

Transcendence in *The Book of Khalid* and *The
Book of Mirdad*

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To my parents...

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The abbreviations used in this research to refer to Mikhail Nuaimah and Ameen Rihani's literary works are the following:

- Khalid: Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead, and Co. New York. 1911. As TBK.

And,

- Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. As TBM.

Introduction

1) *The Book of Mirdad*: Mikhail Nuaimah's Spiritual Philosophy and *the Immigrés'* Advanced Thought Revealed:

The Pen League, or what is called in the Arabic Language *Al Mahjar* Group or *the Immigrés* was first initiated in New York city around 1920 with Khalil Gibran as President and Mikhail Nuaimah, the author of *the Book of Mirdad*, as Vice President. It was essentially composed of Christian Maronite Lebanese-Americans who travelled between Lebanon and the United States- at the time- as an attempt at questing for the innovation of thought, for knowledge, and for literary novelty and reinvention as a consequence to their existence in an Arab World preoccupied by the dividing aftermath of the First World War, and disjoined on the geographical, social, ideological, and religious levels, especially with the rise of sectarianism and the prioritization of what each part of the Syro-Lebanese community referred to as their personal faith over human dignity. The group was composed of Levantine poets and literary figures who proved themselves to be pioneers of the Arabic Literary scene before they were introduced into the American literary arena. Nasib Arida, Ameen Rihani, Elia Abu Madi, Mikhail Nuaimah, and Khalil Gibran were known, and still are recognized as the developers of Arabic Romanticism in their home country, fusing it later with American Transcendentalism. Indeed, they inaugurated a new Era of Arabic Literature by becoming inspired by America's Transcendentalist Movement -- representing thus an offshoot of English Romanticism-- and shifted Arabic poetry from a relatively traditional, metaphysical, rigid, medieval, and rhythmic form to becoming more flexible and capable of incorporating subjects dealing with the individual and His reasons for existence, the nation and its meaning , along with the human condition and future reflected in the question of survival in a war-wrecked Middle East. Contrarily to the free Arabic verse and its new national fervor promoted by *the Immigrés*, classical, conventional, and strictly traditional Arabic poetry is imperatively thought to commence by the recurrence of a famous scene describing the longing and yearning of a male lover for his female beloved, called in Arabic *Al Wukuf Ala Atlal*, or in a more literal sense, the endless contemplation of the remnants of the absent beloved. Indeed, aside from praising the lover, mourning the deceased,

or recounting tribal voyages and war accomplishments, the prototypical poetry in Arabia did not stray away from these themes nor the repetitive resonance of its verse. In her book, Huda Fakhreddine further explains the structure of the classical Arab *Qasidah* or poem:

The *Qasidah* is a monumental structure, an outstanding identification or mark of what it is to be Arab. It presents to us the original landscape, geographical, psychological, linguistic, and emotional among other things. It has served as the primary field of reference for all Arabic poetry. It is the enduring edifice with which Arab poets even today have to negotiate a relationship or a truce before they move forward. However, it is intriguing that this monumental structure is always erected upon ruins. This journey the Arabic linguistic and symbolic landscape is always launched from the site of abandonment and desolation. The classical Arabic *Qasidah* always begins with the conventional prelude known as the *nasib*, which has various motifs or sub-themes. These various motifs are all means by which the poet reflects upon and reacts to his relationship with a lost past. They range from standing upon the traces of a deserted campsite (*atlat*), to remembering the departing [...] to conjuring up the ghost of the departed beloved.¹

Therefore, in order to give birth to Arab-American Literature, these Levantine–American writers dared to embrace a new step in their ventures by first intentionally producing literature in both Arabic and English –mainly while originally writing their books twice in both languages through personal translations --, and by also voicing a hybrid and plural identity which eventually was infused in their productions tinted with glimpses of spiritual research, nostalgia, and the longing for an original and unconventional, --sometimes abstract-- world created to embrace those who identify themselves as being « Eastern » and « Western » without any schisms that might interfere in blurring the boundaries between these traits. Although this identity was perceived by others –the Americans on one side and the Lebanese on the other—as hinging upon a state of shocking nonconformity, disproportion, and cultural incompatibility. *Al Mahjar* Group’s duty consisted in challenging this dogmatic and extremist refusal by bearing and nurturing this astounding cultural mixture. Arab-American literature can be viewed as the fruit of an Arabic Literature influenced by Eighteenth Century Romanticism – in its very basic definition as based on the celebration of emotion and individualism, and as discarding all forms of the rationalization of nature—and American Transcendentalism that insists on intuition as an undeniable source of religious and worldly knowledge. Moreover, the Pen League, and especially Nuaimah, sought to revitalize Arabic literature and alleviate it from its ambiguous steadiness by slightly resorting to the « modern » and « Western » model which represented an inspiration and a fascination for all the members of the

¹ Fakhreddine, Huda. J. *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition: From Modernists to Muhdathun*. Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden. The Netherlands. 2015.p 94-95.

League, especially from a formal perspective. Indeed, in a Forward by Dr. Afag Azadova, the writer illustrates the Pen League's desperation for a revolutionary transformation of the Arabic literary stream of thought activated by voyage and discovery, and reinforced by abandoning the destroyed land of birth:

And as Mikhail Naimy says, expressing the pain in his heart: « Many critics evade the truth by means of 'patriotic' phrases such as 'Our country is the cradle of inspiration and humanity and the homeland of the prophets.' 'Centuries passed, and still we knock our foreheads on the threshold of churches ... a thick layer of rust has covered our hearts and minds.' » And here, finally, is the sublime image of Gibran, who « embodied all epochs, ideals and great deeds, the undying voice of the ages » : « The sight of the ruined city [of the past] brings the poet to despair, but Life tells him he must depart and look instead for the City of the Future : Come, for only the coward tarries, and it is folly to look back on the City of the Past. »²

Thus, the writer expresses the level of intimidation and fear the members of the league felt because of the overwhelming atrocities in their region and for also being obliged to settle elsewhere in order to find a cultural remedy that would appease and breathe life again into the deteriorated and disconnected « East ». At the time of the creation of the league, there were, indeed, significant, yet disappointing political events that seemed to deter the group of writers from remaining in Lebanon, while simultaneously encouraging them to seek solutions from abroad, and especially from the achieved « Western » hemisphere. Imangulieva recounts the tumultuous history of Post-World War I Lebanon and Syria originating from a Nineteenth Century series of events characterized by internal and external religious and political rivalries and complexities:

As European powers had begun to expand, particularly Britain and France in the mid-nineteenth century, Lebanon experienced a growing religious animosity between its two main population groups, the Maronites and the Druze, accompanied by bloody clashes and internecine fratricidal struggle. Even Karl Marx commented on the political battle that extended to the coast of Syria. All this weakened the economic condition of the country and led to a stagnation in its spiritual and cultural life. Occupation, political repression and persecution, religious strife, devastation of the country, and economic crisis, together with the missionaries' propaganda that promised a free and prosperous life in the West, meant that [...] not only the Lebanese intelligentsia but also ordinary people were awoken to the possibility of emigration.³

² Imangulieva, Aida. *Gibran, Rihani and Naimy: East-West Interactions in Early Twentieth-Century Arab Literature*. (Translated from the Russian by Robin Thomson). Inner Farne Press. Oxford, 2009. p. xiv.

³ *Ibid.* p. 18.

Therefore, there was another psychological and human strife only *Al Mahjar* adherents deeply understood. They needed to elevate their countries by being expedient and extracting valuable spiritual experience from the rich history and literature of the West, in opposition to the members of 'Al Nahda' or the Arab Renaissance, who mainly focused on technological breakthroughs and economic developments. Indeed, the Pen League maintained that Lebanon would only be healed and would survive exclusively through treating the main ailment and disease: The collapsing literature and the fragile cultural landscape as results of general pessimism and disenchantment. They believed that through altering mentalities with recourse to a new form of literature, the Levantine people would thrive mentally and politically because they would have developed--by the time they began observing the type of literature produced by the Pen League-- a certain level of consciousness and patriotic awareness built on human solidarity and universality, and based on shunning fragmentary, sectarian, and extremist discourse through envisaging divinity in Man. The Mahjarites, Naimy included, held that the possibility of invigorating Arab literature would be guaranteed by means of incorporating Transcendentalist beliefs and historical similarities between the two regions into it, leading to the genesis of Arab-American literature. As a prominent member of the Mahjarite group, Nuaimh clung to his desire to revolutionize the repetitive themes and typical structures of Arab literature and possessed a futuristic eye fraught with avant-gardist projects. Indeed, in *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*, Mikhail Nuaimh holds that the essence of the league's responsibility was « to lift Arabic literature from the quagmire of stagnation and imitation, and to infuse a new life into its veins so as to make of it an active force in the building up of the Arab nations"⁴ Thus, in the history of Arab- American and Levantine Arab Literature, the *Al Mahjar* group represented the intellectual unity of an exceptional and small crowd of poets and men of literature, with Nuaimh as one of its most recognized and accomplished figures next to Khalil Gibran and Ameen Rihani.

Mikhail Nuaimh (1889- 1988) was born in Baskinta, near Mount Sannin in Lebanon to a Christian poor family. His father sought to emigrate alone to the United States as a final solution to guarantee survival and save his children from the hardships of a life blasted with need and privation. It is recounted, in his personal biography entitled *Sabu'un or Seventy, the Story of a Lifetime*, that his mother used to urge her children to pray and deliver a message to God in order for the father to be kept protected and safe during his hazardous quests for financial improvement. Indeed, Nuaimh writes and remembers the voice of his mother reverberating with supplications:

⁴ Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. American University of Beirut. Lebanon. 1985.p. 18.

Say with me my child: God, I pray you grant success to my father in America. May dirt be transformed into gold when he holds it in his hands. God, I pray you return him safe to us. God, I pray you keep me in the company of my siblings. God, I pray you keep me in the company of my uncle Ibrahim and my uncle Solayman, and grant them success and offer them the gift of breeding children, God...⁵

As it appears in his biography, the mother's prayers are of most simple yet piercing and straightforward. Indeed, the Little Mikhail Nuaimah still vividly recalls the spiritual utterances and the helpless devotion with which his mother used to beseech and conjure the blessings of God for them to fall peacefully upon her family. It could be easily presumed that these minor details and lost fractions of memories he writes about were one of his earliest inspiring data to shape his highly spiritual style and philosophical ideals. Nuaimah's writings thus confirm—and especially *the Book of Mirdad* -- through his mother's reasoning and pleading to God, that the writer's direct literary impact emanated from the early days of his –more or less–religious childhood and upbringing. This image of his mother kneeling to God in the search for hope was primarily one of his first conceptualizations of a « righteous » religion, embodied by the presence of the human being, and the existence of an unperceivable, thorough, and implicit contact with a form of Providence. This idea is developed in *the Book of Mirdad* as a counter-response to mediators and false prophets who pretend to be the deliverers of the prayer to God instead of the heart of the devoted person himself, which is supposed to be the internal carrier of one's concerns and burdens. In fact, Nuaimah criticizes the instrumentalization of religion by means of Mirdad's discourse, reminiscent of the eponymous Khalid, in *the Book of Khalid* (1911) by Ameen Rihani, who also intentionally degraded the priests in his hometown for he believed them to be the reason behind the dissemination of the dogmatic and fanatic religious zeal in society, resulting thus in internal divisions and unexplainable prejudices, leading to brutal wars and the creation of a scattered population who only wishes to immigrate and flee the tension. Moreover, Nuaimah, in his youth, left Lebanon in 1911 for the United States as a final, yet unsatisfying attempt to conquer the shadows of degeneration that were hovering upon his country at the time. To be more specific concerning the author's upbringing and experience, this brief passage clarifies Nuaimah's journey:

He lived in Palestine as a child and attended the Theological Seminary in Poltava, the Ukraine, from 1906 to 1911. In 1911, he moved to the United States, where he attended the University of Washington-Seattle before moving to New York City. He returned to Lebanon in 1932. In New

⁵ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *Sabu'un. The Story of a Lifetime (1889- 1959) Part I (1889-1911)*. Naufal Organization, 2011. Beirut, Lebanon. p. 19. (Originally published in Arabic and the passage quoted is translated by myself).

York, he was associated with Khalil Gibran, a fellow member of the New York Pen League, an organization promoting Arab writers and writing. Author of the spiritual work *Book of Mirdad: The Strange Story of a Monastery Which Was Once Called the Ark* (1948), Naimy also wrote a biography of Khalil Gibran. Naimy's poems are collected in *Hams al-Jufún (Eyelid Whisperings)* (1945). While his poetry frequently addresses spiritual matters, critic Issa J. Boullata, in "Mikhail Naimy: Poet of Meditative Vision" for the *Journal of Arabic Literature*, noted that Naimy moves away from entirely traditional Arabic forms his work, using an accessible, common diction. "His meditative mood," wrote Boullata, "coupled with the attraction of his whispering quiet tone, wins over the reader as one who shares the experience with the poet. Naimy was living in East Beirut at the time of his death in 1988.⁶

In this extract, it is clear that Nuaimah was thoroughly exposed to a Levant which was not yet geographically disunited and shattered. Indeed, he is a Lebanese who also grew up in Nazareth, Palestine, and experimented with his region as a united geographical area before being subject to the Sykes-Picot Agreement; a confidential arrangement that took place in May 1916 and which resulted in the departmentalizing of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Indeed, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, it is a:

Secret convention made during World War I between Great Britain and France, with the assent of imperial Russia, for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. The agreement led to the division of Turkish-held Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into various French- and British-administered areas. Negotiations were begun in November 1915, and the final agreement took its name from its negotiators, Sir Mark Sykes of Britain and François Georges-Picot of France.⁷

Besides, the biblical façade and outlook of *the Book of Mirdad* is nothing but a reflection of Nuaimah's identification with the person of Christ, and the influence of a Christian household upon his younger years. As a matter of fact, the author in *Mirdad* elucidates the "holiness" of the ideas brought to the fore by the protagonist through alluding to their intricate relationship with nature and the prevailing setting and time frame. Indeed, the setting in *Mirdad* is quite elementary and almost bare:

Facing the sea to the West and rising many thousands of feet above it, with a front broad, steep and craggy, Altar Peak appeared from a distance defying and forbidding. Yet two reasonably safe accesses were pointed out to me, both tortuous narrow paths and skirting many precipices—one from the south, another from the north.⁸

⁶ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mikhail-naimy> .

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Sykes-Picot-Agreement> .

⁸ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p 19.

It reflects asceticism and austerity, especially with the existence of a secluded temple-like ark in the middle of a Mountain called the “Milky Mountain”, and the prevalence of slopes and natural components. As Nadeem Naimy explains, the mysterious-looking zone reproduces an almost identical Lebanese landscape, fraught with memories echoing the “Divine”. In Nuaimah’s chain of thought, the Lebanese landscape is intertwined with the presence of the Christ, his teachings, and his disciples. He also links it to sermons, to sole meditation against the awe of the horizon above these mountains, and to utter and pure wisdom. In *the Lebanese Prophets of New York*, Naimy expounds upon this viewpoint:

Psychologically, the people in their seclusion continued in the tradition of considering their mountain more as a religious refuge than as a nation; more as a place of worship, so to speak, than a parliament. Hence this traditional and almost unique spiritual intimacy in Mount Lebanon between man and soil which reached to the point of man deifying his land. “Oh Lebanon, ‘ goes the popular song, ‘ Thou who art on earth a fragment of Heaven... Thy name on my lips is but a prayer.’” Strewn all over with monasteries, temples and holy shrines, Mount Lebanon is perhaps unmatched by any other country in the number of settlements, hills, valleys, places, and even roads, trees and springs that bear holy names.⁹

Thus, it is important to notice the importance of the association of the setting to a certain level of providential glorification in the novel, as a sign of eternal gratitude to the land in which the author first inhaled his first Christian breath. *The Book of Mirdad*, in general terms, recounts the story of Mirdad, a Jesus-like or Messianic figure who chronicles his teachings about life, prayer, judgment day, the sentiment of humane love, along with other abstract concepts and notions into a safeguarded book left at the mountain called in the novel « Altar Peak ». The book begins by being narrated in the first-person singular through the voice of an anonymous character who finds himself travelling through a « Flint Slope » and longing to reach the distant and impassable summit of the mountain in order to discover the myth of the “Bound Abbot”; the story of a priest imprisoned in the Ark for years. This unknown voice reaches finally « Altar Peak » after a strenuous and frustrating path to cross, reminiscent of a pilgrimage. In fact, the character in question was robbed and dispossessed of his meal, cloth, and psychological stability by strangers he seemed to encounter on the road, and who did not cease to threaten, frighten, or deprive him from his possessions. Finally, the character reaches this mysterious abbot who remained—according to his tale-- for more than one hundred and fifty years roaming

⁹ Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. American University of Beirut, Lebanon. 1985.p. 58-59

speechless around « Altar Peak ». Shamadam, --the priest-- appears to become delivered of his strife at the first sight of the impoverished character, while stating that the latter has finally come to rescue his life, and to legitimately be handed the book written by the mighty Mirdad. Shamadam also explains that his seclusion was a form of punishment of which he was the subject and Mirdad the inflictor, caused by Shamadam's unflinching hubris, excessive conceit, and abuse of power as the Master of all priests in the mountain, characteristics Noah warned against.

