The Rise of Arab-American Literature: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in the Work of Ameen Rihani

Waïl S. Hassan

Although the history of Arab immigration to the US is well documented, the genesis of Arab-American literature remains to be adequately charted.[1] A few general overviews, studies of individual authors, and collections of essays provide useful entry points into the subject, but a systematic account of the birth and development of a tradition that is now in its second century remains to be undertaken.[2] Such a project obviously cannot be fulfilled here, but the aim of this article is to highlight the historical and discursive conditions that shaped the intellectual, political, and literary projects of the first Arab-American writer, Ameen Rihani (1876–1940), and his contemporaries, and how those projects converged in his major novel, *The Book of Khalid* (1911).

In addition to that first Arab-American novel, Rihani is the author of the first Arab-American poetry collection *Myrtle and Myrrh* (1905) and the first Arab-American play *Wajdah* (1909); those three texts are the first English-language literary works by an Arab writer anywhere. Subsequently, he published another poetry collection, *A Chant of Mystics* (1921), a treatise on *The Descent of Bolshevism* (1920), and a volume of essays, *The Path of Vision: Essays of East and West* (1921). His first English-language publication, however, was *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala* (1903), a translation of selected poems by tenth-century Arab poet Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri (with another volume, *The Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala*, following in 1918), who is known in the Arabic literary tradition as a great skeptic and rationalist poet-philosopher. This is the first English translation from Arabic poetry by an Arab translator.

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Rihani was also the first Arab literary critic and travelogue writer in English, with an important study on *The Lore of the Arabian Nights* (written in 1928–30 and unpublished until 2002) and three books on the Arabian peninsula and the founder of the Saudi dynasty: *The Maker of Modern Arabia* (1928), *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930), and *Arabian Peak and Desert* (1931). In Arabic, Rihani published poetry, literary criticism, essays, history, books on his travels throughout the Arab world, and studies of nearly all of its heads of state. In fact, he was already a celebrated writer in Arabic before he published anything in English. His *Nabdha fi al-thawrah al-firinsiyyah* (Treatise on the French Revolution) appeared in 1902, and numerous articles, speeches, short stories, and poems established his literary reputation in the Arab world by the turn of the century. He introduced prose poetry for the first time into the Arabic language and spearheaded an important literary movement known as *mahjar* (immigrant) poetry, which introduced European Romantic themes into Arabic. His collected Arabic works, *Al-A'mal al-'arabiyyah al-kamilah* (1980–86), edited by Ameen Albert Rihani, fill 12 substantial volumes.[3]

What unites this prolific output in Arabic and English is an overarching project of cultural translation that ambitiously aimed at reinterpreting the "East" and the "West" to each other and bringing about a civilizational synthesis, coupled with a tireless pursuit of Arab independence, first from the Ottoman Empire and then from European colonialism, and political unity. Although Rihani shared those twin objectives with many of his contemporaries, his approach was shaped by his location in the US. The first objective dates back to the beginnings of the Arab *Nahda* (or renaissance) in the 1830s. In the wake of the French occupation of Egypt (1798–1801), it became all too clear to Egypt's ruler Muhammad Ali (1805–48) that Europe's strength was the result of modern scientific knowledge, and it was in the interests of acquiring that knowledge that he began sending educational missions to France in the 1820s. In 1831, an Egyptian Islamic scholar named Rifa'a al-Tahtawi returned from one such mission in Paris to establish a school for translation that aimed at disseminating modern European science and ideas. The core of *Nahda* reformism was selective appropriation of those modern European ideas, sciences, and institutions that would strengthen Arab societies while rejecting those aspects of Europe that did not harmonize with Arab Islamic mores and values. Christian Levantine intellectuals who played an important role in the movement from the 1860s onwards, and to whom Rihani was heir, contributed to the rise of secular Arab nationalism as an anti-Ottoman ideology.[4] But this impulse was not sectarian *per se*, for it was shared by many

Muslim intellectuals and political leaders from the early nineteenth century and was translated into the Arab Revolt of 1916, which was led by the Sharif Husayn of Mecca and coordinated with the British invasion of Palestine in the final phase of World War I. In the McMahon–Husayn correspondence of 1915–16, leading up to the Revolt, the British encouraged Arab aspirations to independence, only to conclude secretly the Sykes–Picot agreement with the French in 1916 which effectively divided the Arab world into spheres of influence, and to issue the Balfour Declaration in 1917 promising the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.[5] None of these could have been seen by Arab nationalists as anything but a betrayal by the British, something that deepened the mistrust felt by many toward Europe and further complicated the task of social and political reform predicated on cultural translation and synthesis. Inspired by Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, some Arabs hoped that the US would play a more positive role in the region than the European powers, whose colonial ambitions in the region had become obvious, and some even called for a US mandate in the region (Khalidi 32–33).

The Syrian Christian intellectuals who came to the US in the late nineteenth century and established a number of Arabic-language newspapers in the 1890s were influenced by the *Nahda*.[6] They wrote in Arabic, and many of them were outspoken in their criticism of the Ottomans and of social conditions back home, especially religious superstition and the power of the clergy. Although many of those early immigrants imported with them local sectarian biases, espoused by various newspapers at the time, gradually, and under pressure from the larger society in which they became a racialized minority,[7] those biases began to be fused into a "Syrian" identity in the US and a nationalist politics with respect to events back home. For example, when Ameen Rihani emigrated to the US in 1888 at the age of 12, he was accompanied by his uncle ʻAbduh Rihani and his teacher Naoum Mokarzel, who in 1898 founded a newspaper called *Al-Hoda* (Guidance), "to serve the cause of a Christian, Maronite-dominated Lebanese nation under French tutelage, independent of the Ottoman Empire." Mokarzel's impulse was to oppose the publishers of another paper *Kawkab Amrika* (The Star of America), begun in 1892, which "did not espouse a religious bias" and "remained loyal to the Ottoman Empire, perhaps because of the [founder's] family's Damascene (rather than Lebanese) origin and Eastern Orthodox Christian faith, but more likely because this educated, elite family was among the advocates of the incipient Syrian nationalist philosophy," which "stressed Syrian unity through political and social reforms, respectful coexistence between the numerous rival religious sects, and Syrian patriotism—a patriotism aimed more at the concept

of a Syrian people than a Syrian nation—and by implication, loyalty to the Ottoman Empire" (Naff, "Arabic" 7). In contrast, *Mir'at al-Gharb* (Mirror of the West) was established in 1899 as the voice of the Syrian Orthodox and anti-Ottoman Arabism, while the Druze and Muslim immigrants founded *Al-Bayan* (The Explanation) in 1911 (Naff, "Arabic" 8). In his early speeches and essays published in those papers, often against the grain of their sectarian biases, Rihani himself would be so critical of the Maronite Church that he was excommunicated in 1903, an event dramatized in *The Book of Khalid*. Similarly, Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931), also of Maronite background, wrote a number of short stories in Arabic, dramatizing the corruption and tyranny of the clergy that were directly influenced by Rihani (Naimy 21–22, 25–26). Rihani was also a nationalist in that he advocated Arab unity and independence from the Ottomans and later from European colonialism, a goal which he hoped would be achieved with the aid of the US. He believed that because of its historical experience as a former colony and the ideals expressed in its Declaration of Independence, the US would be a natural ally in the Arab struggle for national liberation, which he hoped would come to fruition with the creation of the United Arab States, on the US model, after the demise of the Ottoman empire. The task, therefore, was to explain both this historical affinity between the US and the Arab world and the advantages of their forging an alliance. His freelance diplomacy in the 1920s and 1930s aimed at cementing the relations between Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, founder of the Saudi dynasty, on whom Rihani set his hopes for unifying Arabs, and the US government. Rihani's Arabic travel books aimed at bringing the Arab world closer together, while his English travel books of the same period (self-translations from the Arabic originals) sought to familiarize readers with Abdul-Aziz and his kingdom.[8]

