilogy of Light, Love, and Will. The philosophy of this novel could be indicated in the basic principles of the “Great City” and the Superman. A reception was held in honor of Rihani for the release of *The Book of Khalid*, and the president of the New York **Pleiades Club** crowned him with a laurel garland.

During the period between 1910 and 1922 Rihani became remarkably involved in the literary life while continuing to pursue productive political engagements. He joined the Poetry Society of America<sup>1</sup> and continued writing and publishing in English and Arabic. Among the American magazines and newspapers that published for Rihani were: *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Bookman*, *The Forum*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *The International Studio*, *New York Evening Journal*, *New York Sun*, *The Phoenix*, *The Print Connoisseur*, *The Papyrus Phoenix*, and others<sup>1</sup>. Among the books that he wrote and/or published during that period were: *The Lily of Al-Ghor*<sup>2</sup>, a novel written in Arabic in 1913, under the title of *Zanbaqat-ul Ghowr*, and rewritten in English in 1914, describing the oppression of the woman (represented by Mariam) during the Ottoman Empire;

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the document entitled “*The Ameen Rihani International Publications*”, at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon, 87 pages.

<sup>2</sup> *The Lily of Al-Ghor*, the English version, typewritten, 312 pages. The original manuscript is preserved at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon. A paper copy of the manuscript *The Lily of Al-Ghor* is preserved at the Library of Congress. A digital copy of this manuscript is preserved at the following places: The Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon; North Carolina State University, Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies; and Notre Dame University Center for Digitization, Louaize, Lebanon.

*Juhan*<sup>1</sup>, a novel in English about the advanced role of Middle Eastern women during WWI; *The Luzumiyat*, second<sup>2</sup> translation of the Arabic poetry of Al-Ma'arri into English with Rihani's introduction highlighting the significance of this poet to the Western mind; *The Descent of Bolshevism*<sup>3</sup>, political analysis in English on the Arab origins of the socialist movements. *The Path of Vision*, essays in English on East and West<sup>4</sup>, *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems*<sup>5</sup>, poetry in English.

In 1911, Ameen joined **The Poetry Society of America**<sup>6</sup>. His poems were published in several poetry and literary magazines in the United States, distinguished with its transcendental and mystic trend of thought. It is worth mentioning, in this regard, that Rihani wrote free verse in Arabic and rhythmic classical, and free verse in English since 1903. He was influenced by the poetry of Walt Whitman.

In early May 1911, Gibran moved to live in Rihani's house at lower Manhattan, New York, 28 West, Ninth Street. On May 16 of that year Gibran wrote to Mary Haskell saying: "I am living in Rihani's house... I find myself annoyed, but everything goes well. However, I do my work (in drawing) in the large Rihani room...<sup>7</sup>". It is clear that Rihani, during that period, had introduced Gibran to his American and Syrian friends in New York.<sup>8</sup> Among those who Gibran drew them are: the poet Edwin Markham, the literary critic Richard Le Ghallienne, and the writer and poet

<sup>1</sup> *Juhan*, a novelette, written in 1916-1917, published 2011 [posth.], Notre Dame University Press, and Editions Dar an-Nahar, Beirut, 91 pages. It was translated into Arabic, by Abdul-Masih Haddad under the title of Kharej-ul Harim (Outside the Harem). The Italian translation is done by Francesco Medici, Rome, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Rihani's first translation of the poetry of Abul-Ala' Al-Ma'arri entitled *The Quatrains*, published in 1903, Doubleday Page and Co., New York, 143 pages.

<sup>3</sup> *The Descent of Bolshevism*, writ. 1919-1920, pub. 1920, the Stratford Co., Boston.

<sup>4</sup> *The Path of Vision*, writ. 1913-1921, published (pub.) 1921, James T. White and Co., New York, 92 pages. Reprinted 1970, Beirut, and 2008, Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems*, writ. 1904-1921, pub. 1921, James T. White and Co., New York. Reprinted 1970, Beirut.

<sup>6</sup> The **Poetry Society of America** is a literary organization founded in 1910 by poets, editors, and artists. It is the oldest poetry organization in the United States. Past members of the society have included such renowned writers as Robert Frost, Langston Hughes, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens. In 1917 The Poetry Society was instrumental in the establishment of a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Rihani was the only Arab-American member in this society.

<sup>7</sup> Otto, Annie Salem, *The Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell*, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Gibran, Jean and Khalil, *Kahlil Gibran His Life and World*, New York, Graphic Society, 1974, pp. 209-210.



Frank B. Sanborn<sup>1</sup>. It is assumed that Gibran lived in Rihani's house for about fourteen months: from early May 1911 till late June 1912 when Rihani left New York and went with his uncle Solomon (brother of Fares, Ameen's late father) on a visit to Europe and Lebanon for about ten months.

On December 13, 1911, Charlotte Teller wrote to her friend Mary Haskell saying: "I want to talk to you about Rihani's *Book [of Khalid]*, which is directly and indirectly the cause of my wakefulness... To be quite frank, Khalil has never made me feel Syria. The Book does... And how much more I feel Rihani because of his stiletto like satire and humor... Rihani's personality has suddenly become large enough to conceal most of the rest of Existence. His pain is powerful... I appreciate Ameen's sarcastic literature, and I shall drive him along one trail, Satire!! If anyone knew how much I believed in the ability of this literature..."<sup>2</sup>

Michael Monahan wrote about The Book of Khalid saying: "Ameen Rihani, poet of the sunrise, has brought out his esoteric romance of East and West *The Book of Khalid*. Here is a spirit fresh and creative as the breath of Spring... It is long since I have looked into a book so enchanting with its blended charm of two disparate worlds, its unstated philosophy, quaint mysticism, poignant irony and delightful humor. The West has never hitherto witnessed itself in the flashing mirror of such a mind"<sup>3</sup>.

Helen Johnson Keyes evaluated the book from a different angle. She wrote: "Metaphysics and science bloom for Khalid under culture and inspiration... Khalid is not a student of Western institutions so much as he is an observer of man, a creature of instincts and intuitions... He has the value and charm of a penetrating mind and a vivid heart and he fitfully illuminates many dark corners in our Civilization. He is a poet singing to the Universe and to the Superman"<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 228-229.

<sup>3</sup> *The Papyrus Magazine*, New York, December 1911.

<sup>4</sup> *The Bookman Magazine*, New York, December 1911.

A third example of the published extracts is taken from the poet Edwin Markham who saw: “In *The Book of Khalid* a critique of our Western civilization as it appears to the wisdom of the East, ambition against contentment, activity against sweet idleness. Rihani is a man of ardent poetic temperament, a clever poet, and a man of unworldly ideals. He thinks nobly of life and writes with ease and grace. His hero, Khalid, explores many creeds seeking to find a way through the labyrinth of human thought”<sup>1</sup>. This philosophic novel proved to be a continuous work of interest for scholars, university professors and students together with other writers<sup>2</sup>.

With the early days of World War One, Rihani started a book on the Ottoman Empire and the oppression of the people of countries under this despotic statute. The author aimed to prove that this autocratic order acts against any human, religious, and particularly Islamic ethics and values. Consequently, this kind of a rule is oppressing the minorities in the Ottoman Empire, like the Armenians, the Greeks, and the Arabs. Several chapters of this book were published in the *Bookman Magazine* in New York. This manuscript, entitled *Turkey and Islam in the War*, in a book form, is unpublished<sup>3</sup>. The original is partly typewritten and partly published in magazines, 140 pages.

Together with writing novels, poetry, plays and articles, Ameen wrote short stories in Arabic and English. Among the themes in Arabic: the oppression of the Ottomans against citizens calling for freedom; the tyrant ruler, and exploitation of the ignorance of the people. After publishing these short stories in magazines of Lebanon, the Arab World and other Arabic publications of emigrants’ communities, the collection of short stories and the play about Abdul

---

<sup>1</sup> *The American Magazine*, New York, NY January 27th, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to *100 Years of Selected Writings on Ameen Rihani's The Book of Khalid*, edited with an Introduction by Paul Jahshan, Platform International, Washington, D.C., 2011, 330 pages. -

<sup>3</sup> For further information about the contents of *Turkey and Islam in the War*, refer to: Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Al-Yanabi' Al-Mansiyya*, (*Forgotten Springs*), Riyad Ar-Rayess Publishing, Beirut, 2000, pp. 187-198. The original copy of the manuscript *Turkey and Islam in the War* is preserved at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon. A paper copy of the manuscript *Turkey and Islam in the War* is preserved at the Library of Congress. A digital copy of this manuscript is preserved at the following places: The Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon; North Carolina State University, Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies; and Notre Dame University Center for Digitization, Louaize, Lebanon.

Hamid were published in a book form entitled *Sijil-ut Tawba* (The Register of Repentance), Cairo, 1951 posthumously.