The book ends on an interesting note: « God is your captain, sail, my Ark! ». This final epigraph summarizes the entire philosophy of Mirdad, who is to be considered allegorical as a character construction for the concept of the « God within ». Indeed, Mirdad came to the guardians of the mountain as a manifestation of religious enlightenment and reformation consisting in the belief that God can humble himself and walk through people's souls and minds, only if they be virtuous and understand that all the goodness from within intensifies the human being's bond with God and maintains one's physical and psychological balance. Virtue and morality also provide insight into self-consciousness and instigate noble vision for and of the self and the other's.

Before pursuing explanations regarding Nuaimeh's different Western and Eastern literary mentors, it is quite momentous and paramount to add that the author of *the Book of Mirdad* borrowed the Myth of the Deluge from the biblical story of Noah and the Ark—in which God brings about a fatal flood to destroy the human race, but still recommends Noah to build an ark along with a small group of people in order to restart humanity. This ends with a covenant between God and Noah inaugurated by God fashioning a rainbow as a sign of accord—In Genesis 9 from the Bible, the story is recounted in detail:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. “And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁰

¹⁰ Holy Bible, New International Version. Biblica Inc. 1973.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+9> .

Nuaimah transposed it onto the book's context and framework. Indeed, he writes:

Many years after the great Deluge Noah and his family, and his family's increase, drifted into the Milky Mountains where they found fertile valleys, abundant streams and a most equable climate. There they decided to settle. When Noah felt his days drawing to an end he called unto him his son Sam who was a dreamer and a man of vision like himself, and spoke unto him saying: 'Behold, my son. Your father's harvest of years has been exceedingly rich. Now is the last sheaf ready for the sickle. You and your brothers, and your children and your children's children shall re-people the bereaved Earth, and your seed shall be as the sand of the sea, according to God's promise to me. 'Yet a certain fear besets my flickering days. It is that men shall in time forget the Flood and the lusts and wickedness that brought it on. They shall also forget the Ark and the Faith that bore it in triumph for the fifty and one hundred days over the furies of the revengeful deeps. Nor shall they be mindful of the New Life that issued of that Faith whereof they shall be the fruit. 'Lest they forget, I bid you, my son, to build an altar upon the highest peak in these mountains, which peak shall henceforth be known as Altar Peak. I bid you further build an house around that altar, which house shall correspond in all details to the ark, but in much reduced dimensions, and shall be known as The Ark.¹¹

Therefore, the narrative in this book is founded upon one of the major stories stressed in the Christian religion as well as in Mesopotamian and Sumerian epics and folk tales such as Gilgamesh. In the latter, the God of storms Enlil causes the flood as a reaction to his discomfort with the noise and the overpopulation of humanity, and the surviving hero is named Utnapishtim. This implies, on one hand, that the Levant's « sacredness of soil » and overflowing, rich history are undeniable to Mirdad. Yet, he is ambivalent for he believes that the people were indifferent to the historical qualities of their home, and were nonchalant regarding their position as to disseminate kindness and uprightness within society. Indeed, they spread but blood and gluttony in the land, which is expressed here through an ominous tone, by Noah, father to Sam, Ham, and Japheth.

Along with his literary productions in both Arabic and English, Nuaimah was also fluent in Russian and was extremely influenced by Russian literature and by many important figures among them: Leo Tolstoy. Even Mirdad, the protagonist, can be regarded as Tolstoyan for he appears to focus on spreading and believing in the sermons he presents, and despises all forms of institutionalized religious belief. Nadeem Naimy explains Nuaimah's connection to Russia:

The eagerness to have the gap bridged between himself and Christ was already, therefore another factor in the making of Naimy's mind when in the fall of 1906 he found himself, again

¹¹ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon, 1948.p. 15.

on a scholarship, in Czarist Russia. The five years he spent as a brilliant student at the Theological Seminary in Poltava in the Ukraine, allowed him to plunge deeply into the rich and manifold nineteenth century Russian literature which he read with vehemence. What in his mind had hitherto been the making of his nature and the nature of his environment and upbringing both in Lebanon and Palestine, had now come to find in this literature its artistic, intellectual and cultural justification, enhancement and ultimate fulfillment.¹²

Thus, it could be concluded, through Nuaimah's protagonist Mirdad, that both of them reflect an adherence to the Tolstoyan movement. Indeed, this is justified by Mirdad's peaceful tendencies to solve conflicts and not repay violence with violence. Rather, Tolstoyans were always readers of the Sermon on the Mount, which lays bare Jesus Christ's teachings more than his proclivities to produce miracles. Indeed, Jesus Christ expresses the need for perfecting the human heart:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹³

A Tolstoyan could also be considered as a Christian pacifist. This case could be explained with Mirdad's willingness to ignore Shamadam's –the Ark's self-proclaimed Master—brutal and severe ways.

To conclude this part, it is essential to affirm that *the Book of Mirdad* is an amalgamation of literary, philosophical, and spiritual interpretations, and a conflation between the character

¹² Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. American University of Beirut. 1985.p .61.

¹³ Holy Bible, New International Version. Biblica Inc.

of Jesus Christ and the figure of a God infiltrated in the believers' minds and ways of thinking. Thus, at times, humans must find a way to transcend—that is to overcome their clashes-- through the faculty of « Understanding » in order to envision the whereabouts of God the peacemaker, and God should also transcend—according to Nuaimah-- his superiority to become able to give birth to wisdom from within people's practices and convictions and not from « above ». Therefore, Transcendence in *the Book of Mirdad* appears at first as a mechanism by which God's existence maybe justified, explaining thus the humans' mission on earth. Yet, the notion of Transcendence might also cause distraught for it might not always provide the answers for human beings' temporal existence and purpose on earth.

2) *The Book of Mirdad*: Historical Context and Circumstances in Which It Was Produced:

The Book of Mirdad: The Strange Story of a Monastery Which Was Once Called the Ark was written by Nuaimah and published in Beirut, Lebanon, 1948. Although he spent a lot of years of his youth in the United States, --specifically from 1911 until 1932 --when he was mostly active with the Pen League—he was not recognized as a novelist nor as a poet by the American public unlike his friend and literary companion Khalil Gibran, who was able to easily astonish readers with his famous piece of creation entitled *the Prophet*. Nuaimah wrote poetry in English and tried to spread his writings into the American realm. In *the New Antology of American Poetry: Modernisms, 1900-1950*, a part of Nuaimah's experience in America, along with some specificities about his poetry are exposed:

Although MIKHAIL NAIMY lived in the United States for twenty years, serving with the U.S Army in World War I and writing most of his poetry in New York City, he is unknown to most American readers of poetry. Yet he was regarded as the most acclaimed writer in international Arab culture when he died in 1988, and at one time he was considered for the Nobel Prize in literature [...] Naimy's poetry is regarded for both its dark stoicism and its peacefulness. His experience in World War I on the French front led to his renowned poem « My Brother ». Such poems as « Hunger », written at the beginning of the Great Depression, appeared in the New York Times in 1930. Undoubtedly Naimy's sensitivity to the economic depression stems in part from his horror at the famine in Lebanon[...].¹⁴

¹⁴Gould Axelrod, Steven. Roman, Camille and Travisano, Thomas. *The New Anthology of American Poetry: Modernisms 1900-1950*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2005.p.456-457.

This extract hints at the sentiments of terror and dread the writer Nuaimah experienced throughout his attempts to write whether poetry or prose. Indeed, since literature is represented as a form of art, and expresses a degree of inventiveness and imagination by referring to inspiration derived from one's reality, Nuaimah found that his world was a pit for estranged humanity and tortured casualties resulted because of the awfulness of economic and political situations in both America and Lebanon alike. Nuaimah expressed an abhorrence mixed with both sorrow and compassion, and he also did not hesitate to generate his ideas by the use of a book which expressed at the same time the need for an escape and a need for a remedy, and prompted questions of existence. Therefore, the creation of *the book of Mirdad* coincided with the increase and proliferation of what we might refer to as Modernist anxiety. Modernism, as a literary and philosophical movement, is mainly focused on breaking up with tradition by means of distorting, in creative fashion, some « normalized » structures in literature, which also engendered the appearance of the technique of the « stream of consciousness » as an example of challenge and of revealing « innermost confessions, wells of suppressed energy »¹⁵, and « daring experimentation »¹⁶. The Modernist Period also had its deep-seated grounds and was justified according to a rationale by its adherents. It represented mainly a reaction to the traumatic events of the period, such as World War I and II, the Economic Depression, and the disturbing, yet piercing and perceptive theories by Sigmund Freud—mainly the theory of the unconscious--, Friedrich Nietzsche—his declaration that God is Dead and that He abandoned humanity-- along with the definition of the *Übermensch*, meaning 'the Super human' who transcends religion as a means for survival and self-improvement--, and mostly Charles Darwin—the Theory of the Evolution of Species denying supreme interferences in the action of creation. —These reflections caused a crisis because of which other authors and people in general were extremely disillusioned, and which resulted in losing the power of faith in humanity and started a new unending series of unanswered questions. Besides, the year 1948, on a more local and Middle-Eastern level, witnessed the creation of Israel, the eventual division of the Levant, and the commencement of more clashes and political combats in the region. Salma Khadra Jayyusi confirms this demonstration by her own view on Western Modernism and its eventual echoes propagated into the Eastern section of the world:

¹⁵ Humphrey, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. University of California Press. 1954.p. V.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Among the figures [...] was Sir James Frazer. In *the Golden Bough* (1890) he wrote about the presence of archetypal rhythms in human life, in particular the rhythms of the birth and rebirth of gods, proclaiming the capacity of myth to re-establish links with primal sources of experience in a world controlled by 'functional rationality' [...] Frazer's work led to 'extreme mental states, rapture, ecstasy, and transcendence'. Darwin's concept of the origin of species challenged the very foundation of religious belief. Freud became, in Auden's words, 'a whole climate of opinion', and his description of the ineluctable conflict between nature and culture gave rise to the discomfort of civilization [...] Marx exposed the exploitative nature of capitalist society and showed how it transformed 'personal worth into exchange value'. Nietzsche, who, for example, emphasized Dionysian energy and rapture which civilized life tried to tame [...] had the most profound influence on western thought and literature.¹⁷

Therefore, the year 1948 and the period prior to that, represented a watershed in the history of both Western and Eastern thought as it liberated Arab poetry from the grips of Medieval components and shifted Western literature to a situation where existentialist and absurdist cogitations shattered all human enthusiasm. *The Book of Mirdad*, thus, expresses a certain level of anxiety for it generates questions on the true, arguable, and vague definitions of what a God could represent. At first, the novel seems to take a biblical stance and introduce Mirdad as an 'heir' to Jesus Christ. Yet, as the author continues to shed light on the protagonist's proposals and general truths, he seems to take a more "liberal", and personalized representations of God. Indeed, Mirdad declares in the beginning: « With seven seals has Mirdad sealed his lips. With seven veils has Mirdad veiled his face, that he may teach you and the world, when you are ripe for teaching. »¹⁸ Here, Mirdad declares himself a tutor of humanity, and singles out his teaching capacities the human mind is in considerable need for. Yet, he also insists that « your word and God's are one except that yours is still in veils »¹⁹ which paradoxically hints at the potential equality between Man and God. This utterance could also be referenced to the idea of Existentialist Humanism developed par Sartre, which alludes to the importance of the authenticity of Man. This theory could be applied in this context as Easterners live in a society that considers God to be a source of punishment and wrath, leading people to conform and hide behind their true selves. Yet, Mirdad encourages to « lift the veils » and start believing in God as one believes in Himself. This idea could be traced to one of the signs of Modernist anxiety,

¹⁷ Badawi, M.M. (Ed). *Modern Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press.1992, p.133-134.

¹⁸ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*, 1948. Beirut, Lebanon.p.41-42.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.52.

inciting Man to reconsider his appreciation for himself with regards to religious thought, and in relation to his connection with others in society.

From another point of view, Mirdad's presence in this book—as Man and God-- could be explained, in this historical context, through Mikhail Nuaimah's tendencies to justify the absurd by resorting to the creation of an innovative and reformist religious thinking. Although the idea of religion apparently sounds hyper-contradictory to the notion of the 'Absurd' and secular atheism as Albert Camus developed it—meaningless and nothingness--, Nuaimah, through Mirdad, justifies monotony and lack of creativity in society by a need for transcendence and spiritual reflection. Indeed, Nuaimah maintains that drowning in the Absurd—manifested in social conformity -- is an escape and is perceived by the majority as a possible explanation for their modernist shock. Indeed «: The Absurd, then, presents itself in the form of an existential opposition. It arises from the human demand for clarity and transcendence on the one hand and a cosmos that offers nothing of the kind on the other. Such is our fate: we inhabit a world that is indifferent to our sufferings and deaf to our protests. »²⁰

Thus, through the historical timing in which the novel was produced, we could easily decipher the necessity for the existence of a 'spiritual' book introducing a new form of perception, and comprehend, thus, the tenets propounded by Mirdad in order to deliver a new outlook on Providence, in a way that does not separate a Deity from Man, nor comprise a tone full of anger and commandments, but in a manner, that rather lies in Man's reluctance to believe in this Providence or not, and in either way, Man would always emerge as God-like in this context.

3) *The Book of Mirdad* and *The Book of Khalid*: Blatant Echoes and Reverberating Inspiration:

Rihani and Nuaimah, as members of the Arab-American Pen Association, shared similar values and views especially concerning religious thought, reforming spirituality, and identity as a limitless perception. Gibran, in his own words on self-knowledge, writes:

The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;
And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.
But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;

²⁰ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/camus/#H5> .

And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.
For self is a sea boundless and measureless.²¹

According to Gibran, the self is boundless and in need for constant renovation and redefinition, which also justifies Khalid's quest for his incarnation of a hybrid sense of construction by being part of both the United States and Lebanon. It also explicates Mirdad's proposals on the 'Self' as being adaptable to all forms and versatile in a God-like manner; concluding thus the presence of a Universal and a sacred being at the same time. At first glance, the resemblances in Nuaimah's and Rihani's novels are quite flagrant and unmistakable. Both of them share the same formation of their respective titles and they are also similar in style and form of their narratives—in using biblical language, repartees, and the archetype of the disobedient and defiant character—. Indeed, Nuaimah declared Rihani as an inspiration, and both focus on an archetypal prophetic protagonist, characterized by seclusion and exceptionalism, and rebellious towards the standards previously-agreed upon by society. There is also the question of the presence of a manuscript in common. Mirdad listed his adventure in a written piece hidden within the dark alleys of Altar Peak, while Khalid also chronicled events in a book supported by his friend Shakib's judgment of the events in what the latter calls the *Histoire Intime*. The two books were long time lost and finally found to be read by anonymous persons. This is a reminder of sacred scripture, which typically always recounts prophetic occurrences and narrates its characters' ventures. Besides, the other similitude between these two books lies in the disappearance of both characters, inciting the curiosity of the reader and adding shades of mystery, suspense, and uncertainty. However, the main purposes are the fabrication of an unusual persona distinguished by hybridity: A Lebanese-American Khalid and a Universal Mirdad who is not known—in the book—to have a specific « nationality » --except for being a descendent of Noah and Sam--, yet it is obvious that the protagonist identifies with all people from all differences. Moreover, 'sacred' settings are forwarded in both novels with Khalid being expelled from Egypt and lost at its desert and wilderness—hinting at the Exodus--, and Mirdad incarnating the modern-day Noah and sailing with his disciples to the unknown at the end of the book. Thus, it is to be concluded that both characters are in constant search for a harmonious meaning through transcendence, whether through geographical movement, through spirituality and the molding of a new identity not bound by religious organizations, or even through immersing people surrounding them in their atypical opinions. To conclude this part, the name Khalid is the equivalent of the

²¹ Gibran, Khalil. *The Prophet*, A'Naby. OneWorld Publications. 2012. p.55.

adjectives « Eternal » or « Immortal » in the Arabic language, while Mirdad means the person who keeps coming back or the 'Ever-returning', which also alludes to the notions of the perpetual and the everlasting. Their consecutive names are intentionally chosen by the authors as reminders of their exquisite power to seek a remodeling of humankind through words, experience, and insight.

4) *The Book of Mirdad*: To What Extent Does It Represent Arab-American Literature?

As a Mahjarite writer, Nuaimah's literary influences ranged between his mother tongue, Russian Literature, and American Literature. Yet, Nuaimah was keen on joining his American-Lebanese mates on the road to harbor and retain their visions of Arab-American literature. Although *the Book of Mirdad* appears oriented towards a literature of the East, it nevertheless discloses and imparts an intention directed towards both the American readership and Lebanese or Arab crowds. Indeed, this book was written to become a testimony of Nuaimah's journey in life including America, and it is said that despite his period of contact with American society, Nuaimah sensed an alienation and a materialism that overwhelmed him and could not penetrate his conception of spirituality. Despite that Ameen Rihani was able to tame the seemingly Materialist side of America through a balance he established with the East by his mediator and traveler Khalid—who discovered God in nature by means of Transcendentalist philosophy and sought to reverse excessive religiosity in the East through the inspiring model of industrial and methodological America--, Nuaimah only made use of a historical context bolstered by American events, and reserved Transcendentalist thought—confirmed by Mirdad's concerns on self-consciousness and knowledge, and God that inherently lives in Nature—as a major influencer upon his writings. Yet, still, Nuaimah produced poetry such as his poem « My Brother » in which he writes:

Brother, if on the heels of war Western man celebrates his deeds,
Consecrates the memory of the fallen and builds monuments for heroes,
Do not yourself sing for the victors nor rejoice over those trampled by victorious wheels;
Rather kneel as I do, wounded, for the end of our dead.