Rihani's literary, intellectual, and political project is captured in the title of the published proceedings of a symposium held a few months after 9/11 to celebrate his life work: *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*.[9] Heir to two literary and cultural traditions, Rihani not only contributed to both but also tried to fuse them together. That he wrote in two languages throughout his life meant that such "bridging" involved constant literary and cultural translation. That process immediately collided with the discourse of Orientalism. Rihani, Gibran (who wrote in Arabic and English), and Abraham Rihbany (a Syrian-American Protestant minister who wrote the first Arab-American autobiography, *A Far Journey* (1914), and several other well-received books in English in the 1910s and 1920s) knew that addressing American readers required more than just the ability to write in a foreign language. They had to situate themselves in relation to a powerful discourse through

which their readers had already formed their ideas about that distant culture. The shift from Arabic to English meant that Anglophone Arab-American literature was to be constrained by that antecedent discourse, in relation to which the nascent literary tradition must constantly define itself. Obviously, when writing in Arabic, Rihani and Gibran not only had a different agenda, but also enjoyed greater discursive latitude in that, first, they did not have to explain Arab culture to Arabic readers; secondly, they were not expected by their readers to pose as Oriental spokesmen; and thirdly, they did not have to abide by discursive strictures imposed on their cultures by a conquering knowledge system—with its stereotypes, typologies, culturalist and racialist frames of reference, privileged texts and modes, and so forth—even when they could not free themselves entirely from its powerful imprint. They wrote within an Arabic cultural discourse and could ignore or dismiss simplistic or offensive Orientalist descriptions, or they could boldly and directly challenge their imperialistic underpinnings. When writing in English, however, they had to couch their message in ways that guaranteed, or at least increased, the likelihood of its acceptance—of *their* acceptance as writers—by American readers. As Evelyn Shakir points out, "the first generation of Arab-American writers (as might be expected of immigrants in an age of rampant xenophobia) dressed carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or man of letters. They could not hide their foreignness, but they could make it respectable" (Shakir, "Arab-American Literature" 6). Some of those roles (such as Gibran's posture as a mystic or Oriental sage) are, of course, among the stereotypes circulating within Orientalism's regime of truth, whereas others (Rihani as a man of letters and Abraham Rihbany as a Protestant minister) were carefully calculated to challenge aspects of it, in an effort not only to "make foreignness respectable," but also to redefine the relationship between "East" and "West."[10] The implied message was, "Here we are, we can produce literature that draws upon the most distinguished Western writers, and we can minister to American Protestant congregations, but we, too, are Orientals."

Edward Said described the stance of the Orientalist as that of a translator: "The relationship between Orientalist and Orient was essentially hermeneutical: standing before a distant, barely intelligible civilization or cultural monument, the Orientalist scholar reduced the obscurity by translating, sympathetically portraying, inwardly grasping the hard-to-reach object. Yet the Orientalist remained outside the Orient, which, however much was made to appear intelligible, remained beyond the occident" (222). Early

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Arab-American writers in English tried to appropriate that stance of Orientalist translator and, in fact, their implicit claim was that they were better equipped to interpret the Orient than European Orientalists. Immigrating to the US as a child like Gibran and Rihani (both at age 12), or as youth like Rihbany (age 22) out of economic necessity, they were intermittently educated in Arabic, French, or American schools in Lebanon and the US, and their self-education was eclectic. Like Said, they came to Arabic studies belatedly.[11] Therefore, it was inevitable for them to subordinate their experience to the systematic, authoritative, and widely dispersed Orientalist knowledge. Nevertheless, they felt the kind of tension between that knowledge and their own lived experience which was to spur Said's critical project, but they did not have the benefit of the privileged family background that afforded him a first-rate education, or the conceptual tools with which to interrogate Orientalism as he would do seven decades later, or the historical advantage he enjoyed (or suffered) of witnessing the decolonization and Civil Rights movements, the catastrophic events in Palestine, and the rising tide of anti-Arab racism in the US over the course of the twentieth century, all of which in different ways motivated and inspired the oppositional thrust of his work. In the early twentieth century, in contrast, it was still possible for Gibran to see British and French colonialism in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon as a civilizing force (*Nusus* 60–65). It was also possible for Rihani to see the US as a potential ally in the Arab struggle for independence. Rihbany went even farther; by a logic that seems eerily familiar and thoroughly disturbing to us today, in books like *Militant American and Jesus Christ* (1917) he provided a religious argument for US intervention in World War I, and in *America Save the Near East* (1918) he advocated US stewardship over the region: "I do not say that America is the best 'colonizer,' nor that Syria's real need is to be 'colonized' by being tied to the chariot of a strong and *conquering* nation. The cry is rather for a big-hearted, disinterested helper, whose motives shall be above suspicion, and whose reward, the joy of helpfulness" (52).

Arab-American writers' attempts to replace the Orientalists as interpreters or translators of the Orient were a way of claiming cultural space and voice, countering the negativity associated with the Orient, and mediating between it and the West for the sake of greater cross-cultural understanding. Said's book and the polemics it initiated, together with the areas of inquiry it opened up, such as postcolonial studies, represents a watershed in that contest over voice, representation, and discursive power in which early Arab Americans engaged. Said's critique of Orientalism and of the concept of the Orient calls into question the antithetical construct

of the Occident or the West: "if it [his critique of Orientalism] eliminates the 'Orient' and 'Occident' altogether, then we shall have advanced in the process of what Raymond Williams has called the 'unlearning' of 'the inherent dominative mode'" (Said 28). Early Arab-American writers did not go so far, however, for they accepted the Orientalist distinction between the contrasting essences of East and West: the former seen as passive, mystical, spiritual, traditional, and backward, and the latter correspondingly as aggressive, rational, materialistic, modern, and progressive. What they wanted to contest was the hierarchy of values attached to the poles of this binary. They were angry at, and rebellious against, the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Empire and highly critical of social and political conditions in Syria and the rest of the Arab world, and they likewise correspondingly admired the social, political, and technological advances of Western European countries and especially the US. But they were also very conscious and proud of a great civilizational past and a rich cultural and literary heritage, to which they made a considerable contribution through their Arabic prose and poetry, written in the US.[12] Therefore, they could not accept the idea of the East's inferiority. Moreover, the prevailing attitude toward Europe within what Albert Hourani calls the "liberal" school of Arabic thought from the 1830s onwards emphasized critically selective borrowing from Europe; only those ideas and sciences deemed compatible with Arab culture and necessary for the reform of its social institutions were to be adopted, while much else that characterized Western social customs and values that were deemed decadent, overly materialistic, or spiritually anemic by both Islamic and Levantine Christian standards were considered in need of reform and to be rejected. Given the balance of power and the challenges of social reform in their countries, Arab intellectuals in the Arab world never imagined themselves on a mission to reform the West, but they discriminated sharply between what they considered to be the advantages and disadvantages of modern Europe, and advocated selective borrowing from it.

Because of their location in the US, Arab immigrant intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century saw themselves as reformers of East *and* West. The discursive challenge facing them was to replace Orientalist valuations with a model of duality without hierarchy, whereby the contrasting essences were seen as existing in a sort of metaphysical equilibrium and reciprocity: East and West complement, need, and have something to teach each other. Rihbany puts it succinctly: "The world needs a characteristic Oriental civilization as it needs a characteristic Occidental civilization" (*Wise Men* 159). Reform of the East depends on the

inspiration and material assistance from the West, but "if it is to be of significant value to either the East or the West, a new Eastern civilization must be genuinely Eastern. It must not be a replica of Western civilization, which itself needs a hundred reforms" (299–300). A "better East" (289) would be more suitable to Western business interests (299), yet would remain free from the material and spiritual ravages of industrialization discernible in "New York, Chicago, and London" (300). By the same token, "the Oriental must never cease to teach his Occidental brother, nor ever allow himself to forget his own great spiritual maxims which have guided the course of his life for so many centuries" (301). At the end of the day, East would still be East, and West be West.