His short stories in English, written between 1914 and 1916, carry different themes, among them: social experiences in Lebanon, like “Karima” and “Monseigneur”, Arab social experience, like “The Servant of Allah”, “Sherif Effendi”, and “The Green Flag”, and general human themes applicable in the East or the West, like “The Prince and the Fakir”, “Gawya”, and “Bulu Land”. This collection, entitled *The Green Flag and other Short Stories*,<sup>1</sup> is unpublished manuscript, partly handwritten, and partly typewritten, in a total of 120 pages.

In 1916 Ameen married Bertha Case, an American painter artist, who was part of the Matisse, Picasso, Cézanne and Derain group in Paris, and the Midi, and joined them in exhibiting her work at the Salon de Mai and Salon d’Automne. In the United States she had continuous exhibitions in New York and California. Ameen and his wife Bertha visited Pope Benedict XV in 1917. The Pope was heartedly interested in ending World War I and in establishing an equitable peace between the fighting armies. Bertha visited Lebanon in 1953 (thirteen years after Ameen's death), staying with the family of Rihani's brother, Albert, in Freike. On July 29, 1970, Bertha died in New York at the age of 91. She had requested that her body be cremated and that her ashes be sent to Freike to be buried next to her husband.

### **The Mexican Experience**

Rihani visited Mexico, and specifically Merida, Yucatan, several times to see his brother Joe and his family, and Uncle Solomon and his family. In spring 1914 he visited the Mayas ruins in Yucatan, and noticed the similarities between the Mexican Pyramids and the Egyptian ones. This comparison suggested to him other cultural and social similarities between East and West. After several visits to these ruins he decided to write a book on the Mayan Civilization. The short

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the contents of *The Green Flag and Other Short Stories*, refer to: Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Al-Yanabi' Al-Mansiyya*, (*Forgotten Springs*), 2000, pp. 249-253. The original copy of the manuscript *The Green Flag and Other Short Stories* is preserved at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon. A paper copy of the manuscript *The Green Flag and Other Short Stories* is preserved at the Library of Congress. A digital copy of it is preserved at the following places: The Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon; North Carolina State University, Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies; and Notre Dame University Center for Digitization, Louaize, Lebanon.

manuscript was completed in 1919, typewritten in 54 pages. It carries the title of *In the Land of the Mayas*<sup>1</sup>.

During World War One, Rihani wrote a book on clarifying the identity of the emigrants. The manuscript is entitled: *Letters to Uncle Sam*. In this work, he addresses the United States, in the form of letters to Uncle Sam, denying the accusation of the Lebanese and Syrians with the charge of false identity, and calling them “Turkus”. Rihani defends their identity case stressing that they are a civilized people who yearn for freedom and independence and demands that the Americans should pay attention to the interests of the vulnerable and oppressed people who suffered from the Ottoman Empire and want to get rid of them. The Lebanese and the Syrians are among those people seeking liberation.

In this regard Rihani wrote to President Theodore Roosevelt, on April 22, 1917, saying: “ The news of America’s entry into the War on the side of the Allies has filled me with joy and I have never been so proud of being an American citizen as I am today... Naturalized citizens should respond to the call of the colors before the native born; for this is an opportunity when they should come forward to testify to their loyalty to the Stars and Stripes and show their gratitude as beneficiaries of the democratic institutions of the great Republic...”<sup>2</sup> Then he gives a quick idea about his role in this respect saying: “I have already written several articles to the Arabic papers in New York calling upon the Syrians, whether naturalized or not, to enlist in the Army. And I have no doubt that thousands of them will do so, I have no doubt that they all feel as I do...”<sup>3</sup>

Rihani, in this book, clarified the role he played in Mexico to encourage the Lebanese and Syrian communities to support the Allies (France, Britain, and the United States) against the Central

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the contents of *In the Land of the Mayas*, refer to: Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Al-Yanabi’ Al-Mansiyya, (Forgotten Springs)*, 2000, pp. 215-222. The original manuscript of *In the Land of the Mayas* is preserved at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon. A paper copy of the manuscript *In the Land of the Mayas* is preserved at the Library of Congress. A digital copy of this manuscript is preserved at the following places: The Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon; North Carolina State University, Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies; and Notre Dame University Center for Digitization, Louaize, Lebanon. This manuscript was translated from English into Spanish by Prof. Carmen Ruiz Bravo Villacenté in 2019, Madrid, 62 pages.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Letters of Ameen Rihani*, Rihani Museum Archives, computer typewritten copy, Vol. I, Chap. IV, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Powers (Germany, Italy and Turkey). He had a lecturing program among the community members asking them to volunteer in the *Légion d'Orient* of the Allies against the Ottoman forces. The German Ambassador to Mexico, Mr. Von Eckhardt, demanded from the Mexican Ministry of War to consider Rihani “undesirable” and have him expelled from Mexico. The authorities had him arrested. His brother Joe, his wife BIRTHA and the American Council, were all active to free him. After more than two weeks of arresting Rihani, they succeeded in having the Mexican authorities to let Rihani leave the country<sup>1</sup>.

Few of the letters/Chapters of *Letters to Uncle Sam* were published in the U.S. The manuscript was published in Washington D.C., Platform International, 2001 posthumously.

### A “Western” novel and art critiques

Between 1917 and 1921, Rihani was busy also with two major works: his new novel about a love story between an Italian physician, Jessup, and an American lady called Gladys. One of his patients was a French lady, Beatrice, married to an Austrian young man with complicated marriage problems... Eventually the doctor escapes the illusion of love, just as Beatrice escapes the traps of a failed marriage...

The reader notices that, unlike most other Rihani works, the characters here are all from Europe and the United States, yet they have their own cultural differences and variances. As if the author wants to show that the issue of East and West is relative, because Europe is considered the “East” of America, and at the same time, the “West” of the Arab World, as much as Arabia is considered the “West” of India and China, and at the same time, the East of Europe. This is, more likely, considered an advanced step towards multiculturalism in Rihani’s bilingual literature. This novel entitled *Dr. Della Valle*, is still a typewritten manuscript, in 312 pages<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rihani, Albert, *Where to Find Ameen Rihani*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> For further information about the contents of *Dr. Della Valle*, refer to: Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Al-Yanabi' Al-Mansiyya*, (*Forgotten Springs*), 2000, pp. 246-249. The original manuscript is preserved at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon. A paper copy of the manuscript *Dr. Della Valle* is preserved at the Library of Congress. A digital copy of the novel *Dr. Della Valle* is preserved at the following places: The Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon; North Carolina State University, Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies; and Notre Dame University Center for Digitization, Louaize, Lebanon.

Since 1916, Rihani started to frequently visit art exhibitions in New York together with galleries and performing arts centers whenever he is in Paris or London, thus reviving his interest in art development in America and Europe. This renewed interest resulted with a series of articles and art critiques. This material was published in magazines of specialty in the United States, specifically *The Print Connoisseur*, and *The International Studio*. Within this framework Rihani wrote about major world artists such as: Emile Bourdelle, Kees Van Dongen, Matisse, Manet, Renoir, Childe Hassam, Degas, Gauguin, Pissaro, Toulouse Lautrec, together with leading American artists such as: Paul Dougherty, Frank W. Benson, Will Simmons, William Oberhardt, Hellen Peale, Anders Zorn, and others... This collection of articles in art criticism was published in 1999, posthumously, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 198 pages with illustrations. Some of these articles were translated into French, Italian, and German<sup>1</sup>.

### “Mysticism of Reality” and East/West revisited

In 1919 Ameen became a member of the **Authors’ Club**<sup>2</sup> of America and was the only Arab American affiliated colleague in this prestigious literary Association. He maintained his membership between 1919 and 1940, the year he passed away. The Club included men of letters from the United States, England and other European countries.

In 1921 Rihani published two of his major English works: his second collection of poetry entitled *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems*, was published in January of that year, James T. White and Co. Publishers, New York, 104 pages. The collection includes 31 poems that could be devised into three major themes: Mysticism comprising: “The Lost Disciple”, “A Sufi Song”, “The Two Brothers”, “God of the Distances Hear Us”, “The Sufi”, “The Fugitive”, and “A Chant of Mystics”; Transcendentalism consisting of: “The Towers and the Night”, “The Song of Siva”, “In the Palm Groves of Memphis”; The Song of Rain”, “The Wanderer”; Unity of Being,

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the contents of *Critiques in Art*, refer to: Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Al-Yanabi’ Al-Mansiyya*, (*Forgotten Springs*), 2000, pp. 255-264. Refer also to: Rihani, Albert, *Where to Find Ameen Rihani*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> **The Authors Club**: Established in 1882 in New York. Its mission is to promote and support the American literary heritage. Among its members are: John Draper, Walter Frost, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, and Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Club published a book entitled *Liber Scriptorium*, Volume I in 1893, and Volume II in 1921. In Vol. II, Rihani published one of his short stories entitled “Monseigneur”. The Club’s archives are preserved at Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, New York.

particularly emphasized in “A Sufi Song” and “A Chant of Mystics” again and again. The Oriental touch is clear in the following poems: “Constantinople”, “Andalusia”, “Prayer in the Desert”, “Lebanus”, “From the Arabic”, “Hanem”, and “Badruddin”. The Love poems include: “Water and Flowers”, and “Lebanus”. The two single standing poems are: “After Reading King Lear” and “O Freedom”. It is worth mentioning that the stated themes are interconnected with each other. Trying to subdivide them is just to facilitate understanding the spirit of this poetry.