Brother, if after the war a soldier comes home
And throws his tired body into the arms of friends,

Do not hope on your return for friends,
Hunger struck them down all to whom we might whisper our pain²²

This poem fosters the disillusion and pain Nuaimah experimented with during his stay in the United States especially during World War I, which reinforced his intention to establish a literary work in which spiritual tools are the goals to cure America and Lebanon from war and its human fatalities rather than curb technological development that could rise to its objectives if manipulated by the wise. For Nuaimah, the disease lies rather in the soul and not the scientific progress per se. Therefore, *the Book of Mirdad* implicitly regains an American aura through the language, the historical context—Western Modernism--, and the willingness to connect East and West utilizing a Jesus-like mystic—who is worshipped by both poles—who adopts a Transcendentalist stance to rehabilitate the corrupt human soul. To conclude, *AL Mahjar* Group, Nuaimah included, stepped out of Lebanon to constitute what is referred to by Deleuze and Guattari as « Minor Literature ». It is the conception that it « is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language. But the primary characteristic of a minor literature involves all the ways in which the language is effected by a strong coefficient of deterritorialization. »²³ Indeed, this book, also written in Arabic, deterritorialized the Arabic language from its medieval themes—which rarely included Christian references and substructure, and hardly addressed the idea of God through a different definition of the monotheistic perception-- and its long and sometimes pompous sentences to enter a new movement and era through transcendentalist thinking fraught with transformed biblical exchanges in a context stamped by anxiety and post traumatic reactions. Besides, the Mahjar poets and authors metamorphosed Arabic language before shifting to English, which makes Arab-American literature a commixture of English language transposed onto a transformed form of Arabic. Wail. S Hassan explains the changes in Arab poetry and its connection to immigrant narratives : « By introducing a new conception of poetry, by adding a spiritual

²² Nuaimah, Mikhail. « My Brother ». Website: Inspirational Poetry, Poems, Quotes: <https://www.inspirationalstories.com/poems/my-brother-mikhail-naimy-poems/> . (Translated from Arabic by Sharif. S. Elmusa and Gregory Orfalea.)

²³ Deleuze, Gilles. Guattari, Félix, and Brinkley, Robert. *What is Minor Literature?* University of Southern Mississippi. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20133921> .

dimension to It (...) by turning away from rhetoric and declamation, by concentrating on the more subjective experience of man in relation to nature and ultimate questions, by introducing biblical themes and images into their poetry, by their preference for short meter and stanzaic forms, the *Mahjar* poets(...) exercised a liberating influence upon modern Arabic poetry. »²⁴ Thus, this « liberating » force represented a factor that owes the *Book of Mirdad* its unique form and style, and situates it on the side of Arab-American masterpieces.

5) The Question of Transcendence Re-Visited:

In this paper, the question of Transcendence will be defined from varied perspectives. The most basic idea concerning the term lies in its general definition and its orthodox meaning which is directly related to the religious explication. At first, it could be noticed that this philosophical question is an asset contained by God. Indeed, in all monotheistic and Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—God is viewed as higher, untouchable, and beyond a Man’s reach. He is independent from all physical realms and holds the status of the invincible and the unconquerable. For instance, in the Islamic tradition, God is known to have ninety-nine names, with the hundredth still unconcluded and left for human beings to reflect upon. He is, according to the scripture, the « The Supreme », « the Creator », « the All-Seeing » “the All-Aware” and « the Sublime ». These titles reflect the predominant and surpassing traits of God, which render him necessarily transcendent. In Christianity, the Holy Trinity or Hypostasis mirrors a degree of detachment from human traits. Besides, in these three religions, the body and the flesh are always viewed as inferior to the soul which remains elevated and incomparable in nobility and purity contrarily to the physical body that only assembles the « waste » of the material world. Next to the theological definition, the Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the term as involving « exceeding usual limits, extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience, in *Kantian Philosophy*, being beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge »²⁵. Therefore, the main focus in this dissertation will be related to the meaning that stresses what is beyond or what is within, or what is beyond the “within” or the Self. Indeed, transcending could refer to a vertical direction in which humans are separated from God, land, or their own psyche. It also hints at an evolution or a renovation. However, the

²⁴ Hassan, Wail. S. *Immigrant Narratives, Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2011.p. 60.

²⁵ The Merriam Webster Dictionary. Website:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transcendent>

term could always be depicted through a post-modern horizontal mode, in which transcending lies within one's mind or soul as a mechanism for more self-discovery and personal appreciation through the respect for others as equal and as divine. For instance, Transcending could mean overcoming the notion of the Senior God as a spiritual procedure allowing a more equal understanding of Man and his "Godly" qualities. The problematic raised in the context of *the book of Mirdad* and *the Book of Khalid* is the capacity for such a term to constitute a procedure for explaining existence. It also raises the question of identity as flexible and shifting, and builds comprehension with others through what Mirdad calls « Understanding ». Thus, Transcendence appears to be related to the theological sphere, while, in reality, it confronts a rebellious view of identity, and unmasks a human agony resulting from the ambiguous relationship of the metaphysical realm with the tangible world.

This dissertation, will, therefore, explore some of the important angles brought about by the term Transcendence in relation to *The Book of Mirdad* and *the Book of Khalid*. We will not be limited to its basic dictionary definition that emphasises the religious and ecclesiastical outlook. Rather, through this piece of writing, we will seek to analyze the concept in accordance with the experiences of Khalid and Mirdad who represent two paradigms for the fruitful meditation in Nature and the complex reunion of geographical and spiritual identities. First of all, I will commence by exploring the landscape of 'Transcendence' by delving into its literary and subjective definitions, by theorizing it as applicable to the form and style of each narrative, and by formulating its symbolic and symbolist expressions in the two novels. The first chapter will, thus, introduce the reader to a rather almost exhaustive literary and theorized view of the word 'Transcendence' as we sought to investigate and interpret it— and as it would suit the contexts of the two books---. As for the second part of the dissertation, I will be establishing a link between the notions of transcendence and the rise to prophethood through the inspection of Transcendentalist literary productions and the value of the prophet-figure as a literary and human hero tinted with the Divine and rooted, at the same time, into the representation of the common Man—especially in the cogitation and reflection of Henry David Thoreau--, in connection to Nuaimah's and Rihani's Arab-American literary accomplishments. Finally, the third part will be characterized by an inconsiderable and infinitesimal change of direction in which I will attempt at opposing the dimensions of both transcendence and immanence, yet by providing how these two terms are intrinsically intricate and in constant bonding despite their paradoxical outlook. In fact, the third chapter will also include how and why defining transcendence could never be thorough nor complete if not associated with its own reshaped

definition stating that immanence lies in transcending the nonphysical itself and in scrutinizing the ‘Self’ and its situation as ‘being-in the-world’ –as Heidegger suggests-- from an identity-related and phenomenological perspective. Besides, I will seek to examine the limits of perceiving the concept of transcendence as a way towards the re-invention and re-creation of a world in which the Human and the Divine are interconnected and equal by introducing a number of obstructions and interferences that delay, and sometimes restrain the concept of ‘transcendence’ from expounding to reach its goal which consists in permitting humanity from modifying and transforming the narrow vision of one’s personality and identity into a multilayered persona fraught with appreciation to the human as God and vice versa . These obstacles manifest themselves in the pervading surges of communal anxiety that constantly resurface to remind humanity of its finitude—especially because of wars and political control-, which results in a general nihilistic and pessimistic attitude, preventing Man from finding solutions, and discouraging a desperate psyche from remodeling and re-discovering existence through its own making. For example, Mirdad—although he adopts and uses biblical diction, and appears to be a mentor reminiscent of the Christ—is not, in reality, an advocator of a specific religion, nor is he striving to convince the readership to join a Christian sect or a dogma contrarily to what is promoted about the *Book of Mirdad*. As a matter of fact, the protagonist comes forward to elaborate a global vision stressing a more moral stance advocated through transcendence while being disguised under Christian features—a method for Nuaimah to cope with reactions and restrict accusations of heresy-- . Indeed, Mirdad is allegorical for Nuaimah’s humanistic mysticism and belief in the continuity of humanity through espousing the importance of God within Man. Andrew Harvey, in a Forward to *the Book of Mirdad*, writes:

There are(...) two kinds of mysticism: a mysticism that teaches the way to transcendence and union with the Light alone, and an ‘evolutionary mysticism’, which honors the union with the transcendent but which stresses the birth of the divine in matter(...) History has shown us that the first kind of mysticism can co-exist effortlessly with hierarchy, inequality and injustice, because in its vision the world is seen and known as either inevitably flawed or as an illusion, with the only refuge possible being a transcendent freedom from it. In the second kind of mysticism, we are all challenged to go on a difficult and mysterious path of constant transformation of our entire being and action, so as to embody the divine (...) and to be agents of an Evolutionary Will that longs to transfigure all conditions of life on earth.²⁶

Thus, according to Harvey, mysticism can also be concluded as a mechanism to realize the transcendence that allows the Unity of Man and God. In this context, it is Evolutionary

²⁶ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*, 1948. Beirut, Lebanon. p.vii.

Mysticism—the second form of mysticism-- that concerns mostly our analysis of this subject. Indeed, Nuaimah regards Transcendence as an ambition and an objective through which humanity can be able to combine a spiritual self with a ‘materialist’ pragmatism in order to achieve balance, divinity, and not undermine the capacities of man in a modernist age that is followed and ruled by existential challenges. Moreover, to bridge the gap between the average reader and Transcendence, mechanisms such as mysticism, meditation, and also Deterritorialization are required because both Mirdad and Khalid embody these experiences and espouse them as their tools to attain this knowledge which would free them later from conformity and ignorance. However, the concept of transcendence remains ambiguous as to its validity, especially when the endings of both novels suggest the prevalence and the victory of the ephemeral and the nihilistic above ‘Understanding’, knowledge, and transformation for we can notice the abrupt and unexpected disappearances of the main characters at the final stages of their stories, which probably allude to their inability to rise up to their own idealism. Yet, the characters should not be conflated with their creators. If Mirdad and Khalid demonstrated an Idealist mindset by propagating what approximately appears to be Kantian categorical imperatives and moral rules –especially as far as Mirdad is concerned--, it is because Nuaimah and Rihani stressed the importance of an equilibrium in the journey leading to transcendence, and this balance –to be achieved—required a kind of “martyrdom” and excess to some extent. Aside from perceiving transcendence as a one-way ideal, it could also be shifted in order to disentangle and clarify the uncertainty and inconclusiveness of the human soul or Self. Indeed, John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon argue that “After all, for all its authority and prestige, the word “transcendent” is a relative term: It depends on what is being transcended, and there is a long list of candidates—the subject, the self, the sensible world, beings, even being itself—and so there is nothing to stop us from wondering whether transcendence itself is to be added to the list as still one more thing to be transcended.”²⁷ . Through these perspectives and definitions, we could also ascertain that even transcendence could be surpassed as a method towards introspection and the investigation of divinity, power, morals, and union within Man regardless of His permanent contradictions. Therefore, the question of transcendence is studied as a means and a goal by which coexistence could be fulfilled, and the dual asset of Arab-American literature—as literature combining Arab and American concerns—could be finally put to the fore. Indeed, questioning transcendence and its functioning in the two novels

²⁷ Caputo, John D, and Scanlon, Michael J (Ed). *Transcendence and Beyond, A Postmodern Inquiry*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, USA. 2007. p. 2.

highlights the effect of Transcendentalist values --as American attributes-- upon the Levantine protagonists, and posits them as manifestations of personal transcendence.

Chapter I: The Landscape of Transcendence.

A) Formulating Transcendence from a Literary and Historical Point of View.

Before further exploring the position, the impact, and the illustration of the term “transcendence” within *the Book of Khalid (1911)* and *the Book of Mirdad (1948)*, it is important to begin by examining it not only as being a multifaceted and many-sided concept alluding to the transformation of one’s Self, or implying the metamorphosis of the human existence into a world fraught with the faculty of Man to “Comprehend” and “Understand” beyond the traditional religious institutionalization, but rather as a notion that finds its explanation and its deep-seated core in the principles and ideas of the authors—mainly Gibran, Rihani, and Nuaimah--, as well as within the plight and the entire psychological and historical experience of the Syro-American condition. In fact, the thematic history of Arab-American literature derived its deeply-rooted spirituality and “romanticist” framework and content from a powerful need of the Syrian-American community to overcome the rifts in identity—especially within the Arab Christian population—and to overpower the clash of civilizations which many Lebanese immigrants to the United States were forced to encounter on a daily basis. This literature is, therefore, an attempt at exteriorizing the urgent need for transcending these differences and fashioning them as a new form of internal accord and harmony between the Lebanese and the Americans.

1. Defining Transcendence through Comprehending the Syrian-American Voyage to the New World and by Deciphering the Pen League’s Thought:

Immigration can be first defined as a major watershed in the lives of those who experiment with it, especially that it is also automatically followed by a primary shift on a geographical and cultural level for the families and the people who venture it. Although immigrating is a universal right, mainly if the communities concerned with it are threatened by war and devastation, it remains a difficult task to perform because its consequences remain a challenge. Indeed, the Syrian-American experience is considered to be an illustration for this situation. The Syro-Lebanese immigration primarily began after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire—circa 1911--, and from a historical viewpoint, the New World, or America, was the promise and the dream for peace and stability in contrast to the divided Greater Syria or *Suur’ya Al Kubra*. Many waves of “Eastern” immigration followed, and the confrontation with the “West”

surfaced. In this context, transcendence is to be perceived, from an objective and historical perspective, as a situation of transformation, a geographical dislocation in the form of a physical as well as a psychological movement. Indeed, this philosophy is unconsciously and intricately intermingled within the mentalities of the immigrants for its essence expresses the unexpected change, which will later affect the émigré literature and thinking, and oblige the newcomers to partially assimilate to the American context. This genealogy of transcendence does not find its explanation through abstraction or mere theorization. It rather takes place within analyzing the act of deterritorialization—the term mainly used by Deleuze and Guattari-- brought about by conflict and struggle. Besides, the case of immigration reminds of transition and an eventual friction within a new multicultural society in the United States, thus the formation of a new identity. Indeed, the adjustment to a bicultural environment, and the adoption of a pluralized identification of the Self, are the consequences and the outcomes of transcending—meaning overcoming the cultural isolation of the Levant, and developing a new sense of the psyche, within the physical world-- . Although ‘transcending’ to accomplish one’s humane side of integration and travel is not always positively welcomed by the subjects concerned, it remains a mechanism through which the Lebanese-American community was able to give birth to its own literature and convey, therefore, the need to recognize this duality through writing. Besides, physically transcending continents involves the repercussions of separation, trauma, and the necessity to be re-invented on the level of one’s identity, which is not always evident and guaranteed. For instance, Khalid in *TBK*, reflects this -- when he first arrived at the United States-- through a dream that reflects a repressed reality—from a Freudian perspective-- to relive his flashbacks:

I dreamt I was a donkey-boy again.

Out on the sun-swept roads of Baalbek, I tramp behind my burro, trolling my *mulayiah*.

At noon, I pass by a garden redolent of mystic scents and tarry awhile.

Under an orange tree, on the soft green grass, I stretch my limbs (...)

The cyclamens, the anemones, the daisies, I saw them, but I could not speak to them.

The goblin placed his hand upon my mouth, and I was dumb

O take me back to my own groves, I cried, or let me speak.

But he threw me off his shoulders in a huff, among the daisies and the cyclamens.²⁸

²⁸ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Melville House Publishing. 2012.p. 51-52 (originally published in 1911).

Through his dream, Khalid unconsciously confesses that to realize intellectual and physical transcendence, and to accomplish the goals of his voyage, he should be able to reconnect with his homeland through the American soil, without sensing a schism nor permitting a chasm to evolve between his original “East”, and the current “West” that he inhabits. Indeed, the nostalgia depicted here is quite natural. Yet, transcending exhibits a new manner of reformulating one’s homesickness and transforming it into an appreciation of the world in itself as “home”, without delimiting countries nor recognizing borders. This type of transcendence can be also reminiscent of Heidegger’s Being-in-the-world or the *Dasein* philosophy. In fact, John Haugeland explains that “dasein is a living way of life that embodies an understanding of being”²⁹ as well “as the entity that understands being”.³⁰ Through the *Dasein* --further explained in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927) --, or what we might refer to as the experience of “Being” as a whole entity --soul and body--, it is quite understood that Khalid’s future experience of living and creating a new reshaped identity should not lead him to discriminate between nations nor between any specific space or culture. This context of immigration and the primary contact between the Lebanese and the Americans could be utilized to illustrate the relocation of the general idea of metaphysical transcendence, which basically means “being transcendent to the world, outside space and time”, onto the plane of the tangible world. Indeed, for Khalid --as a representative of the Syrian immigrating community-- to be able to interconnect with a “Western” context, he was able to invent a spirituality rooted in the appreciation for Nature as a mother-figure in order to accomplish his goal for American interconnection. Thus, according to Abdul Aziz Said in his article entitled *Understanding Peace through Rihani’s Spirituality*, immigrants developed a Universal consciousness. He explains: A new perspective gives us permission to listen to and to abide by our consciences, and cultivate an ever-emerging transnational consciousness, which is a meeting of the best of East and West (...) The transnational consciousness is not molded by the media, nor is it the creation of the elites and intellectuals: it is the cry for human dignity. It is an innate human expression. This transnational consciousness has the power to generate new metaphors...symbols and resources that represent

²⁹ Haugeland, John and Rouse, Joseph (Ed). *Dasein Disclosed*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2013. (page number not mentioned).