Others like Rihani (and less explicitly Gibran) envisioned a Hegelian dynamic that would eventually blend East and West into a higher civilizational synthesis, and saw themselves in the role of two-way reformers and facilitators of that process. Like Rihbany, they accepted the Orientalist distinction between East and West, but rejected its historical immutability in favor of a conception of East and West as values and attitudes of mind that are not geographically determined and which can, therefore, circulate among cultures over long historical periods. This more plastic form of Orientalism can explain the erstwhile historical ascendancy of Phoenician and Arab civilizations. Thus, pride in an illustrious cultural and civilizational heritage that has much to offer their new country is the theme of Gibran's address "To Young Americans of Syrian Origin," which appeared in the inaugural issue of *The Syrian World*, the first English-language literary and cultural magazine in North America, launched specifically for the benefit of second-generation Arab Americans whose native language was English. Pride in Syrian heritage (or the "Syrian Race," as it was often described at the time) is also the theme of a series of articles by the Reverend W. A. Mansur, published in *The Syrian World* throughout its six-year life (1926–32). Rihani clearly articulated this reconstructed Orientalism in the June 1927 issue of the same magazine. In an address originally delivered two months earlier at the American University of Beirut and titled "Where East and West Meet," Rihani declares that his title "implies a partial denial of the dictum of Rudyard Kipling, megaphoned to the world in a line of verse, 'East is East and West is West, and ne'er the twain shall meet.'" Rihani goes on:

> I admit, at the start, that, from a surface point of view, the evidence is in favor of Mr. Kipling. The East prays, the West dances; the East dreams, the West thinks; the East broods, the West plays. What is a mark of respect in the East, is

> considered an offense in the West: the Oriental, when he enters your house, slips off his shoes at the door; the Occidental finds a hat-rack for his hat. . . . [T]he one is suave and insidious, the other is blunt and often crude. The Oriental is imaginative and metaphoric, the Occidental is literal and "matter-of-fact." Kipling's dictum is in this, at least, wholly to the point. (8)

Here, Rihani validates the Orientalist typology: East and West are homogenous, self-evident, autonomous, and antithetical to one another. However, what is variable is not their projection on symbolic geography, but their traits, which he feels are in need of being refined, nuanced, and historicized:

> Like all generalities, however, these traits are not without exception. They are characteristic, but not exclusive. Take, for instance, the fawning and florid Oriental, extravagant with the metaphor and the puff, he is not a type exclusive. He is a species produced by despotism and its pompous court. The aristocracy kowtows to the emperor; the lower classes kowtow to the aristocracy and to each other. . ..
>
> When absolute monarchies were the rule in Europe, the Europeans, on the whole, were quite Oriental in the art of fawning and adulation; while the extravagant manner, as much in evidence in the nation as around the throne, was revealed, not only in speech, but also in the dress of the period. Consider the ruffles and feathers of mylords at court; the flounces and trains of mylady in waiting; consider the dedications penned by needy scribes to their rich patrons. . .. As for the people, they follow, according to the Arabic proverb, their sovereign. (8–9)

A critical historical perspective relativizes Orientalist valuations, which become anything but timeless. If Europeans were at one time Orientals, and Arabs Occidentals, those identities become variable, dynamic, and interchangeable. What matters ultimately is

> the highest ideal of the prophets and the poets—the ideal of the soul—which includes the ethical and the practical aspects of life, and which is neither Oriental nor exclusively Occidental. It is supremely human. Before it every mark of birth disappears; and customs and traditions are held in abeyance, and the differences in nationality and language cease to be a hindrance to understanding. The soul seeking expression,

> the soul reaching out for the truth, is one everywhere. Confucius might be American in his ideal, even as he is Chinese, and Emerson might be Chinese, even if he is American. Cotama [sic] Buddha made manifest in London might be mistaken for Carlyle and Carlyle revisiting the glimpses of the moon in Japan might be mistaken for Cotama. Jelal-ud-Din Rumi, were he born in Assisi would have been a St. Francis; and St. Francis, were he born in Shiraz would have been a Jelal-ud-Din. . . . And genius everywhere is one. In the Orient and in the Occident the deep thinkers are kin, the poets are cousins, the pioneers of the spirit are the messengers of peace and goodwill to the world. Their works are the open highways between nations, and they themselves are the ever living guardians and guides. (9–10)

This transcendentalist metaphysics of the spirit, prophecy, and poetry trivializes Orientalist hierarchies, but also overlooks the material conditions of cultural and ideological production.[13] If "East and West meet" in a transcendental sphere inhabited by Buddha, Rumi, St. Francis, Carlyle, and Emerson, they can remain safely and discretely separated in the material world. (The very worldly and avowedly agnostic Confucius seems oddly out of place in this company.) In its conciliatory, non-confrontational stance, it offers itself as an alternative to the dominant discourses of difference, but without exposing their internal inconsistencies or their affiliations with power. In fact, it offers an illusory sense of freedom that sublimates the dialectics of history. The same idea is expressed in Rihani's poem "A Chant of Mystics," published in 1921 in a collection bearing the same title:

> Nor Crescent nor Cross we adore;
> Nor Budha [sic] nor Christ we implore;
> Nor Muslem [sic] nor Jew we abhor:
>   We are free.
>
> We are not of Iran or of Ind,
> We are not of Arabia or of Sind:
>   We are free.
>
> We are not of the East or the West;
> No boundaries exist in our breast:
> We are free. (84)

This passage is frequently quoted to illustrate the nobility of Rihani's endeavors to reconstruct a human community free from

religious, ethnic, and cultural chauvinism. Such an ideal is indeed admirable, yet the fact that the entire collection contains not a hint of the historical and political conditions that were radically transforming the map of the Middle East in 1921, and in which Rihani himself was fully embroiled as a speaker, writer, nationalist, activist, and delegate to post-war conferences, points to the unbridgeable chasm between this rarefied metaphysics and material reality. Rihani's negotiation of Orientalism vacillates between this Sufi ideal that transcends dualism and the material, worldly transactions that confront it—that is, between metaphysical unity and cultural translation.

It is highly significant that Rihani's first effort at cultural translation was itself a literary translation that directly challenged Orientalist scholarship. The preface to *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*, which was expanded and republished in *The Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala*, describes the classical Arab poet (974–1058) as "the Lucretius of Al-Islam, the Diogenes of Arabia and the Voltaire of the East" (*Quatrains* vi). Al-Ma'arri was a skeptical rationalist whose example represented, first of all, an implicit challenge to the idea of an exclusively spiritual East. Yet, this skeptical rationalism is tempered by a mystical, non-sectarian, anti-clerical religiosity that centers around a non-partisan God whose love embraces all humanity regardless of creed:

> Another prophet will, they say, soon rise;
> But will he profit by his tricks, likewise?
> My prophet is my reason, aye, myself—
> From me to me there is no room for lies. (*Quatrains* 57)
>
> These superstitions, Sacred Books and Creeds,
> These cults and Myths and other noxious Weeds—
> So many Lies are crowned, in every age,
> While Truth beneath the tyrant's heel still bleeds. (59)
>
> Muhammad or Messiah! Hear thou me,
> The truth entire nor here nor there can be;
> How can our God who made the sun and moon
> Give all his light to one Sect, I can not see. (*Luzumiyat* 35)

Rihani found in those beliefs a way to overcome religious and political schisms, including the polarity between a dreamy, stagnant, albeit spiritually rich East and a rationalist, progressive, yet drearily materialistic, West. He believed that al-Ma'arri combined the best qualities of both and held out the hope of a future synthesis of civilizations. At the same time, al-Ma'arri demonstrates to the

West that the germ of Enlightenment could be found in the East (and eight centuries before Europe, for that matter), the implication being that Orientalists either did not fully understand the East or deliberately misrepresented it. Secondly, through al-Ma'arri Rihani questioned Europe's fascination with Omar Khayyam, Persian author of *rubaiyyat* (Arabic and Persian for *Quatrains*), famous in Europe in Edward Fitzgerald's translation, a fascination that represents at once partial and partisan knowledge. Thus, Rihani's argument, in the preface to the *Quatrains*, that Khayyam was an imitator of, and a lesser thinker than, al-Ma'arri directly challenged the authority of Orientalists by exposing the inadequacy of their representation. Khayyam

> was an imitator or a disciple of [al-Ma'arri]. The birth of the first and the death of the second . . . occurred about the middle of the eleventh century. . . . [T]he skepticism and pessimism of Omar are, to a great extent, imported from Märrah. In his religious opinions the Arabian philosopher is far more outspoken than the Persian poet. I do not say that Omar was a plagiarist, but I say this: Just as Voltaire, for instance, acquired most of his liberal and skeptical views from Hobbes, Locke and Bayle, so did Omar acquire his from Abu'l-Ala. (xviii–xix)

Moreover, Khayyam appealed to English readers because of his rebellion against Islam, which made him easy to enlist in the discourse on the backwardness and fanaticism of that religion. Al-Ma'arri, in contrast, attacks all creeds, as well as tribalism and chauvinism of all stripes, and can, therefore, only be subversive to Orientalist culturalism.