Rihani’s philosophy, in this work, is his belief in, and confirmation of, the oneness of God, the Universal Spirit, and the unity of Being. The issue of East and West is expressed in verse and within this intellectual framework. Articles and book reviews were published in magazines and newspapers in the United States, Canada, and other countries discussing Rihani’s second collection of poetry<sup>1</sup>.

In March 1921, Rihani’s new collection of essays was published under the title of *The Path of Vision*. Part First, mostly theoretical including: “The Path of Vision”, “The Mysticism of Reality”, “The Highest Ideal”, “Minds and Monominds”, “Touring and Commuting”, “Green Logs and Brushwood”, “A Footnote of Nature”, “The Question of Pontius Pilate”...; and Part Second, frequently practical comprising: “From Concord to Syria”, “My Native Horizon”, “Over Ancient Babylon”, “The Oriental Heritage”, “Change and Exchange”, “The Curiosity of the Occidental”, and “The Lying Oriental”... Major themes of the book are: Oriental Transcendentalism, Occidental Rationalism and Virtues of East and West.

The philosophy of this work could be summarized, using the author’s words, by the following statement: “The highest, noblest form of spirituality, the divine essence, can be attained only by those who follow devotedly the path of vision”<sup>2</sup>. It is the path of post modernism, the way to futurism, and the track to globalism and cross cultural experience. Book reviews, related articles,

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the bibliography on Ameen Rihani entitled: *Studies and Articles in English and other European Languages on Ameen Rihani and his Works*, digitized copy, 108 pages, Ameen Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon, and Institute of Lebanese Thought, Notre Dame University, Lebanon.

<sup>2</sup> Rihani, Ameen, *The Path of Vision*, “The Path of Vision”, edition of 1970, ed. with an introduction by Suheil B. Bushrui and John M. Munro, The Rihani House, Beirut, Lebanon, p. 26.

and chapters of the work were published in magazines and newspapers in the United States, Canada, England, Egypt, Lebanon, and other countries discussing, or presenting samples of Rihani’s philosophic recent collection of essays.

### **Rihani’s Visit to Arabia**

In January 1922, Rihani left New York embarking on a long trip to Arabia. His first stop was in Alexandria, Egypt. After few days he moved to Cairo where he stayed from early February till the last week of the month attending ceremonies organized in his honor welcoming the Levantine American author who “introduced the Eastern philosophy to the West”<sup>1</sup>. Among those who participated in ceremonies honoring Rihani were: Aḥmad Shawqi, Moḥamad Lutfi Jum’a, Aḥmad Zaki Pasha, May Ziada, Ya’qub Sarruf, Salim Sarkis... Major receptions took place at the American University of Cairo, the Ceremony at the Pyramids, and Samir-Ames Palace Hotel... Rihani recited his new poem entitled “Ana-sh Sharq”<sup>2</sup>; it was published in *Al-Ahram* newspaper, February 15, 1922, front page. *The New York Times* published an article entitled: “Ameen Rihani Portrait on his Reception in Cairo”<sup>3</sup>. A book in Arabic was later published covering all related activities<sup>4</sup>.

By the end of February, 1922, he left Cairo starting a long travel throughout Arabia, meeting and getting better acquainted with its rulers. He was the only traveler at that time, European or Arab, to have covered that whole territory in one trip. He acquired an invaluable and first-hand account of the character, vision and belief of each of these rulers. He developed a friendship with Ibn Saud, ruler of the desert kingdom that would soon become the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Between 1924 and 1932 he wrote and published six books in English and Arabic related to the

<sup>1</sup> A title bestowed on Rihani by the Lebanese Egyptian writer Tawfiq Hasan Ar-Rafi’i in 1922 as a subtitle of his abovementioned book published in Cairo.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Rihani’s poem “Ana-sh Sharq” in his Arabic poetry collection *Hutaf-ul Awdiyah*, Ameen F. Rihani *The Complete Arabic Works*, Librarie du Liban, Beirut, 2016, Vol. IV, pp. 3952-3958. Rihani rewrote this poem in English under the title “I Am the East”, it is published in his work: *Waves of My Life and Other Poems*, Platform International, Washington, D.C., 2009.

<sup>3</sup> *The New York Times*, “Ameen Rihani Portrait...”, May 28, 1922, section III, page 14, Column 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ar-Rafi’i, Tawfiq, *Ameen Ar-Rihani fi Misr, Muqaddem Falsafat-ush Sharq Ilal-Gharb*, (*Ameen Rihani in Egypt, Introducing the Eastern Philosophy to the West*), Al-Hilal Publishers, Cairo, 1922, 314 pages.



three trips he made to Arabia. In Arabic: *Muluk-ul Arab (Kings of Arabia)* (1924), *Tarikh Najd Al-Hadith (History of Modern Najd)* (1926); in English: *The Maker of Modern Arabia* (1928)<sup>1</sup>, *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930)<sup>2</sup>, and *Arabian Peak and Desert* (1931)<sup>3</sup>. These accounts were a considerable critical and public success. London publishers released a circular on Rihani's travel books as having been best sellers. He is considered by scholars as a major figure in the intellectual development of Arab nationalism. In 1932 Rihani completed his other two significant works on Iraq entitled consecutively: *Iraq During the days of King Faisal the First* (manuscript)<sup>4</sup> and *Kurdistan* (manuscript)<sup>5</sup>. In his writings on national issues, he emphasized the importance of a secular state and a secular education pointing that there must be no minorities or majorities, but only equal citizens. Rihani placed the greatest priority on the spread of nationalist and pro-unity feeling among the masses, and argued that rulers would have to follow.

<sup>1</sup> *Maker of Modern Arabia* or *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia, His People and His Land*, written 1923-1927, published 1928, Constable and Co., Ltd., London, England; Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston; Macmillan Co., Toronto, Canada; and Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, India, 370 pages. Reprinted 1933 London, Boston, Toronto, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras; 1983, Caravan, New York, and several other editions and prints till today...

<sup>2</sup> *Around the Coasts of Arabia*, writ. 1928-1929, pub. 1930, Constable and Co., London, England; Macmillan Co., Toronto, Canada; The Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, India, 364 pages. Reprinted 1931, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston; 1933, London, Toronto, Boston, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras; 1983, Caravan, New York, and several other editions and prints till today...

<sup>3</sup> *Arabian Peak and Desert*, written 1929-1930, published 1930, Constable and Co., London, England; Macmillan Co., Toronto, Canada; The Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, India, 293 pages. Reprinted 1931, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston; 1933, London, Toronto, Boston, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras; 1983, Caravan, New York and several other editions and prints till today...

<sup>4</sup> *Iraq During the Days of King Faisal the First*, written 1932, original manuscript preserved at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon, typewritten text, 369 pages. For further information about the content of the manuscript *Iraq During the Days of King Faisal the First*, refer to: Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Al-Yanabi' Al-Mansiyya*, (Forgotten Springs), 2000, pp. 222-231. A paper copy of the manuscript *Iraq During the Days of King Faisal the First*, is preserved at the Library of Congress. A digital copy of it is preserved at the following places: The Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon; North Carolina State University, Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies; and Notre Dame University Center for Digitization, Louaize, Lebanon.

<sup>5</sup> *Kurdistan*, written 1932, original manuscript preserved at the Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon, typewritten text, 145 pages. For further information about the content of the manuscript *Iraq During the Days of King Faisal the First*, refer to: Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Al-Yanabi' Al-Mansiyya*, (Forgotten Springs), 2000, pp. 222-231.239. A paper copy of the manuscript *Kurdistan*, is preserved at the Library of Congress. A digital copy of it is preserved at the following places: The Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon; North Carolina State University, Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies; and Notre Dame University Center for Digitization, Louaize, Lebanon.

P. W. Wilson, of the *New York Times*, pinpointed the distinction of the Rihani Arab Trilogy in English where the western reader is, for the first time, sharing the opinion and revelation of the Oriental himself about a fundamentally oriental issue. He says: “It is through the eyes of Doughty and of Lawrence... that most of us have peered into the actualities of Arabia. But in these present volumes of Ameen Rihani [*Maker of Modern Arabia*,] it is our excellent fortune to share the vision of the Oriental himself... The command over the subtleties of our anomalous language, revealed in these pages is uncanny. To read [this book] is to enjoy the pleasure of music. From Ameen Rihani we have a portrait of that formidable chieftain, Ibn Sa’oud...”<sup>1</sup>

Within the literary scope Rihani completed a study on the Arabian Nights entitled *The Lore of the Arabian Nights*, written in 1929 and focusing on two issues: first: the features of the Nights including the Jinn, the women, the magic, facets of the fabulous, butterflies... of realism, the tags of the storiologist, the rawy’s work... and second: the translations of the Night including the French and the English... This work was published in 2002 posthumously<sup>2</sup>.