<https://books.google.fr/books?id=jQKtzYneKycC&pg=PT3&dq=dasein&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwidiNyBzPzcAhUGDMAKHV4wCh0Q6AEIRDAG#v=onepage&q=dasein&f=false>

³⁰ *Ibid.*

new values and goals beyond outdated, arbitrary, artificial boundaries.³¹ Therefore, the experience of immigration is a way of “Being-in-the-world”—that is, transcending what is beyond the realm of the metaphysical in order to reconfigure the physical—and grasping its understanding to its fullest through Khalid ‘s experience and the larger Syrian mass immigration. Indeed, Heidegger also suggests that this “relocation of transcendence in the material realm” could be referred to as “Epistemological Transcendence”. Indeed, according to David Wood, “Heidegger has shown, in *Being and Time* that epistemological transcendence is based upon a bad analysis of our experience of the world; there is no outside because there is no inside either”³². Thus, we can comprehend that this incomplete analysis of existence ought to prompt humanity into remodeling and modifying the form of the geographical and mental perception of the world in which it lives in. Indeed, according to Heidegger, it is needless to search for a way to surpass and spiritually overpower the tangible world. Rather, one could remake their existence through learning the experience of ‘being’, and reimagining a new identity through immigration or meditation—Khalid’s and the Lebanese Americans’ situation—for example.

To conclude this part, it is important to understand that transcendence is a versatile and open-ended notion through which we seek to attain a new “Self” as Mirdad suggests: “Aye, to deny the Self is to assert the Self. When one is dead to change, then one is born to changelessness. Most men live to die. Happy are they who die to live.”³³ This alludes to the context of Lebanese Americans who sought to geographically transcend their one-sided view of a simplified and unitary “Oriental” self, as well as historically establish a hybrid and bicultural community who rose up to the challenges of the experience of “Being”, and bore the émigré literature and its pioneers: Gibran, Rihani, and Nuaimah.

³¹ Funk, Nathan C. and Sitka, Betty. J (Ed). *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West. A Pioneering Call for Arab- American Understanding*. University Press of America.2004. p. 114.

³² Caputo, John. D and Scanlon, Michael J (Ed). *Transcendence and Beyond, a Postmodern Inquiry*. Indiana University Press. p.12. 2007.

³³ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. Watkins Media Limited. p. 100. 2015. (originally published in 1948).

2. Transcendence in the Philosophy of Mikhail Nuaimah.

Mikhail Nuaimah, born to a Lebanese Maronite Christian family, and raised within a particularly religious household, is thought to be one of the most influential and revolutionary Arab-American writers in the twentieth century. Indeed, explaining the concept of transcendence by investigating the deeper thoughts of this author would have to, firstly, traverse and pass through the initial religious connotation. In fact, Nuaimah was brought up as a fervent believer in the Christian religion and in the teachings of Christ and his person as a paradigm for forgiveness, tolerance, and salvation. His background is quite momentous and important to speak briefly of for it shaped his future views on seeking to introduce a type of spiritual reform to the traditional and common Christian belief, especially in the TBM. Therefore, we could maintain that his attempts at inaugurating and instigating a change on this level find their way throughout this concept of transcendence which we could also consider to be a mechanism of spiritual and mental reform. In the first book of his autobiographical trilogy *Sabu'un* or *Seventy*, Nuaimah recalls memories of his mother, their prayers, and his biological father's voyage to America as a discovery of the new and heavenly "Promised Land", and at the same time, as a deliverance from the persecution of Arab Christians during the era of Ottoman rule in the Levant. Indeed, Charles Henry Churchill seems to violently condemn what he refers to as "Mohammedans" –meaning the Turkish hegemony— and appears to subjectively hint at their belligerency towards the local Christians in Lebanon. He writes: "The Turks again adopted their unalterable policy, delighted at the prospect of renewed miseries to the Christians, and already in imagination carving out a path over their lifeless bodies and ruined tenements to the attainment of their corrupt and selfish views."³⁴ This affirmation confirms the atrocities of a divided 'Greater Syria'—in the words of Antoun Saadeh-- under Turkish control. It is also quintessential to point at the political upheavals and instabilities as the origins for Nuaimah's endeavors to introduce his renovated views of God. Indeed, he believed that through pursuing a reformed vision of religion—meaning Christianity in this context--, specifically as a faith that prioritizes the sacredness of Man on earth—and the combination of the 'Human and Divine' for that matter--, then political disruptions would be deterred by knowledge and by the respect of the community for the sense of "Self", that would allow fear, public disagreement, and division to become attenuate. In TBM, Mirdad, the character who literally and physically

³⁴ Churchill, Charles Henry. *The Druzes and the Maronites Under the Turkish Rule from 1840 to 1860*. Spottiswoode and Co. London. 1862. p. 84.

concretizes the author's vision of a transcendent God who humbled himself to experience "Being" "on earth", evaluates the significance of the "I" as representative of our consciousness as human beings, and as creatures who are able to identify with the earthly and human divine through this "I". He deliberately fashions a consciousness that easily realizes its moral goals through the interaction with this new vision of God. He explains:

God be my refuge from the woes of *I* and be my guide unto the bliss of *I*, For in that word, albeit so very slight, is locked the soul of every other word (...) Your *I* is but your consciousness of being, silent and incorporeal, made vocal and corporeal. It is the inaudible in you made audible, and the invisible made visible that, seeing, you may see the unseeable; (...) By merely saying *I* you bring to life a mighty host of words; each word a symbol of a thing (...) that universe is the creation of your *I* which is at once the maker and the made.³⁵

Through Mirdad's definition of the 'I', which is basically founded upon the mere declaration and confession that human consciousness is of divine quality, as well as its physical and verbal power to control nature, Nuaimah asserts that, like Mirdad, Jesus is able to be as representative of humanity as any other human characterized by dualities, which reinforces the idea of transcending the previously-proclaimed transcendent deity-- culturally and religiously-- . Indeed, transcending the superior and divine --Jesus as perceived by the Maronites-- implies re-orienting it to the plane of humble earth.

Moreover, Nuaimah reminds the readers that his mother used to beseech a metaphysical God whom he-- as a child-- never saw nor really comprehended the structure during his tumultuous childhood full of skepticism. He describes the specific words his mother would utter during her moments of supplication and writes: "I would repeat what my mother would say with a heavy tongue (...) and I would close my eyes to find the strange images my mother's words drew in my imagination; the image of a father whom my mother said was not of flesh, nor of blood, and that he inhabits the sky—that beautiful space where the sun rises during the day, and the moon and the stars would appear at night(...) those images have always confused me more than any other thing."³⁶ This religious upbringing and the traditional ideas derived from simple hereditary cognition were insufficient to Nuaimah in order for him to complete and reformulate his personal and intellectual perceptions of faith. Therefore, we can argue that the writer believes that transcending the metaphysical—or overcoming the divine discernment

³⁵ Nuaimah, Mikhaïl. *The Book of Mirdad*. Watkins Media Limited, 2015.p. 44 - 45.

³⁶ Nuaimah, Mikhaïl. *Sabu'un*. Naufal. Beirut, Lebanon. 2011. P. 20. (a personal translation from Arabic to English).

of Jesus—would allow a more understandable approach of Christianity, and create a less intangible and imaginative form of Christ—. Indeed, Nuaimah's Maronite background assumes that the nature of God is purely divine, despite the differences in the Eastern Catholic Syriac Church. Monothelism—meaning the union of a double nature, human and divine in Jesus—is a disregarded doctrine in this branch of Christianity and in churches attached to the Council of Chalcedon. Therefore, “The keynote in Mikhail Naimy's personality and thought is his deep religious sense [...] he seemed ultimately to reject the established teachings of the Church, while clinging to the example of Christ and his sublime teachings.”³⁷ However, Nuaimah's spirituality tends more towards transforming the classical image of an unreachable God—reminiscent of believers in Hypostatic Union—, which consequently renders the human side as mighty as the worshipped creator. Through TBM, Nuaimah, thus, reviews transcendence as not the same as Descartes for instance. The latter explicates that God should be most divine and most complete because, if otherwise, our already-conceived indubitable truths and unquestionable mathematical facts confirmed through the cogito – “I think, therefore, I exist”, or ‘*Cogito Ergo Sum*’—would fall into uncertainty and doubt. Contrarily to Descartes, Nuaimah asserts that perfection lies not in the metaphysical nor does it manifest itself in the absence of contradictions and dualities, rather, it is discovered in a being who is partly human and imperfect, and partly strong and divine-like. In fact, Nuaimah believes that true knowledge and progress come when the God-Human is in constant interaction with others, and when others are reminded of their equality to this dual God. Indeed, for Nuaimah, the hierarchical view of God is almost inconceivable. Nabil I. Matar underpins Nuaimah's unconventional and humanist religious thought:

In 1948, the MS. *Of the Book of Mirdad* was turned down by a London publisher on the grounds that it advanced a religion with “a new dogma”. A few years later, Mikhail Naimy was himself condemned by a priest as a heretic. It is unfortunate that Naimy's religious upbringing

³⁷ Hussein Dabbagh, *Mikhail Naimy: Some Aspects of his Thought as Revealed in His Writings* (Durham: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1983), p.46.

and education have not yet been properly investigated, nor, in particular, the significant influence of the Greek Orthodox and Gnostic strains on his literary output.³⁸

Indeed, to confirm Nuaimah's perceptions, we would not describe him as categorically religious, rather, we could discern that Nuaimah repositions and displaces God from the sphere of the unknown to the realm of the familiar as a form of intellectual militancy that seeks to bolster the scope of knowledge within the experience of being in the world. As a matter of fact, recognizing the ability of Man to resemble the Gods affirms the power of control within humans. In Nuaimah and Mirdad's context, this theory applies to his people as a way towards emancipation and renaissance. Also, the author's perception and inventiveness concerning the new vision of the Christian God and the Human being in General, serves his refusal for modernity—followed by a neglect for the spiritual and a focus on human automation and neo-slavery—by introducing the notion of divine Man in an age when human focus is centered upon capitalist profits. Nuaimah explains his viewpoint upon arriving in New York city around the years 1917 and 1929 and he describes the idea of Man who is a victim to materialism in a manner that eliminated all possibilities for appreciating His core, which is more than a mere subject for work and spiritual downfall.

These minds and hearts on rail and rubber tyres

Rolling, for ever rolling God knows where;

These hurried feet led on by mad desires

Out of one snare into another snare

How can we be their road-fellows, my soul?

They seek too many goals—we seek no goal.

So step aside and let them march and roll.³⁹

In his poem, Nuaimah offers the readers a glimpse of the Human being by means of metonymy through describing Him as “heart”, “mind”, and “feet”. Indeed, the poet perceives

³⁸ Matar, Nabil. I. *Adam and the Serpent: Notes on the Theology of Mikhail Naimy*. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 11 (1980) pp.56-61. p.56.

³⁹ Extracted from the poem “Let Them Pass” originally written in English by Mikhail Nuaimah. See the Arabic version “Li Yaa'buru” in *Hams Al Jufun (Eyelid Whisperings); al-Majmu'a*, vol IV. Beirut, 1945. p. 124.

Man not only as a spiritual and divine being, but also as a creature capable of perfecting His calculating side through acknowledging the legitimacy of his divine facets. Besides, in this extract, Nuaimah seems to vicariously live the monotonous experience of daily New Yorkers, who appear to be in a constant state of turmoil and agitation, while indirectly inciting them to pause and further reconsider their meaningless condition. On the literary level, it is implied that the persona watching these people aims at “defamiliarizing”—in the words of Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky-- them by encouraging them to no longer “seek too many goals” and project their energy onto reforming the spirit. Although this literary technique is not conspicuously demonstrated in the poem, it could rather be employed to express the solution Nuaimah offers to the “modern man hopelessly caught in the web of perdition knit by his very hands.”⁴⁰ The technique is initiated to simply make the familiar seem unfamiliar and “make the unfamiliar as easily digestible as possible”.⁴¹ What appears to be ‘familiar’ to the inhabitants of New York is the incessant and persistent search for financial and material satisfaction, while what seems to be the contrary, which is the ‘unfamiliar’ side, is their willingness to transcend their roughly nonspiritual mood in order to attain an awareness which is not completely based on viewing Man as machinery that lost its faith in Providence, but rather recognizes the individual as divine ‘Soul’ incorporated with the faculties of the pragmatic mind. To further analyze this idea, Nadim Naimy explains his point of view:

Any self conceived apart from the Self Universal or God, is only illusory. An illusion, then, is the whole world of time and place. Truly, to be is not to be apart but to make the trip or emigrate from the individual and particular in one’s self and in the rest of things to the unifying principle in Life Universal or God. This emigration by its very nature can only be inner and therefore lonely, and cannot be accomplished by physical suicide. It entails the predicament of emigrating from human society busy in the hubbub of its illusory everyday needs, while living in human society; of transcending the whole world of time and place while living in it, and of slaying the human in one’s self for the Divine while living in the flesh.⁴²

Thus, the concept of “Transcending” is exteriorized and illustrated through Nuaimah’s altered vision of religion in a manner that humans are literally engulfing two sides: One

⁴⁰ Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. The American University of Beirut. 1985. p. 67.

⁴¹ Reis, Marion J, and Lemon, Lee T.(Ed). *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. University of Nebraska Press. 1965. p. 4.

⁴² Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. The American University of Beirut. 1985. pp. 67-68.

incorporated into the material world, and another characterized by universality which alludes to unity and divinity. Indeed, “Modern society to him has fettered man and, without the spring of a new life of truth and beauty, man is doomed in it.”⁴³ Finally, Nuaimah reinvigorated the interpretation of the outlook and the essence of Man through a humanist belief that locates the latter on earth as the center of its progress, mentally and spiritually, and as the seeker of an inner vision of religion not controlled by an unseen world nor by organized churches.

3. Transcendence Through Rihanian and Gibranian Lenses.

Ameen Rihani and Khalil Gibran have always had approximately the same intellectual and literary—critical-- background, in that they pioneered Arab Romanticism and paved the way through Sentimentalism—as a writing technique—towards expressing the need for general political and social change in the Arab World, and also in regard to what they call the “West”. Transcendence, in this case, can take a multifaceted form. In fact, and on a first level, both Gibran and Rihani commenced their writings by adopting a particularly ‘Sentimentalist’ style, not perceived as maudlin nor as melodramatic, but rather seen as a base for the interference of the Romantic mood on one hand, and as an influence of the Arabic language’s naturally embroidered style on the other⁴⁴. Indeed, through this transition, Gibranian and Rihanian literary transcendence, followed by revelation and reform in their respective productions, takes place. To define Sentimentalism in its objective and non-clichéd spirit, Aida Imangulieva writes: “Sentimentalism as a literary tendency was a reaction to Enlightenment Rationalism. Belinsky paid tribute to the role of Sentimentalism in the development of Russian literature thus: “The purpose of Sentimentalism, which was introduced to Russian literature by Karamzin, was to arouse society and prepare it for a life of the heart and feeling.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the process of transcendence occurs when the two writers start from a Sentimentalist style that criticizes rationalism, and move on towards a Romantic literature (in both Arabic and English), that highlights the condition of Levantine society, the American subject, as well as the human presence, and His economic and psychological situation by reconstituting a new view of

⁴³ Boullata, Issa J. *Mikhail Naimy: Poet of Meditative Vision*. From the *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 24. No. 2. Brill. 1993.p. 176.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183302>

⁴⁴ Imangulieva, Aida. Gibran, Rihani, and Naimy: *East-West Interactions in Early twentieth-century Arab Literature*. Inner Farne Press. 2009.p. 40.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

spirituality. One may believe that introducing the concept of transcendence in this subpart would not be related to a spiritual connotation whatsoever. Yet, Transcending or evolving from a literary style to another, more developed and detailed illustrating thus the Arab-American literary maturity, also entails a change in mentality, and in the spiritual ideals of both authors. For instance, Gibran initiated his literary adventure through mere denouncements of “Oriental” women’s condition on the conjugal and familial levels, but he only restrained himself to exclusively and extensively “artistic-like” descriptions and “decorations” for the image and the pictorial frame he writes about, while maintaining the insinuations in his writings condemning conventions and corruption. For example, in *Broken Wings*, written in the early twentieth century, Gibran recounts the tragic love story of Salma Karamy, who is ‘promised’ to marry a man related to a priest, but is, in reality, in love with another, and is finally ejected from the household for tarnishing the “honor” of the family—a common and typical misogynist and violent cultural attribute in countries such as the Middle East, North Africa, or even parts of the Asian continent—. Indeed, Gibran, beneath his pictorial descriptions, did not hesitate to advance a critical opinion through his writings, denouncing honor killing: “An ancient practice in which men kill female relatives in the name of family honor for forced or suspected sexual activity before, or outside of, marriage—even when such women and girls have been victims of rape”⁴⁶. Thus, Gibran began by producing ‘Sentimentalist’ literature and fractions of storytelling, then sprang towards infiltrating his implicit denunciations into his work, while, at the same time, evolving towards the Romantic mood by also developing on the spiritual level: Indeed, he started by encouraging the Maronite church and the readers to discard such cultural practices and their illusory relation to honor—the latter considered as a spiritual characteristic-, and move on towards a more liberating version of religious belief, based on the respect for the dignity of humans, Men and Women alike, especially in *the Prophet*. Through his depiction of Salma Karamy in *Broken Wings*, we can further comprehend Gibran’s early sentimentalist style:

Selma sat by the window, looking on with sorrowful eyes and not speaking, although beauty has its own heavenly language, loftier than the voices of tongues and lips. It is a timeless language, common to all humanity, a calm lake that attracts the singing rivulets to its depth and makes them silent. Only our spirits can understand beauty, or live and grow with it (...) Real

⁴⁶ Penn, Michael, and Nardos, Rahel. *Overcoming Violence against Women and Girls. The International Campaign to Eradicate a Worldwide Problem*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003. p. 87.

beauty is a ray which emanates from the holy of holies of the spirit, and illuminates the body, as life comes from the depths of the earth (...)⁴⁷.