Yet, al-Ma'arri also exposes a fundamental ambivalence in Rihani's Orientalism: on the one hand, al-Ma'arri undermines the binary model that structures Orientalism. If the Orient had its own Hobbes, Locke, Bayle, and Voltaire, then the entire distinction between the rationalist scientific West and the superstitious and fanatical East collapses. On the other hand, al-Ma'arri demonstrates Oriental influence on the Occident, something that Rihani finds extremely significant because it reinforces the idea of Europe's indebtedness to the wisdom of the East in general, and to Arab civilization in particular, thereby undermining the supposed superiority of the West. Rihani's wavering between the impulse to deconstruct Orientalism and the temptation to play the game of cultural one-upmanship—his wanting to have it both ways—points to his own intellectual investment in the opposition of East and West, which seemed unassailable in his age but also afforded him

a platform from which to launch his revisionary discourse. For the East/West dichotomy was not only culturally and intellectually reductive, it was also enabling for Rihani insofar as he could reinterpret or "expand" it to the point where it no longer sustained Western hegemony, but in a non-confrontational, conciliatory manner suited his reformist (not revolutionary) project of civilizational synthesis. His hesitancy is no doubt also due to his sense of being an outsider to the American literary scene, or as he puts it in the introduction to the first collection of his own English verse, *Myrtle and Myrrh*, published two years later, "a stranger at thy [the reader's] gate" (5) who "relies on the hospitality and cordiality due a guest" (6).

Rihani is careful, in the 1903 preface to *Quatrains*, not to challenge Western knowledge explicitly:

> The English-reading public, here and abroad, has already formed its opinion of Khayyam, and let it not, therefore, be supposed that in making this claim I aim to shake or undermine its great faith. Nor am I so presumptuous as to think that one could succeed in such a hazardous undertaking. My desire is to confirm and not to convulse, to expand and not to contract the Oriental influence on Occidental minds. (xix)

However, by the time he sits down to expand the 1903 preface into the version that appears in the 1918 volume of translation, that hesitancy has all but disappeared. The above statement about not wishing to challenge Western knowledge is reproduced, but he goes on to do just that anyway. Elaborating on the neglect and distortion that al-Ma'arri suffered at the hands of Arab scholars who tried to turn him into a great Sufi whose heretical ideas were forced upon him by the strictures of Arabic prosody, Rihani registers his surprise "to find a European scholar like Professor [D. S.] Margoliouth giving countenance to such views, even repeating, to support his own argument, such drivel" (*Luzumiyat* 18). Sensing that the absurdity of such views is not necessarily self-evident to Western readers (given that inane pronouncements on the Arab mind, the Arabic language, Islam's responsibility for the backwardness of Arabs, and so on, were not rare in either Orientalist scholarship or in popular culture), Rihani turns to al-Ma'arri's prose works to show how his ideas of religion as a superstition prevail there, too, before offering this powerful indictment of European scholarship that anticipates the sweeping nature of Said's critique of Orientalism's ideological investments:

> The East still remains the battle-ground of the creeds. And the Europeans, though they shook off their fetters of moral and spiritual slavery, would keep us in ours to facilitate the conquests of European commerce. And the terrible Dragon, which is fed by the foreign missionary and the native priest, by the theologians and the ulema, and which still preys upon the heart and mind of the Orient nations, is as active to-day as it was ten centuries ago. Let those consider this, who think [German Orientalist Alfred Freiherr] Von Kremer exaggerated when he said, "Abu'l-Ala is a poet many centuries ahead of his time." (20–21)

The neglect suffered by al-Ma'arri results from a conspiracy between Orientalists (with Von Kramer and Raynold A. Nicholson as exceptions that Rihani makes sure to mention) and conservative Arab scholars, two groups whose ideological imperatives require a monolithic and static conception of the Islamic tradition. As a rationalist and free thinker, al-Ma'arri did not fit with that conception: from an Orientalist perspective, an Oriental rationalist is an oxymoron; for conformist Arab scholars, al-Ma'arri was a heretical thinker whose difficult writings demanded the sort of misreading that blunted their incisive edge or co-opted them altogether. For Rihani, al-Ma'arri disturbs both regimes of truth and, therefore, serves as a model for the type of progressive intellectual that Rihani himself aspired to be. Al-Ma'arri also becomes a particularly appropriate subject not only for interrogating Eastern and Western self-images and particularly Western views of the East, but for renewing East–West dialogue as well, since he embodies the type of synthesis between spiritual wisdom and skeptical rationalism that Rihani took for a civilizational ideal, one which he himself promoted and aspired to embody in his own work.

Within a few years of publishing his first translation of al-Ma'arri, Rihani attempted to extend this project of cultural translation through all three major Western genres, writing a poetry collection, a play, and a novel by 1911. Mikhail Bakhtin's favorite genre was best suited to carry the burden of the type of cross-cultural discourse that Rihani wanted to create, for it gave him greater latitude than either poetry or drama to juxtapose different ideological worldviews against one another. The poems gathered in *Myrtle and Myrrh* are on the same themes as his Arabic verse and written in an anachronistic idiom and conventional forms, and together with his second collection, *The Chant of Mystics and Other Poems* (1918), came across as exotic, quaint, and mediocre, and were largely "either ignored ... altogether or damned ... with faint praise" (Bushuri and Munro 16).[14] As for

his play *Wajdah*, according to the publisher's forward it "seeks to convey to Western readers a topic that is neither familiar nor usual to them. . . . Perhaps it is the first time that an Arab American portrays to the West a defiant Arab woman who questions everything and defies all norms" (9–10). Such a theme must have seemed totally foreign, and what with the play's being heavily influenced by Shakespearean tragedy and the anachronism of its language, style, and form, the play was never published or performed during Rihani's lifetime, despite his efforts to revise it. Rihani's poetry and drama may have exhibited more literary ambition than talent, but they nevertheless stand as a testimony to his effort to "expand" American consciousness of the Orient.

Much more complex and rewarding is *The Book of Khalid*. Rihani goes one step further in that novel than in his translations of al-Ma'arri, *Myrtle and Myrrh*, *Wajdah*, or *The Chant of Mystics*, in that he attempts to fuse Arabic and Western literature thematically, linguistically, formally, and structurally. This inaugural text of Arab-American fiction and of the Anglophone Arabic novel more generally remains relatively unknown, in part because of its baffling admixture of philosophy and mysticism, its paradoxical tone at once solemn and ironical, its confusingly overwrought web of literary allusions, its alternation between utopianism and cynicism, and its enigmatic protagonist who seems at once to embody and to satirize Rihani's own ideas. Like other immigrant narratives, it is a story of coming to America, but like numerous fictional and autobiographical travel accounts of Arab intellectuals from Ri'fa'a al-Tahtawi's *Takhlis al-ibriz fi talkhis bariz*, the text that inaugurated the project of *Nahda* in the mid-1830s, to the novels of Tayeb Salih and Ahdaf Soueif in the late twentieth century, it is also a story of returning home, of migration rather than immigration. And while immigrant narratives tend, for obvious reasons, to be written in English, migration narratives are, with a few recent exceptions, written in Arabic. In one sense, therefore, *The Book of Khalid* situates itself outside of two traditions: in the one, it is the wrong kind of story, in the other, it is written in the wrong language. Furthermore, its English is both archaic and at times nearly unintelligible to readers unfamiliar with Arabic and its cultural frame of reference because of its infusion with words, expressions, proverbs, and even rhetorical strategies characteristic of nineteenth-century Arabic literature, such as parallelisms and rhymed prose, in addition to the verbal humor and ironic tone characteristic of the Arabic *maqama* genre.[15] It is a language radically deterritorialized, in Gilles Deuleuze and Félix Guattari's terms, availing itself liberally of the resources of another language with different cultural, rhetorical,

and literary norms. Those strategies anticipate the emergence, in the work of our contemporary bilingual writers, of what I have elsewhere called "translational literature"—texts that dramatize the process of translation and foreground the limits of translatability.[16]