Between 1928 and 1933, Rihani also published five works in Arabic, namely: *At-Tatarruf wal Islah (Extremism and Reform)*<sup>3</sup>, 1928, a political criticism aimed at a social and educational reform; the theme of this work is summarized by the following statement: reforming the nation starts by reforming the individual, and reforming the individual starts by the spiritual and educational reform. In the course of the same year another work for Rihani was published under the title of *An-Nakabāt (Desasters)*<sup>4</sup>, this work tracks the calamities in the history of the Arabs with the idea of learning from the mistakes of history in order to build a better future. In 1931, Rihani wrote *Wasiyyati (My Will)*<sup>5</sup>, which summarizes his political, philosophic and literary

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, New York, May 13, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> *The Lore of the Arabian Nights*, Platform International, Washington, D.C., Introduction by Geoffrey Nash, cover design by Reem A. Rihani, 98 pages, including examples of the translations of Edward Lane, John Payne and Richard Burton, with a book index.

<sup>3</sup> *At-Tatarruf wal Islah*, translated into English under the title of *Extremism and Reform* by Dr. Nuwar Mawlawi Diab, Beirut, Menrikh Press, 1997, 92 pages.

<sup>4</sup> *An-Nakabāt*, translated into French with the title of *Tragédies Historiques et Calamités*, (Historical Tragedies and Calamities, by Victor Hakim, no date, Beirut, 160 pages.

<sup>5</sup> *Wasiyyati*, translated into English under the title of *My Will*, by Mr. Anas Sheikh Ali, American University of Beirut, 1972 as part of his MA theses, 28 pages. Another translation into English by Prof. Suheil Bushrui with an introduction, Maryland University, 2008, 28 pages.

beliefs. Two years later, in 1933, Rihani published his literary criticism entitled *Antum-ush Shu'ara'* (*You the Poets*)<sup>1</sup>, attacking “weeping” sentimental poetry and calling for free verse based on strong beliefs in Arabic modern poetry.

In 1929 German translations of Rihani’s works start to be published in Germany. On March 13, 1929, and in reply to one of the letters Rihani received from Dr. G. Oehlich, Director of the Institut Fur Auserliche Politik, in Hamburg, he accepts publishing in their magazine saying: “It gives me pleasure to contribute an article to the Magazine of your Institut... *Europaische Gosprache*” then indicates that: “The United Press Feature Syndicate of this city<sup>2</sup> is syndicating a series of articles I have written on the political situation in the Near East, which include the British and the French Mandates in Iraq and Palestine and Syria. I wonder if there is such a syndicate in Germany, and if it would be interested in those articles to bring my views before the German public”<sup>3</sup>. Rihani seems, at the time, reaching a large number of readers in the West, specifically in the United States, Canada, and Britain.

On March 25, 1929, Rihani replied Prof. Arnold T. Toynbee to one of his letters saying: “Your letter of February 26 and the Ms. which was mailed later were duly received. I have read with great interest your survey of the international affairs of the Middle and the Near East. It is, on the whole, authoritative and fair, and your analysis of the economic phase of the Wahhabi Movement is admirable. But I do not quite agree with you about the Protectorates and the rule of the Zaidi Imam... The lead pencil notes I have made on the margins, here and there, will also be of interest to you.”<sup>4</sup>. Prof. Toynbee used to ask for the opinion of Rihani and his comments on Toynbee’s works on Arabia, and the Arab British relationships. In the same letter Rihani speaks about his articles on the Near East: “I have written a series of articles on the political situation in

---

<sup>1</sup> *Antum-ush Shu'ara'*, translated into English under the title of *You the Poets* with an introduction by Prof. George Nicholas El-Hage, New York, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2017, 64 pages.

<sup>2</sup> Meaning New York.

<sup>3</sup> *Ameen Rihani English Letters*, Rihani Museum Archives, computer typewritten copy, Vol. II, Chap. III, pp. 525-526.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold T. Toynbee (1889-1975), British historian and philosopher of history. Director of studies at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. Among his major works: *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, *The World after the Peace Conference of Paris*, *A Study of History* (12 Volumes).

the Near East in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and the Arabian Peninsula – for a newspaper syndicate here, which will also be published, I think, in England. You will perhaps see them.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Lecture Tours in the United States and Canada**

During this time, Rihani was always on the go between Lebanon and the United States. He made three lecture tours in the U.S. and Canada: the first tour took place between January 1929 and April 1931, by invitation and organization of the Foreign Policy Association (FPA), New York; samples of lecture topics are: The Arab World Today, the Middle East at Present, East and West, Arabia’s Contribution to Civilization, The Palestine Question, The Future of the Arab World, Where East and West Meet. Among other venues of these lectures: Northeastern University, Amherst College, Princeton University, University of Illinois, The People’s Forum of Montreal, Women’s Canadian Club, and Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. The second tour: February-July 1937, by invitation and organization of the Institute of International Education (IIE), New York; samples of lecture topics are: The Future of the Middle East, Palestine, Kings of Arabia, The Poetry of Arabia, Mandates in the Middle East, The Pan-Arab Movement, Arab American Intellectual Relationships. Among other venues of these lectures: Shepherd State Teachers College, Bethany College, Wesleyan University, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Sue Bennet College, Berea College, Teachers Colledge, Richmond, University of Louisville, Indiana University, Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Indiana State Teachers College, Taylor University, and University of Pittsburgh. The third tour: January-May 1939, by invitation of W. Colston Leigh Inc. (CLI), New York; samples of lecture topics are: The Palestine Issue, Who Shall Rule Palestine, Arabia’s Contribution to Civilization, Arabic Literature, Where East and West Meet, Arab American Intellectual Relationships. Among other venues of these lectures: Foreign Policy Association, Providence, Rod Island, Sacramento Community Forum, Visalia Community Forum, California, Town Hall Forum, Oakland, California, Town Hall Forum, San Francisco, California, Town Hall Forum, Oregon, Town Hall Forum, Seattle,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ameen Rihani English Letters*, Rihani Museum Archives, computer typewritten copy, Vol. II, Chap. III, p. 527.

Washington State.<sup>1</sup> Rihani, during those tours, became considered as the “authority” on Middle Eastern affairs, specifically in modern literature and politics.

As a result, Rihani had strong relationships with prominent scholars on Middle Eastern studies. Among them Prof. William Earnest Hocking, the American Philosopher and Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. In a letter, dated August 6, 1930, addressed to Prof. Hocking, Rihani describes this relationship saying: “When you honored me once with a visit at the Hotel in Boston, you said, I remember, that we met once a thousand years ago and we may not meet again for another thousand years. I sincerely hope that you are mistaken in your occult calculations. Or is your ‘thousand years’, by the reverse process of the Biblical conception of time, a thousand days or a thousand hours? *Inshallah...*”<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to Professor Hamilton A.R. Gibb, Orientalist and Historian, on August 27, 1932, Rihani puts in his own words a short explanation to the significance of his English and Arabic works, he says: “the value of my work in both Arabic and English – [is] in building a bridge of understanding and sympathy and permanent good relations between Arabia and the Western world<sup>3</sup>. It is interesting to read Rihani writing further about his work from a comparative point of view when he says in another letter dated August 28, 1932: “European books written on Arabia do not, on the whole, help the reader to better understand the Arab, to be able to penetrate into the recesses of his religious and social background, or to realize the scope and the limitations of his modern political creed. Nor do the few books written in Arabic by natives. The former [books] are often prejudiced or one-sided and the latter are too emotional to be reliable. In my books I hold the balance, criticizing the Arab and the European where criticism is just, and bringing out the good qualities of both – a work of eliminations, you might say, and contrasts

---

<sup>1</sup> Rihani, Ameen Albert, *Faylasuf-ul Furaika Sahib-ul Madinat-il Uzhma, (The Philosopher of Freike, Author of the Great City)*, a critical study, Al-Jeel Publishers, Beirut, 1987, Appendix II, pp. 365-379.

<sup>2</sup> *Ameen Rihani English Letters*, Rihani Museum Archives, computer typewritten copy, Vol. II, Chap. III, p. 561.

<sup>3</sup> *Ameen Rihani English Letters*, Vol. II, Chap. IV, p. 606.

and harmonies. I maintain that they are essential for the better understanding of present-day Arabia and for peace in the Near East...”<sup>1</sup>

### **Rihani Tribute to Al-Firdausi**

In 1934, Rihani published his new play in Arabic entitle *Wafa’uz Zaman (Faithful Time)* celebrating the millennial of Al-Firdausi, the Persian poet, a prose play in two acts, the first in four scenes and the second in eight scenes. The play has been translated into Persian and French.<sup>2</sup> Rihani was also invited to participate in the millennial conference of Al-Firdausi where he presented a paper in Arabic on the subject. In recognition of this remarkable work, the Shah of Iran, Riza Pahlevi, honored Rihani with the Royal Iranian Decoration.