He basically focuses on the picture in which Selma's physical self exists, while exteriorizing her melancholic, desperate, and imprisoned side. To sum up Gibran's spiritual transition effected through his literary passage, Aida Imangulieva expands on Krachkovsky's—a Russian writer—standpoint:

Krachkovsky considers that the excessive sensitivity and high-flown tone, which sounds deliberate and affected, is not in fact merely the style of a few Arab writers but rather characteristic of the general psychology and behavior of the Arabs as a nation: “And if we compare the style of Gibran with the style of, say, contemporary Arab life, we will no longer see that artificiality that struck us at first sight (...) The roots of this style are to be found in the spiritual nature itself, not only of the individual writer but of the entire life out of which he grew.”⁴⁸

Thus, the writer reaches back at Gibran's environment and upbringing to explain the Pen League's literary style and escalating spiritual movement that spring up from local religious tradition and thrive towards perceiving religion to be in the service of humanity and not the contrary way. Indeed, he holds that the Levantine landscape, Lebanese society, and immigration instigated the urge for spiritual and social transcendence whether on the mental level or the on the level of the inner soul.

While Gibran's transitional spirituality was initiated through the segments of an already, politically-dismembered and dysfunctional society, chronicled throughout his short stories, Rihani sought to involve what may be referred to as the writing style of “Self-Orientalization”—in the words of Stephen Sheehi-- into a majority of his productions, including *the Book of Khalid*. This concept is thought to represent, through Rihanian literature, a mechanism or even a more pronounced manner of self-assertion in response to colonialism, notably to greater Imperial powers. Indeed, this style is blatant because it insists upon the parodic cliché of the Oriental Man who is a mystic, a poet, a fervent 'lover', and an admirer for meditation and for “Eastern” culinary taste. In fact, we can notice that, although it appears to be a pejorative action by the writer to strengthen this description and trait, knowing already that it is usually perceived as a feature of vulnerability and control by the oppressor to

⁴⁷ Gibran, Khalil. *The Broken Wings*. Global Grey. 2018. p.9. (originally published in 1912).

⁴⁸ Imangulieva, Aida. Gibran, Rihani, and Naimy: *East-West Interactions in Early twentieth-century Arab Literature*. Inner Farne Press. 2009.p. 41.

“exoticize” the natives, Rihani, instead, re-appropriates it as no longer a flaw, but rather as a self-defense mechanism, and develops the image to the advantage of the Levantine peoples through the protagonist Khalid whose ‘Oriental’ self was capable of debunking the cultural gap between America and Lebanon. For instance, Khalid is introduced, in some parts of his friend Shakib’s account of him, *the Histoire Intime*, as a prurient lover who does not hesitate to spend time with an American “mistress” or rather “princess”—from his own “Orientalist” perspective—and, in the heart of the “West”, she says: “And one day we shall travel together in the Orient; we shall visit the ruins of vanished kingdoms and creeds. Ah, to be in Palmyra with you! Do you know (...) The throne of Zenobia is mine (...) We shall resuscitate the glory of the kingdom of the desert”⁴⁹. Within his brief experience, Khalid is rapidly stereotyped as a prince and as a tribal ‘Bedouin’ traveler who is to revive the glories of Zenobia, the Queen of ‘Tadmur’ in ancient Syria. This vision is perpetrated by Rihani for he maintains that: “the self-parody, the deliberate dissociation, the affectation of impassivity constitute a defense mechanism against deception and vulnerability”⁵⁰. This further emphasises the Oriental subject’s will to retain and insist upon this colonial attribute, and transform it into a process for the construction of a hero from *Arabian Nights*, for example, in a manner that immortalizes his people and penetrates the universal imagination. Sheehi also explains the importance of the reasons behind which Rihani and the Immigrés adhere to this sense of Self-Orientalization:

Self-Orientalizing (is) not always a mindless reaction of internalized racism (...) Self-Orientalizing provides the “backward” Easterner with a position of privilege within a universal history in which the colonial subject otherwise finds itself imminently lacking (lacking progress, modernity, democracy, civilization, etc.). In other words, the Self-Orientalizing tact, rather than being innocent and reactive, was a crucial tact for Arab Romantics to assert subjective presence in the age of colonialism...it was a form of resistance to the hegemony of a positivist criteria for cultural, social, and political success established during the Tanzimat⁵¹

Besides, the Self, ‘Orientalized’, became an identity by which the Immigrés sought to confront Arab Renaissance, which they believed to have “resulted in a stripping away of everything noble and holy in “Eastern” society, trumpeting “the final triumph of rational materialism”.⁵² Therefore, this self-inflicted oriental imagery is an attempt by Rihani to prove

⁴⁹ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York. 1911.p. 86.

⁵⁰ Kalman, Julie. *Orientalizing the Jew. Religion, Culture, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century France*. Indiana University Press. 2017.p.79.

⁵¹ Sheehi, Stephen. *Anxiety and the Ideology of Arab Vision*. Wayne State University Press. Detroit, Michigan. 2006.p. 75.

⁵² *Ibid* p.73.

that Khalid, as a paradigm for this situation, is a subject who is capable of evolving intellectually by internally militating against Western and Eastern division and cultural clashes. Rihani also utilizes this ‘Self-Orientalization’ as a mechanism that interferes in the “transcendence” of Khalid’s identity, from being a naturally-proclaimed Lebanese, to a hybrid Lebanese-American through experience and intellectual friction, until he admits that quality of being created human is the sole identity and source of knowledge, and is at the top of the pyramid. Indeed, Stephen Wang, with reference to Sartre’s view on how we can establish and understand our “Selfness” or “ipséité” writes: “In selfness we become present not only to the identity that we are, but also to the identity that we could be. We understand ourselves in relation to a future identity that cannot be adequately derived from or determined by who we are now.”⁵³ This definition applies to Khalid for he only perceived himself, at the beginning of the TBK, to be a mere Lebanese immigrant, yet, through reinforcing a Self-Orientalized image in the United States, and through his militancy to overcome stereotypes and become involved in the American political and social Landscape, he finally acquired the power to fuse his at once ‘Americanized’ and ‘Oriental’ being, and contribute to the creation of a broader ‘Self’, that is expound enough to receive not only East and West, but also the human facet of what we are.

Thus, Rihani’s perception of transcendence rests upon the evolution of Khalid’s identity and the vision of the Self as flexible and permeable, and as unilateral then multiple. He, indeed, visualizes the capacity to ‘transcend’ as an instrument by which the self is ever-expanding. Gibran, on the other hand, represents transcendence in the form of a spiritual transition originates in criticizing the ‘traditionally-religious’, through his storytelling, towards becoming the Arab-American Romantic who unfolds the spirituality of self-knowledge—in its unifying sense—as more significant and less likely to cause degeneration or social struggle, “for self is sea boundless and measureless”.⁵⁴

⁵³ Wang, Stephen. *Aquinas and Sartre: On Freedom, Personal Identity, and the Possibility of Happiness*. The Catholic University of America Press. 2009. p. 55.

❖ *Tanzimat*: Administrative and political Ottoman reorganizations.

⁵⁴ Gibran, Khalil. *The Prophet*. OneWorld Publications. 2012.p. 55. (Originally published in 1923).

B) The Relation Between the Notion of Transcendence and Form in Arab-American Literature.

On the level of literary form, we can first commence this part by understanding how the notion of ‘Transcendence’, in its raw and religious shape, can be related and transposed onto both the narrative and the manner TBM and TBK are written and organized, in a way that the writing itself would reveal a new envisioned form of existence. Second, we also ought to investigate this concept from its more elaborate and non-spiritual explication, alluding, thus, to some of the manifestations of pain and the presence of traumatic residues in Arab-American literature, while also taking into consideration the experience of immigration and the shocking, yet revealing, aftermath of discovering identity to be a relative concept that persists and lives on with a transmogrified and complex definition. Also, the draining experiences of Khalid and Mirdad within the narrative and its form reveal this traumatic disorder and how the narrative, itself, is sought to repair the wounds. ‘Transcendence’, thus, in this particular case, would directly refer to a problematic in which this notion is regarded as a vehicle and a synonym to overcoming excruciating psychological and physical pain in all its forms—disclosed by the authors or the journeys of the protagonists—. Although these two literary oeuvres were, basically, following an approximatively similar pattern --biblical diction and commandments, many stories incorporated and unfolded into and through one another, and the shady and enigmatic endings--, both are to be approached in different ways, as each writer has acquired his specific thematic vision and comprehension of the experience of their respective protagonists—who are, in turn, responsible for building and re-imagining the definition of a hybrid figure. The two books, in our context, can also be analyzed and meant to represent a philosophical account of the Arab-American literary expedition and exploration, through the invasive and inclusive use of aphorisms and axioms as appropriate to the ideological perspectives of both Nuaimah and Rihani. Indeed, “the irreducible literary dimension of philosophy is nowhere more evident than in the diverse range of expository styles (...), “Genre” is the best label available to characterize these and other distinctive styles. Dialogue, meditation, commentary, and aphorism serve as informative categories (...) a variety of

philosophical genres may be found in every historical period.”⁵⁵ According to Lavery and Groarke, the philosophical dimension and wisdom imbued within a piece of writing creates an irrefutable link between the literary style and the transition towards the philosophical feature, which is undoubtedly and intricately in relation to existence and knowledge. Therefore, through a formal and stylistic literary frame of reference, we will attempt at investigating the connection between the notion of transformation, change, alteration, and overcoming with the specific literary style in TBK and TBM. Finally, we will also seek to research the illustrations of the Arab-American Vision of God as rather “Human”—with reference to Jesus Christ-- into the aphoristic method of narration, alongside other spiritual convictions such as metempsychosis, which is mainly perforated into the conception of transcending the “powerful, dominating, and overseeing” God to find a regenerative energy in the everlasting renaissance of the human soul that continues to spiral between all human bodies. The form of writing reflects several of these facets, and mirrors how Rihani and Nuaimah sought to transcend the past, the traditional, and the painful, to maintain a cyclical present, and explain the psychology of the Arab-American confusion.

1. Theorizing Transcendence:

In this part, the relation between ‘Transcending’ and the Arab-American narrative rests upon reciprocity and interplay. In fact, the narrative itself exteriorizes the need for metamorphosis and overpowering the limited and traditional human and spiritual knowledge of God and its own creation. At the same time, both the authors of TBM and TBK, through the respective forms, use the concept as a mechanism to vanquish pain and defeat the reasons of suffering—and suffering itself for that matter-- throughout the narrative. First, J. Roger Kurtz describes trauma in literature to literally represent a wound.⁵⁶ He writes that: “Its Greek origin (...) denotes a physical injury from and external cause.”⁵⁷ He perceives: “In Luke’s Gospel we read of a traveler (the “Good Samaritan”) who, encountering the body of a man lying beside the road, took pity on him, went to him, and bandaged his *traumata* (...)—his wounds (...) We think of trauma as a pathological mental and emotional condition, an injury to the psyche caused

⁵⁵ Lavery, Jonathan and Groarke, Louis. (Ed) *Literary Form, Philosophical Content. Historical Studies of Philosophical Genres*. Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp. 2010. p.13.

⁵⁶ Kurtz, J. Roger (Ed). *Trauma and Literature*. Cambridge University Press. 2018. p. 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

by catastrophic events, or by the threat of such events, which overwhelm an individual's normal response mechanisms.⁵⁸ Indeed, the examination of the term 'trauma' pursues physical and psychoanalytical pathways. However, it will only be dissected through a formal diagnosis of both books. For instance, TBM begins with an anonymous narrator who seems to recount a historical account of the spatial setting, which obviously alludes to his country of origin, and indicates, -- in an admiring and proud tone—the glories of its past and the mythologies that molded the nation, along with their influence in shaping its people's mentalities and local knowledge of their own existence. Indeed, the historical reports, renditions, and tales of a nation are to be viewed as a direct reflection of the importance of this nation's valuable contribution to the history of humanity, which is also another form of clue, or hint that intervenes in the ongoing ontological and empirical investigations of the nature of 'being' and how it should be perceived. Therefore, Nuaimah describes the "Levant" --modern day Lebanon and Syria— to be a region in which nature is mirrored as a dignified form of deity, and in which the soil reflects religious mythology, war, human sacrifice, and martyrdom. Besides, he delves into the story of the Deluge, with Noah and Sam as biblical figures who are considered, by the people of the modern-day "Orient", to be the fathers of 'Semitic' peoples, and from whom the name *Sha'am* --the historical name of the region and the colloquial name in Arabic for Damascus—derived its etymological roots. This intensified insistence upon the recollection of the region's various elements of its past—Ottoman oppression, immigration and forced dislocation, ancient religious wars, colonialism and world wars, --, paves the way for Nuaimah to create a defense mechanism against this distressing past and inhibits it from repeating itself by digging into communal memory and eliciting a retreat from a new era of divisions, especially that TBM was written circa 1948, which is also the date that witnessed the commencement of the Arab-Israeli war. Thus, to prevent the plunging into an infinite cycle of East-versus-West conflicts, using the specificity of traumatic memory, can deter, according to Nuaimah's writings, internal destruction and transcend upcoming doom. In fact, according to Nadim Naimy, "The innumerable terms of endearment, deification and worship with which Lebanon is addressed in Lebanese poetry and literature indicate how intertwined were faith and place in the minds of its people. Some Lebanese emigrants, pressed to leave their mountain "whose soil was less fertile than its women" for better prospects across the seas, tended even to metamorphose their

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2

Lebanon psychically into a metaphysical homeland”⁵⁹. Through this affirmation, it is understood that this memory, displaying the images of a Lebanese soil exhausted by painful and collective remembrances is, in fact, a quality which the Lebanese person can cherish and embrace in order to confront the future of the nation. Contrarily to Nietzsche, who believes that “there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, *immediacy*, without forgetfulness”⁶⁰, Nuaimah holds that memory, despite the agonizing events that pass through it, should rather be embraced and accepted, especially that the Lebanese people deify somehow the land, which might also prompt them to transcend these traumatic visions through veneration and respect for it. Similarly, Rihani and Nuaimah, maintain, as authors, that to transcend the pain, one must accept it, write it, and transmit it through literature. Indeed:

Memory is the selection of images; some elusive;
Others printed indelibly on the brain. Each image is
Like a thread...each thread woven together to make
a tapestry of intricate textures. And the tapestry tells
a story. And the story is our past...Like others
before me, I have the gift of sight. But the truth
changes color depending on the light. And tomorrow
can be clearer than yesterday.⁶¹

In TBM, other explicit forms of a ‘traumatized’ narrative is the evocation of a neutral form of pilgrimage, not particularly associated—in the book—with any specific religion—Christianity, Judaism or Islam—, yet, the major facet that is invoked and clarified is the degree of suffering “a man’s ascent from the human to the divine”⁶² can require. Indeed, in the first part of TBM entitled “Flint Slope”, which is also believed to represent “the “al- Bahsa slope” on Mt. Sannin facing the author’s hometown Baskinta”⁶³, Nuaimah recounts the unknown narrator’s tormenting expedition towards the discovery of the ancient legend of the “bound abbot” who was punished in “Altar Peak” and was never to be seen again anywhere. He describes how, on

⁵⁹ Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. American University of Beirut. Lebanon. 1985.p.59.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge University Press. 2006.p 35. (Originally published in Germany in 1887).

⁶¹ Levine, Peter. A. *Trauma and Memory, Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past*. North Atlantic Books. 2015. (part 1 entitled *Memory: Gift and Curse*). Extracted from a Screenplay by Kasi Lemmons in *Eve’s Bayou*.p .11

⁶² Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. American University of Beirut. Lebanon. 1985.pp. 59-60.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.60.

his way to this far away mountain, he confronted many people in need who indirectly forced him to abandon his belongings and give away his food and clothing. He writes:

“This fell upon me as a command which I felt too impotent to disobey, especially when the dog approached me snarling menacingly as if to carry out his master’s order. The whole scene filled me with terror, I watched it as in a trance; and as one entranced, I arose (...) making the while desperate efforts to speak—to defend myself, to assert my right. ‘My staff you have taken. Will you be so cruel as to take this grotto also which is my home for the night?’

‘Happy are the staffless,
They stumble not.
Happy are the homeless,
They are at home.
The stumblers only—like ourselves,
Need walk with staffs.
The home-chained only, like ourselves,
Must have a home.