Whereas such strategies in the novels of writers like Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela participate in the post-Saidian project of undermining Orientalist claims to authoritative knowledge, of "translating" the Orient and making it accessible, in the work of Ameen Rihani, who accepted some of the basic tenets of Orientalism but pursued the ideal of a Hegelian synthesis of East and West, translational strategies are part of the effort to forge a new language that would serve as the vehicle of a new genre, the Arabized English novel, or the Arabic novel written in English. This genre would represent a literary synthesis of East and West that heralds the cultural and political synthesis that he envisioned. *The Book of Khalid* embodies this quest in its style, its language, its intertextual references, and its themes. Unfortunately, this also meant that the ideal readers for this novel did not yet exist on any wide scale; only those bi-cultural hybrids like Rihani himself would be able to decipher the endless cross-linguistic word play, in-jokes, untranslated Arabic vocabulary, and literal translations of Arabic phrases that are sometimes accompanied by their idiomatic equivalents but mostly stand alone, and to follow the large number of meandering allusions across 14 centuries of Arabic literature and 400 years of European texts (it is only modern Europe that interested *Nahda* intellectuals). As Geoffrey Nash observes, Rihani's language in many of his English language works "is framed in a discourse clearly borrowed from the western Romantics, and at others in an idiom that reads like a literal translation from Arabic. What can be said of most of these writings is that in foregrounding the Arab and oriental constituency, they make little accommodation for a western readership in the sense of diluting or acculturating oriental idioms to suit occidental predispositions and expectations" (*Arab Writer* 18). This has the effect of estranging the English language by confronting its native speakers with linguistic difference within a deliberately hybridized discourse, instead of leaving them in a comfort zone that does not challenge their assumptions and expectations. Readers are called upon to engage in a difficult task, the end result of which is a new cultural awareness.

Nevertheless, the novel is formally, and quite explicitly, patterned after European models, principally Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605–15), Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34). The central characters in those works, like Rihani's titular character, are idealistic, naïve,

and/or out of sync with their times, and are treated with a great measure of irony by their respective narrators. All three texts involve travel, cross-cultural exchange, or translation: the fictional "real author" of *Don Quixote* is a North African who wrote the story in Arabic; after wandering throughout Europe and South America, Candide and his companions settle near Constantinople and are taught what in the discourse of the novel is the ultimate wisdom by a Muslim Turk; and Carlyle's narrator edits a German manuscript that has the potential to infuse British pragmatism with German idealism. Cervantes's and Voltaire's texts depict a cultural exchange between Arab or Muslim ("Eastern") sources and European ones; Carlyle fits in this company because of his highly appreciative assessment of the prophet Muhammad in *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), which made a great impression on Rihani, and because *Sartor Resartus* constructs the kind of cross-cultural discourse that Rihani himself sought to achieve.[17] In all three texts, satire of social conditions is clothed (in Carlyle's metaphor) in the caricatured depiction of an idealistic protagonist who pursues an elusive utopia. In two of those novels, that pursuit leads to a series of travel adventures of the episodic, picaresque kind. The picaresque closely resembles the Arabic *maqama* genre; indeed, some critics speculate that the picaresque originated in the *maqama* by way of Muslim Spain (Allen 270). In those formal and thematic ways, Cervantes, Voltaire, and Carlyle serve as antecedent examples that authorize Rihani's cross-cultural discourse.

The title character and protagonist is young, naïve, idealistic, and something of a Romantic rebel against social conventions and institutions in Lebanon. "Just like Candide, caught kissing the baron's daughter (rumored to be his cousin), is set upon by the baron and literally kicked out of the 'terrestrial paradise' of Westphalia, so—in a cockeyed echo of that scene—Khalid, in love with *his* cousin, is beaten from the door by *her* father, whereupon he sets out on a journey not away from, but in search of, 'the Paradise of the World,'" America (Shakir, "Arab-American Literature" 6). He leaves with a close friend called Shakib, the counterpart to Carlyle's Hofrath Heuschrecke in *Sartor Resartus* or Cervantes's Sancho Panza. However, Shakib is the educated one of the two, and the inverse relationship between formal education and intuitive wisdom in the characterization of Khalid and Shakib indexes Rihani's indebtedness to Rousseau and the Romantics. Khalid's education is like that of biblical and Qur'anic prophets: shepherding animals, wandering in the open, and meditating, or as Shakib puts it, "he loafs . . . after the manner of the great thinkers and mystics: like Al-Fared and Jelal'ud-Din Rumy,

like Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi" (11). In contrast, Shakib, whose biography of Khalid is full of "ecstasies about his master's genius" (19), recounts:

> When we left our native land . . . my literary bent was not shared in the least by Khalid. I had gone through the higher studies which, in our hedge-schools and clerical institutions, do not reach a very remarkable height. Enough of French to understand the authors tabooed by our Jesuit professors,—the Voltaires, the Rousseaus, the Diderots; enough of Arabic to enable one to parse and analyse the verse of Al-Mutanabbi; enough of Church History to show us, not how the Church wielded the sword of persecution, but how she was persecuted herself by the pagans and barbarians of the earth. . . . Now, of this high phase of education, Khalid was thoroughly immune. But his intuitive sagacity was often remarkable, and his humour, sweet and pathetic. Once when I was reading aloud some of the Homeric effusions of Al-Mutanabbi, he said to me, as he was playing his lute, "and in the heart of this," pointing to the lute, "and in the heart of me, there be more poetry than in that book with which you would kill me." (27)

This is the only one instance of what Evelyne Shakir describes as "name-dropping" on the part of Rihani—"Dickens, Tennyson, Balzac, Shakespeare, Dante, Paine, Arnold, Montaigne, Epictetus, Swinburne, Diderot, Pascal, Ibsen, Homer, Marx, Spencer, and Rousseau," among others—apparently intended to establish Rihani's credentials: "here is an 'Oriental' who can run with Western writers, who can match their erudition, their tone, their wordplay, the particular favor of their philosophical flights" (Shakir, "Arab-American Literature" 6). Yet, equally implicit is the claim that Western writers are not enough, for Rihani also references a host of Arab writers, poets, and scholars who would be known only to Arabists:
al-Zamakhshari, al-Mutanabbi, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyyah, Ibn al-Farid, al-Makrizi, al-Auza'i, and others, so that even highly educated readers who may be familiar with European writers would still feel inadequate vis-à-vis the author's bi-cultural frame of reference.

The passage also registers Rihani's attitude toward the Jesuits, who persecute Khalid in the novel (among other things on the charge that he translated Carlyle's essay, "On Jesuitism," into Arabic), and toward classical Arabic poetry, of which Abu al-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi (d. 965) is a chief representative. A decade earlier, Rihani pioneered prose poetry in Arabic and

introduced Romantic themes and language, so al-Mutanabbi here represents what ought to be jettisoned in the Arabic tradition. Significantly in this context, “al-Mutanabbi” is not a real name, but a title by which the poet became known and which means “one who falsely claims to be a prophet” (he boasted that he could imitate the style of the Qur’an, which is believed to be the literal words of God and, therefore, inimitable as a matter of doctrine). Rihani’s attack on al-Mutanabbi is an attack on the established canon of classical Arabic poetry, the perceived repository of Arab cultural identity, a canon that marginalized the wisdom of al-Ma’arri and lionized a “false prophet.” Instead, the novel offers the latter-day Romantic, visionary, and iconoclastic leadership of Khalid, which holds the potential for cultural, religious, and political reform—and here we can see the influence on Rihani of Carlyle’s ideas on heroism, particularly “the hero as prophet,” exemplified by Muhammad. *The Book of Khalid* thus begins with an introduction titled “Al-Fatihah” (the opening), which is the name of the first chapter of the Qur’an, clearly drawing a parallel between Khalid and Muhammad as prophets and nation builders. But Khalid is also a Christ figure whose “voyage to American is a Via Dolorosa of the emigrant; and the Port of Beirut, the verminous hostelries of Marseilles, the island of Ellis in New York are the three stations thereof. And if your hopes are not crucified at the third and last station, you pass into the Paradise of your dreams” (Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*). As the structure of the plot suggests, however, America proves to be a harrowing experience from which Khalid returns home to retreat to the forest like the Buddha, or like Thoreau at Walden, for a period of meditation and introspection before he emerges to preach social, political, and religious reform. The novel is divided into three parts, each corresponding to a stage of Khalid’s life: “In the Exchange” depicts his early life and journey to the US; “In the Temple” his involvement in the US political machine and subsequent retreat into nature back in Lebanon; and “In Kulmakan” (Everywhere) his emergence to spread his message, his escape from his persecutors to Egypt, which had served as a haven for Syrian intellectuals fleeing Ottoman persecution since the nineteenth century, and his disappearance there. The ending evokes the idea of the Messiah, the Mahdi, or the twelfth imam in Shiite doctrine, who returns to save the world after a period of absence from it.