During the thirties of the twentieth century Rihani became a continuous contributor to two leading magazines in New York, namely *Asia Magazine* and *Travel Magazine*. The Rihani articles published in these two magazines were basically dealing with political and literary issues covering the Middle East and specifically the Arab World in their present situations and future aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Iraqi Muse**

In 1934 Rihani published his Arabic work entitled *Faisal-ul Awwal (Faisal the First)*. It is a close first hand portrait of the King of Iraq, his character and his political and national insight for the future of Iraq and the neighboring Arab countries. One year later, in 1935, another work was published for Rihani entitled *Qalb-ul Iraq (The Heart of Iraq)*. It gives a vivid analysis on the political, intellectual and historical aspects of the Iraqi situation in the twenties and thirties of the Twentieth century. These two works constitute, together with the previously mentioned English manuscript of Rihani entitled **Iraq During the Days of King Faisal the First**, what could be

---

<sup>1</sup> From a letter to Mr. Henry Allen Moe, Secretary of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York, *Ameen Rihani English Letters*, Vol. II, Chap. IV, p. 614.

<sup>2</sup> The Persian translation of *Wafa’uz Zaman* was written by by Mohammed Ṭabāṭabāii, Tehran, 1936, 48 pages, and the French translation written by Felix Fares entitled *Temps Fidèle*, Beirut, 1936, the original translated manuscript is preserved at the Rihani Museum archives, Freike, Lebanon.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the document entitled: “The International Publications of Ameen Rihani”, Rihani Museum Archives, Freike, Lebanon.

called as the Iraqi Muse or the Iraqi trilogy. According to present Middle Eastern scholars it is hard to understand what is going on in the Arab World and the Middle East in 2020, without reading the Arab Trilogy (Three Volumes) and the Iraqi Trilogy (Three Volumes) of Ameen Rihani written between 1924 and 1934.

### **A Lebanese Intellectual Activist**

Rihani delivered numerous speeches in Lebanon and the Arab world. Magazines and newspapers, in Arabic, French and English, published his articles and the news of his activities. Meanwhile, Rihani stepped up his campaign against the French mandate in Lebanon. As for the speech that raised the irritation of the French and moved them directly against him, is his speech entitled "Between Two Eras"<sup>1</sup>, and in it compares the grievances of the Ottoman regime with the tyranny of the French mandate. Rihani delivered that speech in the afternoon of December 24, 1933 at the Grand Theatre the largest assembly hall in Beirut at the time. Next morning a decree was issued by the French High Commissioner, Count De Martel, according to which Ameen Rihani is considered an unwanted “undesirable” person on Lebanese soil. It stipulates that he must leave the country no later than two weeks. Then he leaves Lebanon to Iraq at the invitation of King Ghazi.

He also participated in the Arab American movement championing the Arab Palestinian cause, especially in New York and other American cities. Much of this activity focused on countering the rising influence of the American Zionist lobby, which supported a separate Jewish state in Palestine. He met with various U.S. officials in this regard and, during the 1920s and 1930s, was active on behalf of the Arab American, Palestine Anti-Zionism Society (later renamed the Arab National League). Rihani publicly debated leading figures in the American Zionist movement,

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to Rihani’s address “Between Two Eras”, in his book: *Al-Qawmiyyāt (Nationalisms)*, Ameen Rihani *The Complete Arabic Works*, 2016, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 1010-1015.

and published numerous articles critical of political Zionism. Most of this material is published in a book entitled *The Fate of Palestine*.<sup>1</sup>

In 1939, Rihani received an invitation from the High Spanish Commissioner in Morocco, Colonel Juan Beigbeder, to visit Morocco and Spain. On his way back from New York, Rihani visited the two countries for about three months (May-July) with the idea to write about his visit. This project would be a complementary work for his previous books on Oriental Arabia. Writing about Occidental Arabia was significant to the author in order to end up with a comprehensive picture of the total Arab World with its actual social, intellectual, and political situation during the first half of the twentieth century. The visit resulted with two works: *Al-Maghreb-ul Aqsa (The Far Morocco)*, in three parts: part one includes: the Spanish mandate, the Kalifate rule, the education and the political parties...; part two covers: Al-Khalifa Al-Hasan, Colonel Juan Beigbeder, Ash-Sharif Ahmas Ar-Raysouni, the mountains, the Arabs and the Berbers...; part three comprises: Madrid, General Franco, in the Kalifate Palace...<sup>2</sup> The other related work is about Andalusia. It carries the title of Nour-ul Andalus (*The Illumination of Andalusia*). It talks about the Green Island, Al-Andalus, Ishbilia, the Heroes of Tulaytila, The Nature of the land and its people, Cordoba, Bergos, the Illumination of Al-Andalus...<sup>3</sup> The virtual dialogue, or interview, in this last chapter, between Rihani and Averroes is considered to be a piece of vivid literature and philosophy as expressed by Rihani's significant insights and momentous visions.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1939, Ameen writes to his brother Joe about his new work. He describes this new project saying: "Th[is] is a part of the debt I owe to our native mountains and our forefathers there. I have written books on every section of Arabia, and my Lebanon friends have complained – rightly so – that I haven't yet written anything about Mt. Lebanon. The book is to be free from

---

<sup>1</sup> Rihani, Ameen, *The Fate of Palestine*, written mostly between 1931 and 1937, The Rihani printing and Publishing House, Beirut, 1967 posthumously, 166 pages. The Book was translated into Arabic by D. Tansa Zakka under the title of *Masir Filistin*, Al-Jeel Publishers, Beirut, 1998, 120 pages.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Maghrubu-ul Aqsa, (The Far Morocco)*, 1952 posthumously, Al-Ma'aref Publishers, Cairo, Egypt. Translated into Spanish by Carmen Ruiz Bravo-Villasante (1994), Universidad Autonoma De Madrid, Madrid, Spain.

<sup>3</sup> *Nour-ul Andalus, (Nour-ul Andalus)*, 1952 posthumously, Al-Ma'aref Publishers, Cairo, Egypt. Translated into Spanish by Carmen Ruiz Bravo-Villasante (1994), Universidad Autonoma De Madrid, Madrid, Spain.



any controversial matter, religious or political. It is a book of little journeys to out of the way places in the mountains, where the old life, with its quaint traditions and manners, remains almost intact. It's going to be one of my best Arabic books as I'm putting all my heart in it. I might call it *The Heart of Lebanon*..." And yes, he calls it *Qalb-u Lubnān (The Heart of Lebanon)*<sup>1</sup>. This work was planned by the author to include seventeen journeys to Lebanon covering its villages and cities from the distant South to the remote North, and from Beirut, its capital, to Baalbek and Hermel, up to the North East. He completed writing nine journeys out of seventeen when his death interrupted his last, and most fervent work leaving it incomplete. The nine journeys are: The Cedars; Wherever the Road Leads; Byblos; The Cedars of Jaj; The La'lou'; Afqa; Amchit; Gharzouz; In the Folds of Time; the eight ones left incomplete or void are: Springs from Baskinta to Farayya; Manufactories from Antelias to Tripoli; Ash-Shouf; Jizzine and Below; Marjioun and Beyond; The South, Jabal Amel and its Villages; Tripoli, Seer and Qadisha Valley; Freike Valley.<sup>2</sup>

### **The End Story**

On August 20, 1940 Ameen wanted to ride a bicycle on the road next to his house in his hometown Freike. However, a nerve seizure did occur with his right hand while he was on the bike and while trying to avoid a coming car, thus he couldn't maintain a balance between the car and the edge of the turn. As a result, he fell off the bike and chop down under the road about half a meter high. This fall led to bruising, wounds, and other injuries in his head and legs that did require hospitalization.

On September 13, 1940, at 1:00 pm, Rihani died at age 64 in his hometown of Freike, Lebanon. The cause of his death was the infectious injuries from multiple fractures of the skull and right hip joint. The news of his death was broadcast to many parts of the world. Representatives of Arab kings and rulers and of foreign diplomatic missions, together with leading poets, writers,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Qalb-u Lubnān (The Heart of Lebanon)*, The Sader-Rihani Printing Press, Beirut, 1947 posthumously. It was translated into English by Professor Henri Melki, 2005, Notre Dame University Press, Beirut, 498 pages.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to *Qalb-u Lubnān, in Ameen Rihani The Complete Arabic Works*, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 2016, Vol. IV, pp. 3483-3865.

and other intellectuals from Lebanon and the Arab World, attended the funeral ceremony. He was laid to rest in the Rihani Family Mausoleum in Freike.

Rihani left 30 works in Arabic (all published), 35 in English (20 published and 15 manuscripts), and a collection of 66 art sketches drawn in pencil, chalk, or Chinese ink.

Thirteen years after his death, in 1953, his brother Albert established the Ameen Rihani Museum in Freike to honor his brother's legacy. The inauguration of the Ameen Rihani Museum took place on September 14, 1954 under the patronage of H. E. Mr. Camille Chamoun, President of the Republic of Lebanon.