In this situation, Nuaimah shows that, to fully comprehend and grasp the moral and human value of any pilgrimage—which is a journey of purification towards what we might refer to as the path of God—one ought to transcend the material and be left with the only real source of knowledge he possesses: His ‘Self’ devoid of all worldly pursuits. According to David Baldwin, “Pilgrimage is a practical and demonstrable way of seeking. It is a sure way of putting beliefs and commitment to the crucible. It digs up the answers from deep within. Whilst physically uncomfortable, it provides spiritual reassurance and comfort.”⁶⁴ Eivind Luthen also asserts that “In an age stamped by individualism and self-assertion, the pilgrim dares towards humility: there is no class distinction on the way. People will take you for what you are, not what you represent.”⁶⁵ Although pilgrimage is a sign of transcending the social differences imposed within the scope of the known, it also reaches the metaphysical side by which the soul begins to seek spiritual satisfaction. Simultaneously, the case of the pilgrim in TBM is a manifestation of a traumatic experience because it involves wounds, deprivation, and psychological disturbance. However, this experience is gradually healed when the narrative exteriorizes Nuaimah’s finalized and balanced vision of “God”: A part in him is divine, another is human. This means that this unknown narrator’s quest was, in reality, surrounding his search for his own value and his representation in society. Indeed, ‘God’ is not far at Altar Peak nor is

⁶⁴ Bradley, Ian. *Pilgrimage, A Spiritual and Cultural Journey*. Lion Hudson plc. 2009.p. 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

he looking from above while we search for Him. Rather, Nuaimah maintains that Humans are Gods if they learn the qualities of the deity they are in constant search for. As far as TBK is concerned, the question of pain crosses the narrative throughout the story of Khalid's journey from Lebanon to America. These inherent trauma and agony manifest themselves within Khalid's mourning, disillusion, and confusion. Also, they are portrayed by a new form of pilgrimage, spiritual and explorative in its nature: Immigration. Indeed, this is an individual journey—in our Rihanian context--, yet when explained, it basically applies to a collective plight. As a matter of fact, immigration is double-edged: On one hand, it is synonymous for novelty and psychological expansion. On the other, it is a distressing form of the dislocation of identity and perception. For instance, in the third chapter from the Book of Khalid entitled *Via Dolorosa*, Rihani describes Shakib and Khalid's way to their cultural crucifixion: "In their baggy, lapping trousers and crimson caps, each carrying a bundle and a rug under his arm, Shakib and Khalid are smuggled through the port of Beirut at night (...) they are huddled like sheep on deck from Beirut to Marseilles; and like cattle transported under hatches across the Atlantic; and bullied and browbeaten by rough disdainful stewards (...). But that New World paradise is well worth these passing privations."⁶⁶ This experience highlights a gloomy past for the Levantine peoples, in which they had to re-think their identity from another perspective, and re-establish a new definition of this identity by transcending the hybrid or the binary itself. Michal Frenkel and Yehouda Shenhav explain this new territory from a postcolonial point of view:

Since Said's path-breaking work, empirical observations have shown that colonial discourses were, in fact, never stable or homogenous (McLeod 2000; Porter 1994). Homi Bhabha has taken the argument one step further, showing that the construction of racial identity does not always conform to a binary distinction between 'western' and 'non-western', or between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident', but instead takes place in a third space — or 'in between', to use Bhabha's term (1994, 1998). What Bhabha suggests is that 'the construction of colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference', which does not necessarily result in a binary form (Bhabha 1990: 72).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead, and Co, New York. 1911. pp. 29-30.

⁶⁷ Frenkel, Michal. And Shenhav, Yehouda. *From Binarism back to Hybridity: A Postcolonial Reading of Management and Organization Studies*. p.4.

Therefore, both the trauma of dislocation and the experience of various types of pilgrimages, combined with a narrative that introduces a hybrid thinking –whether through the American-Lebanese dual belonging in TBK or the Human-God binaries through TBM— could engender the presence of an alternative to be overcome, which is in itself another form of transcendence consisting in re-imagining God. Indeed, Khalid, for instance, tends to relocate faith onto the plane of the plain “delights” of the quotidian, as a manner of reuniting his Lebanese origins and his American education, and thus avoiding turmoil, desperation, and ache. Rihani confirms in Khalid’s words:

Can we not apply the bow to the telegraph wires of the world and make them the vehicle of music as of stock quotations? Can we not simplify life as we are simplifying the machinery of industry? Can we not consecrate its Temple to the Trinity of Devotion, Art, and Work, or Religion, Romance, and Trade? This seems to be Khalid’s gospel. This, through the labyrinths of doubt and contradiction, is the pinnacle of faith he would reach (...).⁶⁸

To conclude this part in which we sought to examine various visions of the formal and thematic manifestations of transcendence, it is important to refer to the structure of both books as introductory of Khalid’s and Mirdad’s experiences as metaphysical and worldly travelers, through whom the complex conception of transcendence leads sometimes to the refiguration of the meaning of deity and humanity. While TBK is distributed into episodes going crescendo on the level of the protagonist’s maturity, TBM is divided into commandments conveying each an axiom or a piece of ‘wisdom’. These forms are enticing and makes the reader question their utility and their purposes. To “Transcend” and to move towards “Change”, are, indeed, signs the authors implicate in the narrative for an eventual and possible interpretation.

2. Transcendence and the Chronotope in *the Book of Mirdad* and *the Book of Khalid*.

As a concept, the term ‘Transcendence’ necessarily implicates a multilayered and a multidimensional interpretation that could eventually harmonize with Mirdad’s and Khalid’s visionary attributes along with TBM’s and TBK’s respective literary style and form. Through a Derridean and a deconstructionist mode of thought, we can consider ourselves to be “setting

⁶⁸ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead, and Co, New York. 1911.pp. 220-221.

the dynamics of this word loose upon itself: For if to transcend is already to pass beyond, we are trying to press forward beyond the beyond. Our most straightforward intention (is) to see whether and how this classical idea of transcendence plays out in a postmodern context—what it would mean, how it would need to be rethought, and whether we need in fact to get beyond its classical beyond to a more postmodern beyond (...) Or should we give up on that (...) and take “beyond” transcendence to mean that we should put transcendence (...) behind us—no more transcendence—*plus de transcendence?*⁶⁹ This remark represents a clear ambiguity and hesitation when attempting at establishing an analysis to define the term itself. In fact, “in the spirit of Derrida”⁷⁰, we might even reach a level of comprehension in which the word no longer acquires meaning and plunges into the midst of a nihilistic frame. This is explained by the overwhelming contradictions and multifaceted perspectives on what transcendence could represent in any direction whatsoever, which also might finally put forth the risk and the possibility of the term losing its core. In fact, deconstruction is “an on-going process of questioning the accepted basis of meaning.”⁷¹ Thus, the significance of transcendence could be directed towards the elemental functioning of the narrative, including the dynamics of the latter’s space-time dualism within the Pen League-oriented Arab-American discourse. In the light of this consideration of transcendence, we could thus seek to find the interplay between the notion and the distribution of the Chronotope in both novels and the meaning that the term “transcendence” could convey through a narrative intertwined with the time-space unity. First, Mikhail Bakhtin defines the Chronotope as such:

The intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. (...) we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture.' In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to

⁶⁹ Caputo, John D, and Scanlon, Michael J (Ed). *Transcendence and Beyond, A Postmodern Inquiry*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington, USA. 2007. p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Turner, Catherine. *Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction*. Article published on May 27th, 2016. Website: <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2016/05/27/jacques-derrida-deconstruction/>

the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.⁷²

This definition by Bakhtin posits that space and time are related, and that analyzing the narrative, thus, discovering implicit meaning and symbolism, would be a more explorative venture that allows the reader to digest and further comprehend these texts impregnated with various entangled and interrelated reflections. According to discoveries, scientific research, and even human subjective perception, Time and Space are relative and hypothetical references of direction and measurement. Indeed, human beings refer to time as an indicator of their birth date—their first appearance on earth and the moment they begin to exist—, their experience, and it finally signals the end of their body's involvement on earth. Some of the devout, as well as other metaphysically-oriented opinions will discuss the soul's eternal character and its ability to defy and transcend the notion of Time as we know it. This is a very basic awareness of time as a concept echoing two opposite sides: the ephemeral and the eternal. However, when Time is perceived in correlation with space as both forming a unit and a system in which an action on one would consequently influence the functioning of the other, we can, therefore, envision other interpretations of time as dependent on the state of Space, such as in a literary context. For instance, in *the Book of Mirdad*, in the part entitled the Keeper of the Book, the narrator comes into contact with Shamadam, the bound abbot of Altar Peak who is punished by Mirdad by remaining as an unmovable statue for eternity; a curse casted by the eponymous hero upon whom Mirdad perceives to be ungrateful and greedy. First, the presence of the narrator in the old temple coincides with Shamadam's brief return to life. This shows that 'action' in the spatial setting immediately triggers a movement in the temporal sphere, illustrated by Shamadam's exit from a static situation in which time was frozen—from the latter's perspective-- and his re-admittance into the spatio-temporal frame, in which movement and time are bound together. Moreover, although, for Shamadam, time ceased to be sensed because he lived as a statue, more than one hundred years have already passed. This also indicated the nullified effect of time when space is not in constant movement or is not animated by the characters' actions. Besides, this also means that Shamadam transcended time and was able to conquer it because he was not able to interact with it through space—the latter being the arena of experience and development-- . In TBM, Shamadam recounts to the narrator his story with Mirdad, and how Naronda, one

⁷² Bakhtin, Mikhaïl. "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel". *In the Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 1981. pp. 84–85.

of the followers, was able to keep a book— in which Mirdad’s teachings and journeys were preserved. -- Thus, the narrator expresses his startled state after he met the legendary abbot and exclaims: “Only when my eyes in their roaming had come to rest upon the Slope was I brought back to the monk and his abashing narrative of himself and of Mirdad and the Book. And I marvelled greatly at the hand unseen that set me out in search of one thing only to lead me to another. And I blessed it in my heart.”⁷³ In this situation, the narrator correlates space, represented by the slope, with the moment of time in which he glanced at it. This fusion between that brief moment and the spatial reference were sufficient to create an image in his mind in which he vividly recalls his dangerous adventure while attempting to reach Alter Peak. This presents the ability of space-time to interact with memory in order to give birth to a personal reaction or illicit an emotion, which also shows that space and time work together in shaping the character’s own psychology at times. Furthermore, this brief scene appears to be a microcosm for a larger vision that must be tackled. It is quite known that the members of the Pen-League, Nuaimah included, are opponents of colonial Ottoman Turkey, and they seek to insist through Khalid’s immersion in the American culture and Mirdad’s universal Jesus-like humane teachings, to overshadow the East-West relationship based on control, and ruled by the dynamics of the oppressor versus the oppressed. Thus, this image previously-described, can symbolize an attachment to the Levant that restrictively symbolizes, in the minds of *the Immigrés*, the land on which the Christ was born, the history of Christianity, and Mesopotamian mythology that constructed the historical and collective cultural mindset of the region’s inhabitants, rather than the Levant split by imperial greed and colonial schemes. Indeed, when the narrator—symbolizing the peoples-- perceives the slope, he is reminded of Mirdad as a parallel to the Christ’s persona, and he is thus “brought back” to a long “narrative” which might refer to the historical richness of the area. The term “history” also entails temporality and its constant interaction with space –the Levant in this case—resulting thus in the birth and accumulation of heritage and tradition. Indeed, “the emancipatory claims of colonized peoples were also grounded in narratives of territorial priority. As Edward Said remarks, “if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical in it.” (...) That is (...) collective identity (...) was determined by spatial relations.”⁷⁴. Whereas Stéphane Mosès argues that “the transmission of a collective memory

⁷³ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. Watkins Media Limited. UK. 2015.p. 35. (Originally published in Beirut, Lebanon in 1948).

⁷⁴ Boyarin, Jonathan (Ed). *Remapping Memory, The Politics of TimeSpace*. University of Minnesota Press. 1994.p.9.

from generation to generation – most inherently implies a break from time”⁷⁵, the Arab-American narrative, especially in this particular extract, emphasises the union and intervention of the literary chronotope in the guidance of the Levantine collective memory. In fact, we can assert that the Time-Space as history and geography, designs the communal memory. The transmission, thus, of history throughout these peoples is definitely controlled by historical facts and by the effects of time over the geographical space. Therefore, we can assume that memory transcends time and space, yet it is still shaped by the combination of both of them. In TBM, the chronotope also manifests in Shamadam’s discourse. He addresses himself to the narrator and says: “Now is my second hour at hand. The gates of my prison are swinging open to receive me. Soon will they swing shut to enclose me. How long will they remain shut—Mirdad only can tell.”⁷⁶ Here, the interplay of Space and Time heavily interfere with the character’s fate. Indeed, this correlation between the hour left for him to stay alive, and the place where he will remain imprisoned inflict a sense of doom and impatience upon Shamadam’s psyche. There is indeed a consequential relation between time and space: When the hour passes, the gates will inevitably be shut, and the character will no longer acquire control over his own choices. Thus, we can sometimes believe that the chronotopic field transcends God and vanquishes the notion of providence into deciding the future of the subject concerned. Also, we might believe that “God” transcends his superiority and humbles Himself into becoming infiltrated within the spatio-temporal territory. Finally, we could presuppose that “Transcendence”, in this situation, is no longer saturated with meaning, which alludes to the triumph of Shamadam’s religious convictions—that Mirdad is the messenger of God-- over his destiny. While Nuaimah deciphers the relationship between Space-Time and characters’ futures in his novel, Rihani’s the *Book of Khalid*, introduces the protagonist, during his stay in the United States, and presents him in the beginning as an enchanted emigrant who begins to sing odes to celebrate the scenery and further elevate and appreciate America’s prosperous economy. For example, Khalid chants:

Balloons and airships, falling from the skies,
 Will be as plenty yet as summer flies.
 Electricity and Steam and Compressed Air
 Will carry us to heaven yet, I swear.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Ibid*.p.11.

⁷⁶ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. Watkins Media Limited. UK. 2015.p. 35. (Originally published in Beirut, Lebanon in 1948).

⁷⁷ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead, and Co. 1911.p. 131.

In the beginning, this poem appears to only provide a description of the American lifestyle and technological progress and growth. It is, indeed, quite normal for Khalid as a newcomer, and whose previous life in the colonized Levantine region was merely fraught with daily turmoil, economic sterility, and political unsteadiness, to experience such awe when coming into contact with a drastic and ambitious vision of what he perceives to be the New World. Before handling the meaning of expression in this short song, one should be reminded that, Rihani, in Khalid's words, produced the first Arab novel in the English language. Although this directly leads to the composition of what we call today Arab-American novel, a large part of its "Arabized" spirit is the language per se. Indeed, there is a combination of the typical lyricism of the heavily-metaphorical Arabic language mingled with the succinct and condensed, yet very expressive nature of the English language. Next to the linguistic asset, "Rihani was an established writer in Arabic. It is hard to speculate on the pressing reasons that prompted Rihani to write *The Book of Khalid* in English even though his immigration to the U.S. should offer a good enough entry point; what matters, however, is that he wrote in English with an entire career of writing in Arabic under his belt. Rihani's case is symptomatic perhaps of the ways in which the novel evolved, broadly speaking, out of the shimmering influences of cultures..."⁷⁸ This definitely explains why Rihani looks at "balloons" as "falling from the sky" as if they were part of nature, or holds that a mechanical component as electricity will smoothly guide his way to the heavens. The chronotope, in this respect, can be analyzed through the proportional relationship of time—summer-- and these balloons—spatial reference-- which are in rapid development in number and in quality as time passes by. The wider Rihanian frame of thought transposes this minute and microcosmic description of the United States onto the blatant idea that the abundance of material and economic prosperity will never cease to proliferate in the West. Indeed, machinery is conditioned, on one hand, by time because it depends upon the latter to maintain its improvement. On the other hand, despite the fact that this verse is expressed in an optimistic tone, a deeper layer of interpretation could reveal a camouflaged criticism of the excess of materialism and the imminent transformation of Man into a machine, especially with Khalid's satirical tone deriding the image of "heaven". Thus, the chronotope, or the Space-Time, is fused with the protagonist's critical perceptions in order to transcend the "ordinary" view of humanity as body and soul, and transition into discerning Man as machine, not in the tangible sense of

⁷⁸ Gana, Nouri (Ed). The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English. *The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture*. Edinburgh University Press. 2013.p. 4.

the term, but rather on a more abstract level. In fact, Rihani seems to mostly be unsatisfied with the materialistic proclivity of the Western world, and always seeks to find a certain balance realized through the infiltration of something spiritual. He confusingly asks this question to illustrate his viewpoint:

If we are not wholly satisfied with materialism, if we do not find sufficient nourishment in the fruits of science, if the church has become a cave of winds and the creeds a desert of sterility, where, I ask you, shall we find the comfort and solace that that immaterial something within us longs for and craves? In the mystic circles of the so-called Orientalists of our day, whose spiritualities have ever an eye to the newspaper column and another to the cash register?

⁷⁹

Therefore, this pessimistic view of Man as machine has already been brought up on a more philosophical sphere through the concept of the “Body as a desiring machine” in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*. In the latter, it is plainly described that the human configuration and system is devoid of organs, and is constructed upon a mechanistic source of desire. Thus, Man is a machine that operates in order to produce daily emotional and social activity. Besides, contrarily to Freud and Marx, Deleuze and Guattari posit that the unconscious is liberated through a desire operating by an assortment of machines:

What Deleuze and Guattari accomplish, through their concept of desiring-machines, is to draw a line perpendicular to the opposing starting points of Freudianism and Marxism: libidinal economy is *already* political economy: “social production and desiring-production are one and the same. Desire is located neither ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’ a subject, but rather is *produced* by an assemblage of machines, which traverse the entire milieu of the subject.”⁸⁰

Here, we can freely suppose that the milieu is to represent the environment of the subject, including Spatio-Temporal attributes, which directly leads to the chronotopic features in Khalid’s ode. Thus, Man’s desire and body are rather assembled and nurtured by a mechanistic process in exactly the similar manner by which Rihani perceives the Western Man to behave and function. Indeed, the milieu prompts a transformation in the human being’s interaction with it: The more Space-Time prompts humanity to introduce technological development, the more Man unconsciously succumbs to the demands of His own environment and conditions Himself to transcend his spirit and flesh into becoming ‘the body with a desiring machine’.