However, the novel’s hagiographic structure and all the explicit and implicit attributions of prophecy to the protagonist are parodied in the text. The intoxicated customers of a Cairo hashish den sarcastically describe Khalid as a “prophet” and a “Muhdi” [sic] between loud peals of laughter (8), and his most devoted (and

only) disciple is the ludicrous Shakib. Kahlid's naïve idealism and outlandish behavior do not escape the narrator's satire, either. In a perceptive reading of Carlyle's use of irony and satire in *Sartor Resartus* that applies to Rihani's novel, Wolfgang Iser argues that "as far as the [fictional] Editor [in *Sartor*] is concerned, poking fun at German transcendentalism implicitly asserts a British attitude which allows transcendentalism to be channeled into empiricism" (252). That attitude privileges experiential knowledge over transcendental abstraction, but asserting the value of experience through humor allows the Editor to temper empiricism with transcendentalism, and vice versa, in the act of editing the chaotic manuscript of the German philosopher (253). The philosophy that emerges from the Editor's labors, therefore, represents a higher synthesis reached through cultural cross-fertilization, and the novel thus becomes "a paradigm of translatability rather than an actual translation" (254).

A similar strategy is at work in *The Book of Khalid*. The narrator presents himself as an editor who discovers an Arabic manuscript written by Khalid in the Egyptian state library. Intrigued by the manuscript, he searches for the author and is led to Shakib, who has written a gargantuan biography of Khalid in French. The narrator-editor presents the novel as a historical account, and not as a work of fiction, based on two original manuscripts: the Arabic *Kitab Khalid*, Khalid's spiritual autobiography, is short on facts and rich in abstractions and meditations, and the French *Histoire intime*, Khalid's biography written by Shakib, which provides a chronological account of Khalid's life but is full of exaggeration, rhetorical flourishes, as well as tedious and pointless digressions. The English text, then, is presumably a soberly edited account that draws upon, or synthesizes, the best qualities of its Arabic and French sources. If Khalid's Arabic account is too mystical and abstract, true to the prophetic character of its author, and Shakib's French manuscript is too mired in the romance and poetic excess characteristic of both medieval Arabic historiography and the European chivalric romance, *The Book of Khalid* is a narrative that embodies an evolved and discerning consciousness that is able to discriminate, select, and synthesize. Both original manuscripts, which are the counterparts to Cide Hamete Benengeli's Arabic manuscript in *Don Quixote* and Diogenes Teufelsdröckh's *Die Kleider ihr Werden und Wirken* in *Sartor Resartus*, represent Oriental and Occidental excesses, supposedly displaying the quintessential characteristics of the mystical East and the decadent West (at least as it is mimicked by Shakib, a French-educated Oriental).

The first paragraph of the novel expresses this vision of synthesis somewhat differently:

> In the Khedival Library of Cairo, among the Papyri of the Scribe of Amen-Ra and the beautifully illuminated copies of the Korân, the modern Arabic Manuscript which forms the subject of this Book, was found. The present Editor was attracted to it by the dedication and the rough drawings on the cover; which, indeed, are as curious, if not as mystical, as ancient Egyptian symbols. One of these is supposed to represent a New York Skyscraper in the shape of a Pyramid, and the other is a dancing group under which is written: "The Stockbrokers and the Dervishes." And around these symbols, in Arabic circlewise, these words:—"*And this is my Book, the Book of Khalid, which I dedicate to my Brother Man, my Mother Nature, and my Maker God*." (v)

The location of the manuscript is highly significant, for it evokes the entire cultural history of Egypt: from Pharonic times, represented by the papyri of the supreme god Amen-Ra, to the illuminated Qur'ans of medieval Islamic Egypt, all housed in a library built in modern Egypt. If those markers designate the narrative past and present, the "modern Arabic Manuscript" in question looks to the future, in which the civilization of Egypt, captured in the iconic image of the pyramid, fuses with modern American civilization, epitomized by a New York skyscraper. Those two symbolically charged structures are synthesized into the image of a skyscraper in the shape of a pyramid. The other image on the cover of the manuscript drives the idea home. The materialism of the West and the spirituality of the East combine in a dancing circle of stockbrokers and dervishes that evokes Sufi gatherings for *dhikr*, or trance-inducing rituals intended to bring mystics closer to God. The dedication fuses all distinctions between East and West, materialism and spirituality, past, present, and future, into transcendental, universal, masculinist values that would presumably sustain an evolved form of civilization.

In New York, Shakib and Khalid live in a damp cellar and practice peddling, selling trinkets that they claim to be relics from the holy land, a common occupation for impoverished Lebanese immigrants at that time. Although he abhors formal education, Khalid voraciously reads second-hand books (representing second-hand knowledge not based on personal experience, introspection, or meditation), each of which he burns immediately after reading. This burning of books recalls the burning of Don Quixote's library, which was blamed for causing his insane delusions; in

Rihani's case, burned books stand for the weight of tradition that threatens to ossify the mind. Khalid writes, "does not a systematic education mean . . . that a young man must go through life dragging behind him his heavy chains of set ideas and stock systems, political, social, or religious?" (70). Therefore, his search for the truth involves internalizing—or consuming—the content of books while discarding their dogma, an ambivalence vis-à-vis the past that reverses the classic scene of censorship in medieval times, when subversive books were burned to suppress their content. Khalid here burns the books after absorbing their content, as though to assert the primacy of his own experience and to preempt the hegemonic potential of tradition that turns into the dogma of "social and political guides, moral and religious dragomans," as he puts it (vii)—false knowledge like the contents of his peddling box. "We are pestered and plagued with guides and dragomans of every rank and shade . . . a Tolstoy here, an Ibsen there, a Spencer above, a Nietzsche below. And there thou art left in perpetual confusion and despair" (vii), but "the time will come, I tell thee, when every one will be his own guide and dragoman. The time will come when it will not be necessary to write books for others, or to legislate for others, or to make religions for others" (viii). In the meantime, apparently, he himself must write a book: "And so, the Book of Khalid was written. It is the only one I wrote in this world, having made . . . a brief sojourn in its civilised parts, and I hope to write other books in other worlds" (vii).

Rihani's satirical framing of his themes—a principal strategy in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*—is once again evident here in the simultaneous evocation and dismissal of European writers who influenced his craft, and equally in Khalid's contradictory stance of condemning and burning books yet writing one of his own, and discrediting translators while posing as one himself. Rihani's depiction of Khalid as both a prophet and a laughably Quixotic madman is of the same order, as is the treatment of the central trope of translation, which Khalid brings up in equating writers with "dragomans." According to Iser, Carlyle's novel is more of a paradigm of translation than the actual translation it claims to be. Likewise, Rihani's novel claims to be a double translation from original sources in two languages, yet translation is dismissed as inherently deceptive. Such paradoxes make sense only in light of mystical thought, which sees truth as an inner quality (*batin*), hidden by outward forms (*dhahir*)—garments, in Carlyle's sartorial metaphor, explicitly and repeatedly used by Rihani in this novel and his other writings. It is only by intuition that a seeker can reach the hidden truth, which cannot be expressed in formulas and dogmas, taught, or translated. Hence, the burning of books

and discrediting of translators also apply to Khalid and his autobiography; indeed, *Kitab Khalid* lay abandoned in the Egyptian Library until discovered by the editor, and even then it saw the light of day only as a *pre*-text for the editor's own book, *The Book of Khalid*—an outer garment on top of another outer garment, a veil upon a veil. In that sense, for Rihani, cultural translation is a chimera because it is a worldly transaction, a trafficking in forms, not essences—especially when "genius everywhere is one" and "poets are cousins" (Rihani, "Where East" 10). Poets, prophets, and gurus can only ultimately try to give their disciples an intuition of "Truth," but they cannot communicate it because it is inexpressible; those who come after them turn it into dogmas and books fit for the furnace. Rihani's entire philosophy and life work swings on this dialectic of the mystical and the political, and the worldly and the otherworldly.