### **Major International Conferences on Ameen Rihani**

In November 24-30, 1965, The Cultural Council of North Metn District, Lebanon, organized a memorial week commemorating 25 years of Rihani's departure. This event took place under the patronage of H. E. Mr. Charles Helou, President of the Lebanese Republic. The program included lectures, panel discussions, ceremonies and art festivities for the occasion. Among lecture subjects and discussions are: the vanguard pioneer, his political thought, his effective and influential literature, his philosophy, the humanist, the frontline Lebanese thinker, the literary critic, the futurist, Rihani and Charles Corm... Orientalists and other scholars participated from outside countries such as: Russia, Spain, Italy, Britain, (Czechoslovakia) Czech Republic and Slovenia, France, United States, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

In November 1976, a conference took place in Los Angeles, California, celebrating the 100 anniversary of the birth of Ameen Rihani. The conference discussed major related issues such as: Rihani and free verse in modern Arabic literature, philosophical dimensions in the Rihani Essays *Ar-Rihaniyyāt*, Rihani the literary critic, *The Book of Khalid*, Rihani the play writer, Rihani and Andalusia, Rihani and Arabia. Scholars participated from Harvard University, Toronto University, University of California/Berkley, Texas University, Institute of Linguistic Studies,

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the memorial book entitled: *Ameen Ar-Rihani Ba'da Rub'i Qarn (Ameen Rihani After a Quarter of a Century)*, North Metn Cultural Council, Beirut, 1966, 320 pages.

Washington D.C., Minnesota University and New York University. Among other scholars: Isa Bullata, Bill Widener, Munah Khoury, Steve Blackburn, Mohammad Alwan, Najm Bazerjan...

The centennial celebrations were delayed in Lebanon because of the war. In September 1988 the Union of Lebanese Writers together with the Union of Arab Writers organized the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rihani's birthday at the American University of Beirut. Sessions included the following topics: Rihani and the Arab Cause, Rihani and Liberation and Democracy Issues, Rihani and Philosophic Thought, Rihani and Creative Writing. Papers included: Rihani and secular Arabism, the liberation movement, modern religious and political thought in Rihani's works, Rihani and philosophic thought, the human aspect in Rihani's national thinking, the spirituality of the Occident and the Materialism of the Orient in Rihani's philosophy, where lays the issue of writing and creativity, the natural law and the need for Khalid to suffer, the incentives and results of writing in English.<sup>1</sup>

In November 2002, another international conference took place at the American University of Washington under the title of Ameen Rihani Bridging East and West, A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding. Subjects of common concern were: Rihani the Arab-American transcendentalist; Rihani and cultural political dialogue; Pragmatism and utilitarianism according to Rihani; Rihani and H. G. Wells; Scholar participants came from Indiana University, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, Georgetown University, Maryland University, Maryland, American University, Washington, D. C., Lebanese American University, Lebanon and Notre Dame University, Lebanon.

In November 24-26, 2010, The Arab and Islamic Studies Department at the University of Sydney, Australia, organized an International Conference in celebration of the Centennial of *Ar-Rihaniyyāt (The Rihani Essays)*. Scholars participated from the University of Sydney, Australia; The Lebanese-American University, Lebanon; Notre Dame University, Lebanon; the University of Jordan, Jordan; and the University of Manchester, UK. Topics included: Arab Enlightenment:

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ameen Rihani, a Renaissance Pioneer from Lebanon*, 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Birthday, Al-Ilm lil-Malayeen Publishers, Beirut, 1988, 285 pages.

Rational Drifts, Utopian Dreams, the Rihani Example; Ameen Rihani and Muhammad Iqbal; The Melting Pot: Ameen Rihani and his World; Rihani Religious Tolerance Revisited; Ameen Rihani’s Uncanny Message in *The Book of Khalid*; Ameen Rihani on the Role of Intellectuals; Rihani and Tagore; *Ar-Rihaniyyāt* the Key to Understand Rihani.<sup>1</sup>

On March 17, 2011, The Library of Congress announced Ameen Rihani as “the most influential, prolific and world-renowned Arab-American author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>2</sup>

On March 29, 2011, The Library of Congress organized a symposium on Ameen Rihani in celebration of the Centennial of *The Book of Khalid*, and launched the International Program of the Ameen Rihani Year Around the World (March 30, 2011 – March 30, 2012). Scholars participated in the LOC symposium from the United States, Canada, UK, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. Topics included: The Intellectual and Literary Values of *The Book of Khalid*; *The Book of Khalid* and the Arab-American Narrative of Life in Lower Manhattan; The Spiritual Foundation of Ameen Rihani Thought; Khalid’s Adventures in New York: *The Book of Khalid* and the American Ethnic Novel; Ameen Rihani: A Thinker Whose Time Has Come.<sup>3</sup> Activities of the Rihani International Year Around the World included lectures on Rihani in more than 25 universities in the United States and Canada. Conferences were organized in Lebanon, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and other countries... Busts and statues of Rihani were erected in Lebanon, and the United States, particularly at Tufts University, Boston, and Syracuse University, New York. Media coverage included *CNN*, *BBC*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Al-Arabiya*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other written media in different parts of the world...

The Rihani International Conference that took place in Beirut, Lebanon, December 2011, was organized by the Center for Arab Unity Studies and the University of Sydney, Australia, under the title of: Ameen Rihani and Arab Renewal: Challenges of Change in Literature, Thought and

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Arab and Islamic Studies, The University of Sydney, Australia, *Ameen Rihani International Conference*, November 24-26, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> *Library of Congress News Release*, Washington, D. C., March 17, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The Library of Congress, *Ameen Rihani Symposium*, March 29, 2011.

Society. Samples of topic papers presented and discussed: Rihani and the notion of reform and revolution; The vision of Rihani in relation to woman rights; Religion and secularism; Intellect, intellectual and political power; Democracy and human rights in Rihani's thought; Nationalism and Arab Unity in the works of Rihani; Literary renovation in his works; Dialogue of civilizations in his novels and short stories; Rihani and poetry; Rihani and rewriting history; Evolution in his thought; East and West in his writings. Scholars participated from the University of Sydney, Australia; Lebanese University, Lebanon; Notre Dame University, Lebanon; Lebanese American University, Lebanon; Kuwait University, Kuwait; Institute of the Arab World, Paris; University of Jordan, Jordan; University of Cairo, Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

The International Conference that took place at Notre Dame University, Lebanon, on Rihani's legacy, in March 2012, included papers dealing with Rihani and Arab-American legacy. Among other topics presented and discussed: The Nahdah and its Problematics: Rihani and the Mahjar; Khalidism and The Great City; Envisioning New Worlds: *The Book of Khalid*, Secularism, Vision, and The Global Future; Women's Issues in Rihani's Feminism; Bolshevism and the Orient: Ameen Rihani and John Reed; Pan-Arab Nationalism; Rihani's prophetic visions; Democracy and human rights in *The Book of Khalid*; The literary critic; Rihani and literary modernity; Rihani's heritage in Russia; Rihani's universal spirituality; Rihani in Georgia...<sup>2</sup> Scholar participants came from: Notre Dame University, Lebanon; University of Pennsylvania; Lebanese American University, Lebanon; Lebanese University; Tblisi State University, Georgia; University of Sydney, Australia; University of Sunderland, UK; St. Petersburg State University, Russia; City University of New York (CUNY).

In November 2016, The International Conference on the Philosophy of Ameen Rihani was organized by Notre Dame University and The American University of Beirut. Among other papers presented and discussed: The image of philosophy in Rihani's writings; The philosophy

---

<sup>1</sup> Hajjar, Nijmeh, *Ameen Rihani and Arab Renewal: Challenges of Change in Literature, Thought and Philosophy*, proceedings of the conference organized by the Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2012, 512 pages.

<sup>2</sup> Oueijan, Naji, B., *Ameen Rihani's Arab-American Legacy from Romanticism to Postmodernism*, Notre Dame University Press, Beirut, 2012, 395 pages.

of social and spiritual evolution in his novel *The Lily of Al-Ghor*; Transcendentalism in Rihani's philosophy; Pantheism in Rihani's poetry of nature; The composition of the name of God in *The Book of Khalid*; Rihani and German Idealism; His philosophy of rationalism; Rihani, Islam, and Nietzsche; National commitment in his philosophy; The "Great City" and modern civilization in Rihani's philosophy; His philosophy of humanism and the spirit of time; Rihani and Heidegger Gaze. Scholar participants in the conference came from The American University of Beirut, Lebanon; Saint Joseph University, Lebanon; Notre Dame University, Lebanon; The Lebanese University, Lebanon; The University of Sydney, Australia; The University of Jordan, Jordan; Doha Institute for Higher Education, Doha, Qatar;<sup>1</sup> It is worth mentioning that this conference focused exclusively, and for the first time, on the philosophy of Ameen Rihani, upon a request from professors of philosophy in the universities who organized or participated in this conference.