⁷⁹ Rihani, Ameen. *The Path of Vision*. James. T White and Co. New York. 1921.p. 12.

⁸⁰ Altamirano, Marco. *Time, Technology, and Environment. An Essay on the Philosophy of Nature*. Edinburgh University Press. 2016. pp.140-141.

To conclude, the concept of ‘transcending’ could apply to both books in various ways. Indeed, the ability to fashion and theorize this notion in order to fit into the transforming maturity and ideology of both characters is characterized by its subtle and rapidly-changing nature. Time is a critical and versatile concept that involves the past, the present, and the future. However, a relative consideration of time allows the reader, as well as the protagonists, to conceive the ability of transcending its compartments, and understand its interplay with space in order to produce eternity and re-imagine death in the thorough spirituality of Rihani and Nuaimah; as metempsychosis or the traveling of souls to be reborn in other human or non-human bodies, or even as the resurrection of the traditional Jesus-figure into what the authors believe to be the God-Man.

C) Transcendence and Symbols: Explaining the Term through Allegorical Expression.

The Allegorical expression in a literary text is often perceived important and sometimes obligatory in its usage for it allows a more elaborated comprehension of meaning to emerge, and which can be difficult to decipher or notice. Indeed, the narrative entails layers of meaning and comprehends heavy symbols to transcend a simplistic reading. The writers—Rihani, Nuaimah, and Gibran in this context—deliberately use a form of poetical prose very reminiscent of the ornamented nature of the Arabic Language. This use is also a constant reminder of the English Romantics and Romanticism on a more wider scope. In fact, the quality of symbolistic writing proves its existence in a drastic and overwhelming manner when the Romantic mood pervades, whether from the Western side, or even the Arab-American sphere. Indeed, one must not neglect the fact that the *Immigrés* were Arab exiles whose heritage was initially based upon the American and English Romantics, along with a noticeable mixture and introduction of Arabic phrasal structures, tones, and layout. The purpose of the Arab-American narrative’s is to “invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself”.⁸¹ Indeed, Nuaimah and Rihani’s fundamental themes seem to raise the questions that instill an incapability in readers or scholars to answer them for they dig into the core of human existence and the values by which this ‘being’ appears to nurture itself.

⁸¹ White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form, Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore and London. 1987. p.1.

Nevertheless, the faculty of writing, through the productions of the Lebanese Pen League, functions as a catalyzer of and a reflector upon religious and existential human matters as to seek to provide possible interpretations, answers, and any general analysis that could temporarily lure any ordinary reader or a highly-appreciated and sophisticated philosopher. Hayden White writes that “As the late (...) Roland Barthes remarked, narrative “is simply there like life itself. . . international, transhistorical, transcultural.” Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific (...) narrative is *translatable* without fundamental damage.⁸² Therefore, in this section, our concern would mainly be focused on how the Arab American narrative makes use of the symbolic and the allegorical in order to convey visions on ‘transcendence’. Indeed, the symbolic is a reminder of the unreal, the imagined, and the extravagant: It can be perceived as an abstract and more elaborate replica of its tangible and worldly representative such as in the artistic realm of painting for example. Also, symbols can take the form of a plain object or even be introduced as a character in order to serve the purpose of an allegory. Nuaimah and Rihani make use of dense literary symbolism along with Gibran. However, the latter, known to be an accomplished and practicing artist, was “Inspired by painters from the Renaissance, the Pre-Raphaelites, the French Symbolists, and others, such as visionary William Blake (...) Gibran sought to express symbolic ideas about life, humanity, and the interconnectedness of all things in his own unique way.”⁸³ We can find some of his artistic works illustrating a range of chapters in TBK, while we can also discern the notion of prophethood—also portrayed in his artistic and literary work-- , which is generally symbolic for human intellectual and spiritual exceptionalism, through the aloofness of the figures we notice to be dominating his Art. Thus, Arab American literature partially adheres to the current of symbolist thought especially through Khalil Gibran’s portrayal of Mirdad and Khalid-like figures who, themselves, incarnate and invade another level of thinking that centers upon nature and humanity as divinity that is imminent within the world, yet that transcends the perpendicular separation of Man challenging and obeying a controlling Deity.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Telfair Museums. Visions of the Prophet: The Visual Art of Khalil Gibran. Official Website: <https://www.telfair.org/exhibitions/visions-of-the-prophet-the-visual-art-of-kahlil-gibran/>

1) Transcendence and its Related Symbolism.

“... *Et l’art, expression de tous les symboles, doit être un drame idéal (...)*
Tout est symbole, toute molécule est grosse des univers : Toute image est
le microcosme de la nature entière.’”⁸⁴ - unknown-

While Plato rejects the reproduction of objects through artistic initiatives including poetry and paintings because they merely incarnate a further withdrawal and remoteness from what is perceived as reality, Symbolists reinforce the idea of recreating reality under a new mask which can be expressed by literature or Art. Indeed, they believe that the faculty of dreaming and the re-imagining of reality in different ways should be portrayed in complex fashion as to give way to multiple interpretations and re-invent reality from an abstract and allegorical point of view. The purpose is not merely centered upon reducing the comprehensibility or the intelligibility of existing, rather, symbolists mean to explain that ‘Being’ is not as one-dimensional and depthless as it appears, and that the world can be dissected –on the intellectual level–from various perspectives. Unlike Plato, they consider poetry and literature as the effective sources of knowledge rather than any other metaphysical “Form” as he calls it. Indeed, the “Forms” are to be regarded—according to Plato—as the veritable ideas from which utter truth is inspired. Everything else on earth is simply an inauthentic copy of what is higher and unreachable to the human eye, but achievable through intuition. R. A Goodrich explains that Plato’s theory is embedded in degrading common works of Art for they are thought to be deceiving and misleading. He writes that in *the Republic*, “in five consecutive arguments, poetry and painting are related, firstly, to a deficiency in reality and knowledge, secondly, to one of two parts of the mind, and, finally, to certain undesirable moral consequences.”⁸⁵ However, symbolists seem to reshape the meaning of literary creation, and especially the artistic vision because, for them, these are the tools that build what Man cannot be able to easily exteriorize, whether on the psychological or the intellectual sphere. For instance, Charles Baudelaire, in *Paris Spleen* asks a question that reveals the essence of Symbolistic thinking: “Which one of us, in his moments of ambition, has not dreamed of the

⁸⁴ Balakian, Anna (Ed). *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*. John Benjamin Publishing Company. p. 20.

⁸⁵ Goodrich, R.A. “Plato on Poetry and Painting”. Published in *the British Journal of Aesthetics*. Volume 22, Issue 2, 1 February 1982, Pages 126–137. P. 136. Website: <https://academic.oup.com/bjaesthetics/article-abstract/22/2/126/70741?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of conscience?”⁸⁶ This question emphasizes the need for a rebelled prose that could reflect the many intricacies of the human soul, and the necessity to liberate a dream. Arab American Literature, and specifically Gibranian and Rihanian prose, incarnate this freedom in which subjectivity, emotion, fervent human longings, mysticism and sometimes even decadence are present. For instance, Rihani, in *TBK*, recounts that “Khalid’s young mind went leaping from one swing to another, from one carousel or toboggan-chute to the next (...), He even entered such mazes of philosophy, such labyrinths of mysticism as put those of the Arabian grammaticasters in the shade”⁸⁷. Here, the author insinuates that the protagonist is someone who does not satisfy his thirst for knowledge with mere random information, but rather prefers living and experimenting. He indeed stresses, therefore, the ability not only to discover writings and historical documents simply by reading, but to also delve into a practical understanding of the outer world through mysticism; a symbolist trait *per excellence*. Engaging in the realms of knowledge by becoming a mystic entails a complex deciphering of the ordinary natural elements or any other object or event for that matter. This would also create mystical symbolists of both Khalid and Mirdad. This can be further illustrated through Gibran’s paintings. What could be grasped, in both characters, is their ability to also evolve mentally and mystically: Mirdad who begins his journey as a loathed disciple until he makes way to leadership, and Khalid who starts as a searcher for knowledge and experience, and whose journey is inaugurated by the discovery of a new identity. They indeed reflect symbolist thought because they highlight their ideology, their subjectivity, and their intuition as the most important details of their respective personalities. They see the world as a riddle that needs to be entangled through meditation. Moreover, the signs of this mystical evolution can be discerned in both books through:

A celebration of the divine as both fully transcendent and fully immanent;

A glorying in the essential divinity of humanity;

A profound knowledge of reality as an alchemical cauldron of opposites in which death can prepare birth, evil a wiser good, and catastrophe a new vision of order;

⁸⁶ Baudelaire, Charles. *Paris Spleen*. New Directions Publishing Corporation. 1947.p. X. (Originally published in 1869 and translated to English by Louise Varèse).

⁸⁷ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead, and Co. New York, 1911. P. 60.

An unflinching look at the inner shadow of humanity—its cowardice, greed, delusion, and hubris—

An awareness of the sacred androgyny of the new human born from a fusion of matter and spirit, masculine and feminine;

A rugged understanding that for an evolutionary leap to be possible, all consolations and comforts will have to be risked in an adventure, the end of which cannot be foreseen.⁸⁸

Therefore, Mirdad recognizes that opposites and paradoxes in life to be its fuel and its motors. He, in various occasions throughout the book, stresses that the term ‘God’ be symbolic for Man and his divine intellect, and insists upon natural elements that are different in size, yet very meaningful for the construction of the world, and also symbolic for the latter’s constant evolving energy and rebirth.

2) Khalid and Mirdad: A Journey Towards Prophethood.

Being or becoming a “prophet”, meaning someone “who utters divinely inspired revelations, one regarded by a group of followers as the final authoritative revealer of God's will, one gifted with more than ordinary spiritual and moral insight *especially*: an inspired poet, one who foretells future events, OR an effective or leading spokesman for a cause, doctrine, or group”⁸⁹ entails progress, and takes into account a long journey in which learning and grasping knowledge throughout experience is crucial. Although, sometimes prophets – according to Abrahamic religious doctrines--find themselves merely and naturally ‘gifted’ with the abilities to see the unseen and comprehend the incomprehensible, they generally are compelled to a difficult learning process in which they are victimized and scapegoated in order to represent and bear society’s collective faults and ethical downfalls. In this context, Khalid is an ordinary young Lebanese who becomes the prophet of hybridity and travel. He was the only man in his society to challenge the church and thus be a subject for the loss of his lawfulness to it. Khalid evolved through his journey and reached out to his voyage to America as salvation, but also as an innovation for his psyche. The protagonist, becoming a man of American and Lebanese belonging had to yield to his town’s prejudice and defects

⁸⁸ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. ix.

⁸⁹ Definitions found in The Merriam Webster Dictionary.

which further reinforced the development of his Prophethood and uniqueness. Mirdad, however, became one through a rather mythological course of events. Indeed, he was able to perform miracles and deliver himself from his prison or “the Dungeon of Bethar”. The latter refers to a real fortress located in the modern-day West Bank in which many lives were taken and many children were slain. The effect of this magical event on the other disciples is recounted as such:

.... Suddenly Micayon took a great leap forward, shouting as he leapt, ‘It is he! It is he!’ And he it was – his graceful gait, his stately bearing, his nobly lifted head. The light-hearted wind played hide-and-seek in his flowing garments and carelessly flirted his long, black locks. The sun had lightly tinged the delicate amber-brown of his face; but the dark and dreamy eyes scintillated as before and sent forth waves of confident serenity and triumphant love. His tender feet, strapped in wooden sandals, were kissed bright rose by the frost (...) Micayon was the first to reach him; and he threw himself at his feet.⁹⁰

Therefore, *the Book of Mirdad* and *the Book of Khalid* portray the respective eponymous protagonists as figures of intellectual and even physical exceptionalism. However, Rihani adds that he also considers a prophet-figure not only to incarnate a state of aloneness and seclusion because of His collectively agreed-upon peculiar and uncommon standpoints, but to also represent poets. He explains that “(He) believe(s) in a variety of revelations in which not only the great prophets of God have a share, but also the great poets.”⁹¹ For Rihani maintains that, a poet, like a prophet is “a genuinely spiritual and revelatory thinker capable of communicating insights to humanity which would ultimately contribute to their understanding of the mysterious communion between man and the divine”.⁹² From this vision, we can thus understand that a journey towards prophethood is necessarily a voyage towards mental transcendence which includes sometimes a challenging of the humble physicality of humanity through miracles.

This chapter, thus, sought to anatomize and break down the landscape of what we refer to as ‘Transcendence’, in relation to the ideological output of the Pen League. Indeed, through this first chapter, we were able to visualize and understand the term by perceiving its different angles and adapting them to our most complex of contexts. This also alludes to the fact that TBK and TBM are accessible pieces of writing which are easily molded into the different meanings the

⁹⁰ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. 105.

⁹¹ Bushrui, Suheil. B. “The First Arab Novel in English: The Book of Khalid”. University of Maryland. p 34.

⁹² *Ibid.* p. 35.

concept evokes, because, simply, both literary works are philosophical expositions of the various human possibilities for living.

Chapter II: Prophethood and Transcendence: A
Quest for Crossing the Barriers of the Mind and
Soul.

A) The Traditional Vision of Transcendence Inspired and Defied by Prophet-Figures.

In this part, we will venture to explicate the relation between this shifting notion of transcendence and the figure of the Prophet. Indeed, the term “Prophethood” entails primarily a religious background and is impregnated with religious substance. Yet, it is possible to transmit this traditional definition into a realm where the prophet, the exceptional, or the ‘chosen among humans’ is actually rooted into a reality in which he proves his distinguished self through self-inflicted creativity rather than divine interventions. Thus, the concept of transcendence will define itself through an elevation taken place on earth, upon others, and through this person who exhibits such exceptionalism. This idea does not deny that prophethood itself, as a quality, is, in some recounted and mythological cases, originates from God. In fact, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary, a prophet is he who “utters divinely inspired revelations, one regarded by a group of followers as the final authoritative revealer of God’s will”⁹³. In this situation, this particular person is divinely accredited with being a mediator between the real world and the metaphysical sphere of knowledge and consciousness. Therefore, Transcendence could be related to the human prophet, rooted in the tangible world through His ability to introduce a certain way of improvement and development among other people and surroundings, and even within the formulation of a new vision of living. Whereas He could also be the representative of the ‘Word of God’ on earth, or the presenter of a metaphysical wave bestowed upon Him by a Greater being the tangible world is normally unfamiliar with. Some might even state that “the Prophet of God is not like a poet: He is a bearer of the Truth in the light of reason”⁹⁴. This means that, generally, the state of Prophethood is a responsibility involuntarily undertaken by the person, whether in the religious context or even in the physical world. However, this person will always be found in a state of mind that

⁹³ The Merriam Webster Dictionary. Website: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prophet>

⁹⁴ Durakovic, Esad. *The Poetics of Ancient and Classical Arabic Literature: Orientology*. Routledge. New York. 2015. (online version) Website: <https://books.google.fr/books?id=fl-hCAAQBAJ&pg=PT65&dq=prophethood+literature&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi99pmZuuHdAhUGKFAKHxqWDvcQ6AEILjAB#v=onepage&q=prophethood%20literature&f=false>

compels Him to realize a purpose despite acceptance or refusal. A prophet whose personal motives and resolutions are created within the perceptible world could also be an artist, a literary figure, a philosopher, and a poet. This kind of Prophethood creates the concept of Transcendence because these figures are bound with the need to explain and enhance the flaws of conformity and lack of insight on several political, identity-related, and moral levels.

1) Defining Prophethood.

Conventional prophethood would necessarily dictate the presence of a revelation from God and a specific argumentative reasoning begun by the prophet and directed towards others in order to convince the people of the existence of a spiritual and divine entity, separated from their souls and is at the origin of their existence, which is generally a mighty and a hard task to fulfill. Historically, this happened with Moses, Jesus—in some circumstances—and Muhammed. These figures, raised in humble families, are said to be the spokespersons of God, are described to be the revealers of the Ultimate explanation and Truth that lay bare human existence. Scientific grounds were generally not perpetuated by them nor used to gather followers. Rather, performing miracles and relying on faith were the main sources for inspirations and eliciting others' awe. Besides, these figures--differing from a culture to another—depended upon pathos, logos, and ethos to unite and gather followers. For instance, In the Gospel of Matthew, a miracle conducted by Jesus Christ is recounted:

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away (...) But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, it is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Matthew: 14. *The Holy Bible*. (Containing the Old and New Testaments. Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared & Revised. Set forth in 1611 and commonly known as the King James Version). pp. 2050-2051.