Eventually, Khalid burns his peddling box and abandons his trade based on deception. Living on Shakib's income, Khalid is drawn to the lecture circuits of atheists, with whom he becomes disillusioned. He works in a lawyer's office (in the service of morality, as he tells himself), but is "fired" (in the narrator's ironic pun [82]) for dilly-dallying, absenteeism, and suggesting to his employer that he burn the Register's Office. Khalid then frequents the cultic milieu of New York and enters into liaisons with bohemian women ("huris," as he calls them [83]) who are drawn to his exotic background.[18] Disenchanted with that brand of spirituality, he is then introduced to the corrupt world of Tammany Hall (this time in the service of democracy), only to be literally kicked out and then imprisoned on trumped up charges when he accuses a powerful politician of hypocrisy and deception. Shakib contrives to free Khalid and together they return to Lebanon. Khalid's rude introduction to the workings of American politics is recounted in the first chapter of the second part of the novel, "In the Temple"—the temple of Mammon, and then after his release from prison (in which he rereads Rousseau's *Emile* and Carlyle's *Hero-Worship*), the temple of nature. His experience with American politics convinces him that "Americans are ... true and honest votaries of Mammon, their great God, their one and only God" (112). Nevertheless, he declares that

> my faith in man ... is as strong as my faith in God. And strong, too, perhaps, is my faith in the future world-ruling destiny of America.... In this New World, the higher Superman shall rise ... but he shall not be an American in the Democratic sense. He shall be nor of the Old World nor of the New; he shall be, my Brothers, of both. In him shall

> be incarnated the Asiatic spirit of Poesy and Prophecy, and the European spirit of Art, and the American spirit of Invention. Ay, the nation that leads the world to-day in material progress shall lead it, too, in the future, in the higher things of the mind and soul. And when you reach that height, O beloved America, you will be far from the majority-rule, and Iblis [Satan], and Juhannam [Hell]. And you will then conquer those "enormous mud Megatheriums" of which Carlyle makes loud mention. (113–14)

How such Hegelian/Nietzschean evolution can come about, Khalid does not explain, nor does the editor, who actually satirizes this prophecy in the chapter immediately following, titled "Subtranscendental," in which he compares Khalid's jail-time pontification to "Hamlet's player, or even like Hamlet himself—always soliloquising, tearing a passion to rags" (115).

Back in Lebanon, Khalid retreats to the woods after more skirmishes with the Jesuits that lead to his excommunication and imprisonment, and now he takes on the Muslim establishment. In "The Kaaba of Solitude," a chapter in which nature is described as a "glorious Mosque" (190) and which evokes Emerson, Baudelaire ("*La nature est un temple*..."), Wordsworth, and Thoreau, Khalid conceives of himself as a prophet and refers to "MY Holy Book" (191). The message he preaches when he emerges from the woods is the core of Rihani's philosophy: "I am equally devoted both to the material and the spiritual.... For the dervish who whirls himself into a foaming ecstasy of devotion and the strenuous American who works himself up to a sweating ecstasy of gain, are the two poles of the same absurdity, the two ends of one evil" (237–38). The editor further explains "the gist of Khalid's gospel" (240) this way, "To graft the strenuosity of Europe and America upon the ease of the Orient, the materialism of the West upon the spirituality of the East,—this to us seems to be the principal aim of Khalid. But often in his wanderings and divigations of thought does he give us fresh proof of the truism that no two opposing elements meet and fuse without both losing their original identity" (239). This truism clashes with the principle of absolute opposition that structures Orientalist discourse, which posits both the *undesirability* and the *impossibility* of precisely such fusion. This is exactly where Rihani's project falters in its philosophically Quxotic attempt to graft the Hegelian dialectic onto Daoist complementarity, and then to superimpose both onto Orientalist Manichaeism:

> The Orient and the Occident, the male and female of the spirit, the two great streams in which the body and soul of

> man are refreshed, invigorated, purified—of both I sing, in both I glory, to both I consecrate my life, for both I shall work and suffer and die. My Brothers, the most highly developed being is neither European nor Oriental; but rather he who partakes of the finer qualities of both the European genius and the Asiatic prophet. (245–46)

In a classic Orientalist gesture, the Orient is reduced to mysticism (feminine) and the Occident to science (masculine); despite this culturalist and masculinist hierarchization, both also represent the harmonious yin-yang of humanity, and yet again, despite the eternal nature of those principles, they are somehow capable of evolving into a higher synthesis. The tension noted above between Rihani's resistance to and investment in Orientalism is hidden within that formulation.

This dubious philosophy yields the political vision of an Arab empire, to be built by "a Saladin of the Idea, who will wage a crusade not against Christianity or Mohammedanism, but against those Tartaric usurpers who are now toadying to both . . . the Turks" (302–3), an empire built on "American arms and an up-to-date Korân [sic]" (303). The reformed Islam he champions is that of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahab, "the Luther of Arabia" (303) and founder of Wahabism, the puritanical movement that eventually collaborated with Abd al-Aziz Al-Saud in founding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Historical hindsight permits us now to appreciate the ironies that allowed a cosmopolitan and progressive thinker like Rihani to set such high hopes on, and actively lobby on behalf of, a conservative regime that forged an alliance of convenience with a fundamentalist movement, not to mention Rihani's total miscalculation of the role that the US would play in the region.

When Khalid airs his views in the grand mosque of Damascus, he predictably incurs the wrath of the Ottoman authorities and the conservative Muslims, who attack and nearly kill him. He emerges from that mêlée "like Don Quixote after the Battle of the Mill" (327) and escapes to Egypt, where he eventually disappears after creating quite a legend for himself. The comparison to Don Quixote's hilarious adventure rescues the utopian vision that Rihani puts into the mouth of his character from ridicule; as with Carlyle's satirical treatment of Teufelsdröch that, in Iser's reading, preempts the reader's ridicule of German transcendentalism, allowing it to infuse British empiricism, Rihani's framing of his protagonist makes the message palatable to American readers: here is an Oriental madman/prophet with fantastic dreams—but they are marked indelibly by his American

voyage, and they do, in a way, hold a mirror up to America. The image reflected in that mirror is not always a flattering one, not the image of an immigrant's success story that confirms the American Dream. Nonetheless, it is an image contoured by American ideals and gravid with America's potential as a world leader, even as America's faults and shortcomings are diagnosed, and the remedy to them is prescribed.

Because of these discursive deviations from the norms of immigrant narratives, Geoffrey Nash contends that "Rihani's biculturality is not of the kind that can be considered ethnic American . . . Rihani's writings do not fully register the 'cultural doubleness'" or the "'divided allegiance'" found in "those writers who chose to address themselves to the ethnic situation in America" (*Arab Writer* 24). This judgment is unconvincing because it posits divided allegiance and identity crisis as a condition for ethnic American writing, and makes no allowance for a more self-confident stance like Rihani's, which provides an alternative paradigm that ought to be considered in ethnic studies. Rihani accentuates or exaggerates the "Orientalness" of Khalid to the point of caricature, but it is a caricature that forms part of American consciousness and, consequently, that of Arab Americans. This is more than a discursive performance, for even as he wrestled with Orientalism, Rihani himself accepted its basic premises, including the essentialist concepts of "Orient" and "Occident" which continue to frame the discussions of Rihani's interpreters even today.[19] The novel raises some interesting questions: How would a writer like Rihani, who is self-consciously Oriental because he is so defined in the dominant discourse of his time, imagine an Oriental character in an American setting? How would *he* (for this is, after all, a deeply and unselfconsciously masculinist stance, totally in line with the gendered assumptions of Orientalism) conceive of cultural translation and of the possibility of a cross-cultural discourse? How would he regard his native tradition and its relationship to that of Europe and the US?