## Intellectual Achievements

### The Founding Father of Arab-American Literature

Rihani's early English writings mark the beginning of a school of literature that is Arab in its concern, culture and characteristic, English in language, and American in spirit and platform. He is the first Arab to write English essays, poetry, novels, short stories, art critiques, and travel chronicles. He published his works in the U. S. during the first four decades of the twentieth century. In this sense, he is the forerunner of American literature written by well-known Middle Eastern writers. Thus Rihani is considered to be the founding father of Arab-American literature.

Rihani's first major novel (in English), *The Book of Khalid* (1911), was considered a pioneering literary work that paved the way for Arab-American literature. It combined reality and fiction, East and West, spiritualism and materialism, the Arabs and the Americans, philosophy and literature, in a style of language where Arabic metaphors and English language structures go together in an attempt to create an abstract line where both languages can almost touch. Khalid,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Axes in the Philosophy of Ameen Rihani*, refereed proceedings of the international conference organized by Notre Dame University, Lebanon, and The American University of Beirut; (papers published are either in Arabic, or in English or in French as originally presented), Notre Dame University Press, Beirut, 2017, 715 pages.

the hero of the novel, descends from Baalbek, from the roots of the Cedars in Lebanon and immigrates all the way to New York where he faces all the contradictions of his Oriental soft background and the harshness of the Occidental severe reality. He dreams of the virtual Great City, thinks of the ideal Empire, and looks for the Superman who combines within himself the spirituality of the East, the art of Europe, and the Science of America.

According to several scholars, *The Book of Khalid* is the foundation of a new literary trend towards wisdom and prophecy that seeks to reconcile matter and soul, reason and faith, together with the Orient and the Occident in an attempt to explicate the unity of religions and represent the unity of the universe.

### **The Leading Founding Figure of *Adab Al-Mahjar* (Migrant Literature)**

Rihani is also considered to be the leading figure and founder of "*Adab Al-Mahjar*" (Immigrant Literature). He is the first Arab who wrote complete literary works, either in Arabic or in English, and published in the U. S. (New York). His writings pioneered the movement of modern Arabic literature that played a leading role in the Arab Renaissance and contemporary Arab thought.

His early works *A Treatise of the French Revolution (Nubzha fi-th Thawra-l Farançiyya)*, *The Trilateral Treaty of the Animal Kingdom (Al-Muḥalafa-th Thulathiyya fil-Mamlak-al Ḥayawaniyya)*, *The Muleteer and the Priest (Al-Mukari wal Kahen)*..., published in Arabic in New York, show that his immigrant literature is not nostalgic, like many other immigrant literature at the time, but rather a literary, social, and political criticism that grasp the new ideas from the adopted “new land” and tries to infuse them into the mentality of the “old land” of the ancestors.

Rihani’s Arabic book of essays entitled *Ar-Rihaniyyāt* (1910), endorsed his major philosophic and social beliefs and values that were reflected in his future works. This book consecrated Rihani as a controversial writer paving the way for modernity in Arabic literature and contemporary Arab thinking and philosophy.

Geoffrey Nash compares between Rihani and other migrant writers saying: “None of the other *mahjari* authors had as wide an interest in their adopted country as Ameen Rihani. Confident enough of his own biculturalism, he set out to make an inventory of the impact upon himself, an Arab, of western codes, exploring in the process the wider implications of being a pioneer Arab-American.”<sup>1</sup>

### **First Arab-American Art Critic**

As of 1918, Rihani published a good number of articles on art criticism dealing with the European impressionism and American modern art, during and after WWI. He got acquainted, during that time, with major world renown artists such as Matisse, Goggin, Cezanne and Van Dongen in Paris, and W. Oberhardt, S. J. Woolf, and Troy Kinney in New York. The two major magazines, that published this material for Rihani, are: *The Print Connoisseur*, and *The International Studio*. Rihani was the only Arab-American art critic at the time. These articles were collected, later, and published in a book entitled *Critiques in Art*, 1999 posthumously.

### **An Alternative Perspective to the Orientalist Movement**

His books on Arabia, written originally in Arabic and in English, represent an alternative perspective to the Orientalist movement by giving the world, for the first time, an objective and analytical description of Arabia from an Arab point of view. These are *Maker of Modern Arabia* (1928), *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930), and *Arabian Peak and Desert* (1931). This Arab Trilogy was considered by the publishers in the USA and Europe as best sellers at the time. Rihani during that period, from the late twenties till the late thirties, published in major American and English speaking periodicals around the world. Among these periodicals were: *Asia Journal*, *The Aryan Path*, *Asia Magazine*, *The Chicago Daily News*, *Current History*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *New York Times*, *The Open Court*, *The Syrian World*, *The Times*, *Travel*<sup>2</sup>. The author wrote accounts of his travels to Arabia, in Arabic first, and were published under the titles of *Muluk-ul Arab* (Kings of the Arabs), *Tareekh Najd Al-Hadeeth* (History of Modern

---

<sup>1</sup> *100 Years of Selected Writings on Ameen Rihani's The Book of Khalid*, ed. and with an introduction by Paul Jahshan, Platform International, Washington D.C., 2011, p.166.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the document entitled “**The Ameen Rihani International Publications**”, at the Rihani Museum Archives.



Najd), *Qalb-ul Iraq* (The Heart of Iraq), *Qalb Lubnān* and other works on Arabia that were considered to be a remarkably critical and public success.

### **The Pioneer**

Benjamin Lenox Smith summarized the pioneering trend of Rihani in a Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard University confirming that Rihani “was a man of firsts in a variety of fields of publishing... *The Book of Khalid* broke a number of literary barriers. Not only was it the first novel written English by an Arab, hence celebrated as the first example of Arab-American literature, but it was also innovative considering Rihani's national background, in that the novel revolved around Syrian characters and their communal and national concerns, attaching it directly to the Arabic tradition that Rihani knew so well... His free verse poetry was the first of its kind in Arabic, and his historical and anthropological works on the Arabian Peninsula effectively introduced the English speaking world to this part of the globe. He became a well-respected intellectual figure in his days, as his essays were published in major newspapers in New York, London, Cairo and Beirut”.<sup>1</sup>

In this capacity as a pioneer, Nathan C. Funk argues that: “Rihani was a pioneer whose life offers us a model for intercultural reconciliation. Should we choose to follow his example of exploring human conflicts at a deeper existential level, we might find that many of the contradictions that beset us today, for example, between “Islam” and the “West”, or between America and the Arab world, appear much less incorrigible. We might discover completion in the midst of distinctiveness, and unity within a context of inescapable interdependence and share fate.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Major Philosophic Concerns**

- **The Universal Spirit:** Rihani may be one of the few writers in modern times who connected literature to philosophy, and connected philosophy to politics. This connection

---

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Lenox Smith, Writing *Amrīkā* Literary Encounters with America in Arabic Literature, a dissertation presented to The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, August 2014, a chapter on Ameen Rihani (pp. 54-78), pp. 56-57.

<sup>2</sup> *100 Years of Selected Writings on Ameen Rihani's The Book of Khalid*, ed. and with an introduction by Paul Jahshan, Platform International, Washington D.C., 2011, p.228.

led him to the notion of the Universal Spirit which builds a direct relationship between literature, philosophy and politics. This notion made it easier for him to discover the Oriental aspect of the Occident, and the Occidental feature of the Orient. This is also what made the poet Adonis write about the “Universal Creativity” in Rihani’s thought: “Rihani establishes the person of no frontiers, no boundaries, the individual who includes in his personality the “greater universe” according to Ibn Arabi. Thus, we celebrate culturally a symbol that does not come from the past, as much as it comes from the future. In this sense Rihani surpasses the personal borders, the borders of identity, civilization and local creativity, to reach the horizons of the contemporary human being, where all intellectual boundaries start falling. This is the key of modernity in Rihani’s literature and thought<sup>1</sup>.

- **Ethics:** Rihani is very much concerned with ethics. He defines it by the powers inherent in the awake human soul, which is affected by accidents and other natural elements. It shows, as well, an amnesty for a primary purpose, which is the satisfaction of this soul and its satisfaction and contentment. Rihani believes that morals in their emergence and diversity are subject, like other aspects of the universe, to external natural and social factors<sup>2</sup>. It is worth mentioning that Rihani connects ethics and politics in his approach to “The Great City”<sup>3</sup>, and to the social reform in “The Reform of the Nation”<sup>4</sup>.
- **Agnosticism:** Rihani deals with agnosticism by beginning with the principle of Socratic knowledge and transcends the philosophy of Cartesian doubt to settle in the process of instability, and in his questioning about secrets of existence. This agnostic position

<sup>1</sup> Adonis, “A Cultural Symbol”, in *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*, Funk, Nathan C., and Betty J. Sitka, eds., New York, Toronto and Oxford: University Press of America, 2004, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ar-Rihaniyyāt*, or *The Rihani Essays*, Arabic original, 2016, pp. 523-540.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 500-505.

<sup>4</sup> *Ar-Rihaniyyat, The Rihani Essays*, translated into English by Mrs. Rula Zuheir Baalbaki, revised by Dr. Amal Saleeby Malek, Platform International, Washington, D. C., 2010, “Ethics”, Vol.I, pp. 199-225; *Extremism and Reform, (At-Tatarruf Wal-Islah)*, 2016, pp. 4462-4474.

becomes an intellectual methodology, in Rihani’s writings, before it develops finally into an estranged tool to face the dilemmas of existence.<sup>1</sup>

- **Trilogies:** According to Rihani, the theory of trilogy finds its human path in the body, mind and spirit; it discovers its universal path in the planets, space and time; and its sun’s route, in the form, fire and light. This trilogy catches its social track in the greed, glory and freedom, and discovers its political way in thought, freedom and oppression... Trilogy is not all good or all bad. Some of it is neither good nor bad. It is simply stripped from human greed. And the entity of these trinities exists by creating a balance between the attractiveness and repulsion of things.<sup>2</sup>
- **Stoicism:** Rihani’s stoic tendency contains mental stimulations and spiritual defenses, that you do not find in contemporary beliefs. In his view, it teaches the duty, which does not exceed the useful necessary work, and clarifies the greatness of patience over adversity, and looks at the good and sad things with a clear eye and a reassuring heart. It is significant to mention that Rihani’s personal life, and daily behavior, were characterized with such moral values.<sup>3</sup>
- **Social and Moral Evolution:** This principle does not stop at Darwin’s theory of evolution but expand it to Huxley and Spenser approach in injecting it with the role of social and moral values within the continuous evolution of humanity. In order to go into the details of Rihani’s concern related to the spiritual role in the social and moral evolution it is empirical to mention some of his articles or chapters on the subject, such as: “Theology and Science” in *Ar-Rihaniyyāt*, Vol. I; “Union and Progress”, in *The Book of Khalid*, Book the Third; and “Myself When Young Did Eagerly Frequent” in *The Path of Vision*.

<sup>1</sup> *Writings of Early Days*, (Shatharāt min ‘Ahd-is Siba), 2016, p. 347; and *The White Way and the Desert*, Platform International, Washington, D. C., 2002 posth., article entitled “Agnosticism”, pp. 71-74.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to *Ar-Rihaniyyāt, The Rihani Essays*, 2010, Vol. II, “Trinities”, pp. 470-474.

<sup>3</sup> *Ar-Rihaniyyāt, The Rihani Essays*, 2010, Vol. II, “The Spring of Despair”, pp. 311-318; also articles in Vol. II, such as “The Rope of Optimism” and “The Most Exalted Prophet”.

- **Transcendentalism:** It is essential to mention highlight two remarks typical of Rihani's trend of thought: First: His transcendentalism is an obvious result of his support to social and moral evolution. Both are concerned with a balance between the material and moral aspects of the individual, the society, and life as a whole. Second: Rihani's transcendentalism is not a copy of the American or European school of thought along these lines. He was clearly aware of the significance of giving transcendentalism an Oriental touch, and an Eastern spirit, in order to complement the Western aspect of this school of Philosophy and literature.<sup>1</sup>
- **Idealism:** Rihani, found out that idealism is a philosophic concern, specifically as explained by German philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Fichte and Schelling. Once again, he saw the importance of infusing Idealism, in the German philosophic sense, in other disciplines of Humanity and social sciences, as well as other diversified channels of thought particularly related to literature and politics. His idealism is well clarified in three English works of his, namely; *The Book of Khalid*, *The Path of Vision*, and *The White Way and the Desert*. In these works, Rihani considers that our best leader in life is 'the Highest Ideal', where the material and the spiritual know how to connect, and without it any goals are much more difficult to achieve. This is one good reason for his philosophic positivism.<sup>2</sup>
- **Mysticism:** In his famous poem "A Chant of Mystics" Rihani considers that the human body is but a frame, or a knot shell, to the human soul. That soul seeks the face of God at noon time, and listens to His voice through the running water or through the thunders and strong tempests. His voice is elevated through the voices of other Sufis on their way seeking Truth and reaching a state of free belief in their unity with God...<sup>3</sup> However

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to *The Book of Khalid*, Book The First, "The Cellar of the Soul"; Book the Second, "To Nature" and "The Kaaba of Solitude"; *Ar-Rihaniyyāt*, Vol. I, "The Valley of Freike"; and *The Path of Vision* "From Concord to Syria" and "A footnote of Nature".

<sup>2</sup> Refer to *The Book of Khalid*, Book The Second, "The Vineyard in the Kaaba", and "The Sign of The Hermit"; *The Path of Vision*, "The Highest Ideal" and "The Question of Pontius Pilate"; and *The White Way and The Desert*, "Where East and West Meet" and "The Plant of the Ideal".

<sup>3</sup> *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems*, ed. with an introduction by Bushrui, S. B., and J. M. Munro, The Rihani Publishing House, 1970, the poem entitled "A Chant of Mystics", pp. 99-121.

Rihani criticizes the traditional Sufis who, after death, become surrounded with legendary tales that have nothing to do with the original pure mysticism.<sup>1</sup>

- **The Great City:** This City, according to Rihani, is based on the trilogy of freedom, equity and justice.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have compared Rihani's "Great City", with Plato's Republic, Al-Farabi's Virtuous City, St. Augustin City of God. Another basic trilogy for the Great City is Love, Light and Will.<sup>3</sup> The citizen of the "Great City" is the "Superman" who combines the spirituality of the East with the Art of Europe and the Science of the United States.<sup>4</sup> The principles of the "Great City" are the bases for the political thought of Rihani that he carried through his writings, in Arabic and English, since his early works before 1909 till his death in 1940.

Scholars, and renown media writers, at the dawn of the twenty first century, recognize the role of Rihani in the discourse of civilizations: Philip Kennicott of *The Washington Post*, argues that "There are some important liberal Arab intellectuals who firmly believe a broader revival of Rihani's work would be a balm for the world... Rihani articulated an inspiring sense of dual identity. He was an Arab *and* an American, a perspective critic of both worlds, and his writings are a constant dialogue between two identities he refused to collapse with anything so simple as a hyphen... There is an openness and sincerity in his writing that is charismatic. Rihani is the voice that trumps any notion of a fundamental incompatibility between East and West".<sup>5</sup>

The relevancy significance of Rihani is highlighted by William McGurn, of *The Wall Street Journal*, with his statement: "Ameen Rihani's Writings on American freedom and religious tolerance are as relevant today..."<sup>6</sup> This is similar to a previous testimonial given by Max

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to (*Kings of Arabia*) *Muluk-ul Arab*, Vol. I, "Adyan wa Ashjan" (Religions and Chaos) and "Ahmad Bin Idris and Sufism".

<sup>2</sup> *Ar-Rihaniyyāt*, 2016, Vol. I, Part I, "The Great City", pp. 500-505.

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Khalid*, Book The Third, 2000, "Self-Ecstatic", pp. 239-248.

<sup>4</sup> For the Superman of the Great City refer to *The Book of Khalid*, 2000, pp. 113, 165, 237.

<sup>5</sup> *The Washington Post*, Washington D.C., April 22, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> *The Wall Street Journal*, New York, May 24, 2011.

Rodenbeck, of the *Economist*, who remarks that: “A revealing account of Abdul Aziz's court in the 1920s by Ameen Rihani, a Lebanese-American author, remains just as valid today.”<sup>1</sup>

Roger Allen, the leading American Orientalist today, sums it up, by arguing: “The time for re-assessment of Ameen Rihani’s role is long overdue... I might add that... the central cultural space that Rihani so clearly claimed as his own is precisely the venue for a different view of our world and the role of reasoned and esthetically pleasing communication within it.”<sup>2</sup>

From the 35 works in English that Rihani left, 15 are manuscripts with paper copies at the Library of Congress, and digital copies at the Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon, Notre Dame University-Louaize, Lebanon, (NDU), and North Carolina State University, the Khairallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies (NCSU/KCLDS). The 30 works in Arabic are all published. The collection of 66 sketches, in chalk, Chinese ink, and pencil, includes topics related to: Shakespearian characters, animal caricatures, human caricatures, nudes, female figures, Arab figures, and one landscape. The whole collection is found in the Ameen Rihani Museum, Freike, Lebanon.

Interest in Rihani’s works has been increased during the last few decades. Books and dissertations written about him have reached, so far, a total of 156 works, 55 of which are in English and other European languages, the remaining works are in Arabic and other Asian languages. The translations of Rihani’s works, and/or selections have reached a total of 58 translations distributed in 21 languages European and Asian. According to the Rihani Museum archives of articles and news published on Rihani, this collection has reached a total of 7017 references published in 116 countries and a total of 32 languages around the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Economist*, London, March 23, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Ameen Rihani's Arab-American Legacy: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*, ed. with an introduction by N. Oueijan, Notre Dame University Press, Beirut, 2012, p. 33.