However flawed, Rihani's project is a valiant effort that indexes the historical, ideological, and discursive conditions of the Arab world, Europe, and the US during that period. His questioning of Orientalism and his efforts at cultural translation that aimed at a two-way reform did not resonate in a culture that did not sense itself to be in crisis, at least not the kind of crisis Rihani diagnosed. As Iser argues, "as long as there is an overriding conviction that a culture rests on a firm foundation, the necessity for a cross-cultural discourse does not arise. For such a self-understanding of culture, a cross-cultural discourse can only mean a foreign intrusion" (261–62). A cross-cultural discourse was an urgent necessity

for nineteenth-century Arab leaders and intellectuals who looked to Europe, and to their early twentieth-century counterparts who turned to the US, in search of models for cultural and political survival. That sense was not reciprocated, since neither Europe nor the US felt the need to learn anything from the Arabs or any non-Western peoples; indeed, Orientalism was, as Said argued, an expression of mastery over weaker peoples, and not a manifestation of cultural sympathy or desire for dialogue. Orientals who wrote against the grain of Orientalism, as Rihani did when he challenged its modes of representation, were bound to be ignored, their works regarded as "cultural oddit[ies]" (Nash, *Arab Writer* 25), while those who conformed to those modes, as Gibran did, could become immensely successful. Gibran delivered to America a thoroughly domesticated Orient that hardly challenged its modes of perception or its self-image.

Ultimately, however, both Gibran's evasion and Rihani's sublimation of Orientalism led Arab-American literature to a dead end. In the internationally isolationist and domestically assimilationist decades of American ideology following World War I, reflected in the immigration law of 1924 that practically suspended Asian immigration to the US until 1965, US-born Arab Americans simply hoped to pass (Shakir, "Arab-American Literature" 6). The work of Rihani and Gibran was pioneering, but their literary projects were hopelessly unsustainable for those who came after them. The works of writers like William Blatty, Salom Rizk, and Vance Bourjaily are haunted (literally so for the author of *The Exorcist* [1971]) by a sense of burdensome, embarrassing, "fractional" (as Bourjaily puts it in *Confessions of a Spent Youth* [1960]), dislocated past, rendered all the more acute by the rising crescendo of anti-Arab racism in the US that accompanied the unfolding of the Arab-Israeli conflict. At that juncture, and in concert with historical developments like the Civil Rights movement and the advent of multiculturalism and poststructuralism, Said's unmasking of Orientalism's historical affiliations with power and his courageous critique of the US involvement in the Middle East represented a discursive breakthrough that enabled countless other writers—new Arab immigrants, Americans, and the US-born Arab Americans—to reconfigure the terms of cultural translation and cross-cultural discourse beyond the limitations of Rihani and his contemporaries.

Notes

1. See Elizabeth Boosahda, *Arab-American Faces and Voices: The Origins of an Immigrant Community* (2003); Philip Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (1924); Philip Kayal and Joseph Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation* (1975); Ernest McCarus, *The Development of Arab-American Identity* (1994); Beverlee Turner Mehdi, *The Arabs in America 1492–1977: A Chronology and Fact Book* (1978); Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (1985); Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (2006); Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab-American Women in the United States* (1997); Adele Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People to the United States* (1995). This article has benefited greatly from Marilyn Booth's astute review of an earlier, shorter version that was presented at the *American Literary History* symposium on 4 April 2007.

2. See Shakir, "Arab-American Literature"; Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory," *Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literatures*, ed. Amritjit Singh, Joseph Skerrett Jr, and Robert Hogan (1996), 266–90; Majaj, "Arab-Americans and the Meaning of Race," *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* ed. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (2000), 320–37; Geoffrey P. Nash, *The Arab Writer*; Steven Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007); Ottmar Ette and Friederike Pannewick, eds., *Arab Americas: Literary Entanglements of the American Hemisphere and the Arab World* (2006). Special issues of *Studies in the Humanities* 30: 1–2 (2003) and *MELLUS* 31: 4 (2006) were devoted to Arab-American literature, and collections on Anglophone Arabic literature more generally are now in preparation at SUNY Press and Rodopi. Most of those works focus on contemporary Arab-American writers.

3. For a complete list of Rihani's published and still unpublished works in Arabic and English, see www.ameenrihani.org.

4. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (1967), 51–102.

5. See Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (1991), 315–19.

6. On the Arabic-language press in North America, see Naff, "The Arabic Language Press."

7. See Majaj, "Arab-Americans and the Meaning of Race."

8. For a more detailed discussion of Rihani's Arabism, see Nash, *The Arab Writer*, 46–78. On his relationship with the Saudi monarch, see Irfan Shahid, "Amin al-Rihani and King 'Abdul-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud," *Arab Civilization: Challenges and Responses*, ed. George N. Atiyeh and Ibrahim M. Oweiss (1988).

9. The symposium was sponsored by the Ameen Rihani Institute, Washington, D.C., and the American University Center for Global Peace, Washington, D.C., 19–20 April 2002.

10. On Gibran's self-Orientalizing, see Nash, *The Arab Writer*, 32–45; and Waïl S. Hassan. "Gibran and Orientalism," *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, ed. Layla al-Maleh (forthcoming).

11. Rihani and Rihbany attended college briefly in the US and did not finish their degrees. Although his Arabic seems to have been good, Rihbany did not write in that language. Rihani struggled to master literary Arabic early on in his career, while Gibran's Arabic works were often criticized for their stylistic weakness and ungrammaticality. Nadeem Naimy argues that Rihani's "break with 'classic formulas' and 'authoritative grammarians' . . . seems not to represent a genuine new development, being in reality more of a necessity for him than a deliberate artistic choice" (20). This is also true of Gibran, but it is also the case that the revolutionary fervor of Romanticism very much suited their temperament and their sociopolitical agenda.

12. On the influence of the *Mahjar* (immigrant) writers on Arabic literature in the early twentieth century, see M. M. Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* (1993), 41–47.

13. See Walter Edward Dunnavent III's study of Rihani and American transcendentalism, "Ameen Rihani in America: Transcendentalism in an Arab-American Writer", diss. Indiana U (1991).

14. Albert Rihani compiled a list of Arabic and English reviews of his brother Ameen's works; see the English section of *Where to Find Ameen Rihani: Bibliography* (1979), 68–103. Rihani's books on Arabia were better received in the US than his creative works.

15. *Maqama* was an immensely popular narrative genre that emerged in the tenth century and continued until the beginning of the twentieth century, involving the adventures of a wandering rogue who lives by his wits. For a brief introduction to the genre, see Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage*, 268–78; Abdelfattah Kilito's *Les séances: Récits et codes culturels chez Hamadhanî et Harîrî* (1983) is the most thorough study of the genre in a European language.

16. See Waïl S. Hassan, "Agency and Translational Literature: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love," PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 753–68.

17. See Wolfgang Iser's article on this aspect of Carlyle's novel. On the influence of *Sartor Resartus* on *The Book of Khalid*, see Nash, "Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid* and the Voice of Thomas Carlyle," *New Comparison* 17 (1994): 35–49.

18. Here, Rihani anticipates a long tradition in Arabic fiction of the "East–West romance," the best-known example of which is Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966). I have written extensively on this theme in my work on Salih, Ahdaf Soueif, and Leila Aboulela. See Hassan, *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction* (2003), Chap. 1 and 3; "Agency and Translational Literature"; and "Leila Aboulela and the Poetics of Muslim Immigrant Fiction," presented at a conference on "The African Novels and the Politics of Form," University of Pittsburgh, October 26–28, 2006.

19. Nash, who is probably the most theoretically fluent of Rihani scholars, does not escape that binarism, despite his avowed indebtedness to Edward Said, nor do

the contributors to the Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka collection, *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West, a Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding* (2004), nor for that matter do those scholars who have written about Rihani in Arabic, notable among them Rihani's own nephew, biographer, editor, and namesake Ameen Albert Rihani, author of an important book on his uncle, *Faylasuf al-Freike, sahib al-madinah al-'udhma* (1987, The Philosopher of Freike). The categories of "East" and "West," which have no analytical validity whatsoever, continue to govern much of the discussion even today.

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