This episode puts forth a miracle performed by Jesus Christ, taking place after the murder of John the Baptist. Walking on water, is indeed, an action that confirms the credibility of the teachings of Jesus as a prophet-figure, and reinforces, therefore, his ability to influence the weak and those who refuse to succumb to His commandments. In fact, while “Hume regarded miracles as a violation of natural law (...) Miracles might appear contrary to nature, Augustine concedes, but they do not appear so for God; “for him ‘nature’ is what he does””⁹⁶. Thus, on the religious level, prophet figures are mainly human exceptions who are capable of handling worldly issues through the help of a divine involvement, which renders them more trustworthy and plausible, for they can reach beyond the transcendent world, while the average others remain incapacitated in front of their capacities. This, is, indeed, a classical version of the tale of the prophets as generalized by the religious narrative. In *the Book of Mirdad*, Mirdad himself is regarded as a healer and with miraculous potential. In the Chapter entitled “Mirdad Heals SIM-SIM and Speaks of Old Age”, the eponymous character succeeds to defeat Shamadam’s intentions of killing a cow named Sim-Sim because of her infertility and her inability to produce milk. Shamadam is considered to be the primary antagonist of the narrative, and is also symbolic for death, decay, and conceit. He is also the harvester of constant, hindering, and unjustified rebellions against Mirdad’s wisdom. In this brief episode, Mirdad triumphs against Shamadam’s disobedience and irrational insubordination by healing the cow and restoring her fecundity by overthrowing her debilitating illness:

Shamadam with the butcher walked in. The butcher went straight to Sim-Sim...and great was our amazement, indeed, when we looked at Sim-Sim and saw her chewing the cud. Even Shamadam’s heart softened, and he ordered the best of cow-delicacies brought to Sim-Sim. And Sim-Sim ate with a relish.⁹⁷

The nomenclature chosen for the animal—if paralleled with the content of another literary work—is identical to the name of a magical portal included in the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves; Ali Baba being a character from the compiled collection of the Middle Eastern Folk tales: *One Thousand and One Nights*. Indeed, this gateway is described as a doorway to wealth and eternal richness as it contains various treasures. The cow, thus, is also symbolic for life eternal, wealth, and regeneration despite its fragility, an idea Mirdad stresses by infusing

⁹⁶ Keener, Craig. S. *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*. Baker Academics. 2011. (Online Version. Website: https://books.google.fr/books?id=oCrSpYJvGakC&printsec=frontcover&dq=miracles*&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj_75Pr2uHdAhXCZFAKHUgfD58Q6AEILzAB#v=onepage&q=miracle%20definiton&f=false)

⁹⁷ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. 118.

life into its breath and flesh. This also highlights Mirdad's emphasis upon the necessity to eliminate hierarchy between creatures and contemplate them as sources for rebirth and continuity. Indeed, although Mirdad appears to be as Christ, he rather breaks the myth of the afterlife and roots the latter into life itself. To conclude, being a prophet can directly lead the mind of a thinker to correlate the faculty of prophethood with the religious dimension of the word. Yet, the state of Prophethood can find its way through the human world by transposing its qualities onto poets and innovators of thought such as Khalid in TBK. Indeed, the latter represents another kind of prophet, not a religiously-established one, but a prophet who mystically approaches nature to be the truthful 'God', and one who seeks to vanquish an alienation –deemed inexorable—through joining opposing cultures and transcending a humanity misrepresented due to disunion and discord.

2) Becoming a Prophet: Overcoming Corruption as a Way of Transcending.

“J'avance vers le grand possible!”

Rabelais

Advancing towards the possible, as Rabelais writes, is a declaration of an optimism engendered by the possibility of finding a solution, an afterlife, or a form of a prolongation of life after the death of the flesh. This form of extending consciousness after the death of the body is possible, not from a religious or biblical perspective, but rather from a merely human way of action and perception. Indeed, prophets are considered to be so because they are able to trespass the finitude in order to find and live in a realm where they remain spiritually and intellectually immortal. It is, indeed, the immortality of the name, and the remembrance of that person's legacy what generate an unorthodox vision of an everlasting life. This alludes to the ability of a Prophet to transcend habitual forgetfulness and remain invigorated in the memory of those whom he influenced whether through thought or through deeds. Alongside biblical prophets, Mirdad, as an unconventional Jesus Christ, finds a sense of elevation and eternity through an alternative procedure: Music. Indeed, at some point in TBM, Naronda recounts his Master Mirdad's songs accompanied by melodies from the harp:

The Master (...) bent over the harp as bends a mother, love-entranced, over an infant at her breast (...) the harp continued to ring on, 'God is your captain, sail, my Ark!' And though the Master's lips were shut, his voice reverberated for a space throughout the Aerie (...) And it further seemed as if the Milky mountains range, with Altar Peak in the centre, had suddenly

become detached from the Earth and were afloat in space, majestic, powerful and certain of its course.⁹⁸

This image of Mirdad indulging himself in musical sounds and entrancing thus his followers with their power and their soothing effect, is also echoed by Orpheus, one of the most enchanting musicians in Greek mythology whose music is known to be healing and captivating. Indeed, this transition to an Orphic state of mind, stressed by Mirdad, alludes to the ability of Music to build a bridge between the two opposing worlds of life and death by disconnecting the sense of place from the physical realm and relocating it onto a world that is elevated and detached from the laws and the regulations on earth. Indeed, music creates a condition of immortality by the scattering and dispersal of musical tunes into Space-Time. For instance, it is narrated that Orpheus “took down his harp and began to play upon its golden strings. And the dog Cerberus (for that was his name) growled and snarled (...) but he could not help hearing the sweet music, and he wondered why it was that he did not wish any more to tear Orpheus in pieces.”⁹⁹ This situation also shows the calming and medicinal effect of music, and its ability to ward off evil, negativity, belligerency, and aggressiveness as if it were an incantation. Thus, a prophet is one who can diffuse a tranquilizing and appeasing melody into the air as a way towards harboring respect, appreciation, and reverence.

To transcend through vanquishing corruption is to achieve a psychological inner stability by going beyond life’s inequities and violence. Indeed, prophets are peacemakers and they also fight for a specific cause, while, at the same time, being at risk of scapegoating. Overcoming brutality, wrongdoing, and malfeasance is the duty of this prophet-figure through which he surmounts hardships and proves his indebtedness to his people. For example, Mirdad criticizes the corrupt kings and the rich in power by asserting that all of the valuable possessions they have are useless and worthless if they are not invested into the moral advancement of humanity. He explains:

A crown of gold, studded with diamond, ruby and sapphire, sits very cumbrous, sad and ill at ease upon the head swollen with vainglory, ignorance and lust for power over men. Aye, such a crown, so pedestalled, is but a stinging mockery of its own pedestal. Whereas a crown of the rarest and most exquisite gems would be too bashful of its own unworth to sit upon a head haloed with Understanding and victory over self. Examine well your heads.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. 73.

⁹⁹ Cox, George William. *Tales from Greek Mythology*. Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts. London. 1861. p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. 128.

Mirdad wishes to emphasize the importance of asceticism in specific circumstances. Indeed, he encourages human beings, and especially those who are more financially fortunate, to discard the circle of greed and lust for the material, and balance their attitude with an occasional abstention from the daily pleasures of life they easily have access to. In fact, he believes that restraining the self from unleashing its multidirectional demands and its desires would teach these rulers self-control and allow them to comprehend the importance of preserving one's possessions and valuing their utility and their benefits. Mirdad, therefore asks them: "Would you be rulers of men? Learn first to rule yourselves. How else can you rule well except you be well self-ruled? Can a wind-whipped, foaming wave give peace and quiet to the sea?"¹⁰¹

Khalid, on the other hand, can be considered as a kind of prophet who illustrates an urge for travel and displays an unquenched thirst for knowledge, by which he will later seek to unite Easterners and Americans under the motto of multiculturalism as the future of human identity.

3) Prophets Transcending Religion: The Prophet as an Average Man.

Although the trait of Prophethood is bestowed upon 'chosen' individuals, which therefore makes them unlikely to resemble or be considered as 'regular' and 'normal' people, the quality of being and becoming a prophet also finds its essence in humbling the psyche and going beyond the hierarchy that separates and differentiates between a regular human being whose character is not distinguished by refusal for the quotidian and its regularities and another whose spirit is encompassing all forms of a rebellious reasoning. Indeed, the relationship between a Prophet and his community should no longer be viewed as perpendicular; as if the 'chosen' prophet-figure were above others for being sometimes gifted with the ability to produce miracles. As a matter of fact, the mythological and historical prophet used to be the one in possession of a valuable power that enables him to attract followers and believers with the majority refraining themselves from asking him further questions. However, the modern and postmodern prophet is rather a human being who is not selected by a deity, but he is actually the person who ventures to find it through reason and logic, then makes his way towards convincing others of the importance of believing in it; not because it is an ideology or a doctrine to be followed forcefully, but rather for it represents a solution and a compromise in the tumultuous lives of many people, especially coming from a war-torn region—the context of TBK-- . Thus, Khalid is not described as being an executant of marvelous phenomena, but he is

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

rather presented as an intellectual prodigy who is in constant refusal of Ottoman colonization and sectarianism in Lebanon. His unrelenting will to unite both cultures of America and Greater Syria is held a responsibility by the protagonist and is seen as his sole –among other social problems—preoccupation. Moreover, this new type of prophet is far from reaching perfection or any kind of superiority for that matter. On the contrary, we permit ourselves to believe that Khalid is a Prophet- figure because he displays the determination needed to achieve his goals, has been subjected to marginalization and misunderstandings, and has finally been venerated as a true reformer after his disappearance—a manner by which he sacrificed his soul to find his unreachable purpose---. Indeed, Khalid is a prophet because his thirst for reform is never satisfied. The scribe describes the Lebanese main character:

Khalid will seek the shore and launch into unknown seas towards unknown lands. From the City of Baal to the City of Demiurgic Dollar is not in fact a far cry. It has been remarked that he always dreamt of adventures, of long journeys across the desert or across the sea. He never was satisfied with the seen horizon, we are told, no matter how vast and beautiful. His soul always yearned for what was beyond, above or below, the visible line.¹⁰²

Khalid's quest consists in finding peace as the principle by which the two opposing regions can create an understanding, which will definitely grant an independence and dignity to the Middle East as much as the 'West' already enjoys. In fact, achieving peace necessarily implicates an end of an era of wars and human casualties. According to Rihani, "peacemakers could come only from among those who believe in the principles of love, equality, and the right to live a decent life."¹⁰³ Henry Melki proceeds by bringing into the fore highlights from Rihani's journey: "He himself went through many trials, especially with his health; his early life was difficult, but through hard work he overcame most of the hurdles he faced."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Rihani identifies with his created character for he—as part of the Pen League—sought to build a new territory of psychological and cultural in-betweenness by injecting the pragmatic individualism of America into the collective spirituality of the East and vice versa. For instance, Khalid ventured into the political maneuvers of Tammany Hall—a fraternal organization pertaining to the ideology of the Democratic Party in New York City, and which helped many immigrants rise within the American political scene at the time—and then resigned because he discovered

¹⁰² Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York. 1911.p. 27.

¹⁰³ Funk, Nathan C. and Sitka, Betty. J (Ed). *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West. A Pioneering Call for Arab- American Understanding*. University Press of America. 2004. p. 121.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*.

corruption and abuse of power. However, Khalid's prophetic experience dictated the adoption of secularism as a means to dispose of governmental chaos back in Lebanon for it was intertwined with established religion and the church. Thus, Khalid is a character who challenged himself –through being excommunicated from the Maronite church, to being rejected as a heretic by a Mosque official in Istanbul because his preaching for laicism--to finally extract his own conclusions and reformulate his own political and social vision. Therefore, modern-day prophethood is not merely donated, it is rather acquired and possibly deserved. Moreover, in the case of Khalid, we are rather dealing with an emigrant who was rejected by both geographical and cultural sides, and who managed, despite this inflicted detachment and damage, to re-create the formula of hybridity and to advocate one identity in which East and West are in harmony: Humanity. Finally, Khalid, is not just a traveler who happens to stumble upon shocking and estranging experiences. He is also the friend of Lebanese Shakib, a poet who revels in the skeptic poetry of Iraqi Medieval poet Al-Mutanabbi: "I love to lose myself in a crowd, to buffet, so to speak, its waves, to nestle under their feathery crests. For the rolling waves of life, the tumbling waves of the sea, and the fiery waves of Al-Mutanabbi's poetry have always been my delight"¹⁰⁵. Indeed, Shakib was Khalid's muse and his helpful advisor, which reinforced Khalid's affinity for poetry. Thus, poetry and rejection from one's home country and people can be synchronized for:

To be an emigrant is to be an alien. But to be an emigrant mystical poet is to be thrice alienated. To geographical alienation is added estrangement from both conventional human society at large, and also the whole world of spatio-temporal existence. Therefore, such a poet is gripped by a triple longing: a longing for the country of his birth, for a utopian human society of the imagination in which he can feel at home (...) the poet at this stage fully lends himself to prophecy.¹⁰⁶

In sum, the postmodern prophet-figure is one who conducts research on a Truth that does not emanate from above, but is rather cultivated from experience and poetic meditation. Indeed, prophethood is born out of torment and the enticing necessity to construct a meaningful explanation for the differences between America and Lebanon; that is, to create grounds of communication and interchange, and to look for a new form of sacred Deity that delivers humans from the shackles of politicized religion and opens for believers the gateways of choice.

¹⁰⁵ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York. 1911.p. 49.

¹⁰⁶ Naimy, Nadeem. *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*. American University of Beirut. Lebanon. 1985.p. 36.

B) Transcendentalism and Prophethood: Nature's Revelation and Divinity as a Testimony of Transcendence.

In this section, we will be examining the transcendentalists' perceptions about what 'Transcendence' could evoke, and how can the relation between human beings and nature evolve into a situation in which humans start to conceive natural elements as sacred and worthy of worship. Indeed, transcendentalists take part of a literary movement in which the human contact with nature produces knowledge. They also believe in subjective intuition as allowing human beings to approach nature not only from an objective perspective, but rather from an animistic point of view, leading to considering nature as a form of divinity. In both *the Book of Khalid* and *the Book of Mirdad*, the natural setting interferes in shaping the protagonists' principles, especially that Khalid and Mirdad are representatives of an "Eastern" world that calls for religious reform on one hand, and of a larger one in which human beings search for a spiritual alternative that could unite them and be commonly spread as a pathway towards unity; a principal goal in the philosophy of both heroes. The Transcendentalist philosophy is quite significant and consequential in our research of a non-classical vision of transcendence, because it shifts the definition of divinity into the world and prioritizes immanence as the chief solution to understand the core of Nature and the workings of society. Also, American Transcendentalism established a form of connection between the Eastern and the Western worlds, in that it created an equilibrium between the excessiveness of materialism—as well as empiricism-- in America as both Khalid and Rihani suggest, and the prevalence of spiritual interpretations in Eastern communities, mainly Lebanon. Indeed, Edward Said wrote that "American transcendentalists saw affinities between Indian thought and their own"¹⁰⁷, referring thus to the 'Oriental' influence upon American thought, including the Levantine mode of thinking that stressed and highlighted a holy interpretation of the universe. Therefore, in this section, we will seek to analyze the relation between our protagonists' transcendentalist thought in relation to immanence, and thus put forth their tendencies of worshipping nature as already proven by American transcendentalists.

¹⁰⁷ Versluis, Arthur. *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*. Oxford University Press. 1993.p 4.

1) Transcendence as a Form of Spiritual Devotion to Nature.

*You alone govern the nature of things. Without you nothing emerges
into the light of day,
Without you nothing is joyous or lovely.*

Lucretius [To Venus as Nature, mother of all things]

*"All is God, and that God is all (...) God and the universe are one and inseparable
(...) nature and God are identical" (Encyclopedia of Religion)*

Immanence is basically defined as venturing to find God on earth, contrarily to the traditional nature of envisioning divinity, which is generally sought elsewhere, and beyond the physical sphere. Certainly, in *the Book of Mirdad*, the eponymous protagonist insists upon the respect for natural elements as living, sacred entities. In Chapter 33, entitled On Night—The Peerless Singer, Naronda, who is a follower of Mirdad’s teachings, appears to venerate nature by providing a description of a night in which all disciples are waiting for their Master to return to their temple: “The Master chose a night of Spring whose eyes were soft and bright, whose breath was warm and aromatic, whose heart was quick and wide-awake in which to lead us to the Aerie.”¹⁰⁸ Here, Naronda,-- “a sonorous name suggestive of truth, honesty and devotion”¹⁰⁹- explicitly provides a blatant personification of the natural components, supplying them with a human heart, a breath, and eyes. Indeed, this description permits the reader to comprehend the position of Nature as motherly, humane, vivacious, and vibrant. Thus, we can also conclude that Nature according to Nuaimah is impregnated with a soul and a spirit, which reverberates a pantheistic mode of reflection towards Earth. Moreover, Mirdad exposes his glorification and reverence for nature as God-like when he begins to instruct his disciples and devotees about it. He declares his worship for the godly qualities of Nature in this brief poetic passage:

Lend your ears to the spheres:

As they swing through the skies

Hear them sing lullabies

To the giant babe aslumber

In a cradle of quicksands (...)

¹⁰⁸ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. 165.

¹⁰⁹ Explanation provided by Mikhail Nuaimah and found in this website :

<https://spiritualtexts.academy/2016/07/06/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-name-mirdad-and-do-the-characters-in-the-book-of-mirdad-have-a-name-with-a-meaning-that-fits-their-nature/>

To the lightning held in fetters

To the God in swaddling bands.¹¹⁰

Indeed, Nuaimah, in the words of Mirdad, allocates a value of sacredness to “the spheres” and demands his followers to find God “in a cradle of quicksands” because he maintains that Nature, with its songs and its infinite movement and balance, is a manifestation of God, or even incarnates God Himself. Furthermore, the “God in swaddling-bands” can be actually interpreted as Man, for Nature’s composition entails not only the manifested landscape, but also humans. As a matter of fact, pantheists believe that earth’s components are equal, including all matter, nature, as well as humanity. Indeed, there is a specific cycle of regeneration and renovation that nature is subjected to, and in which hierarchy and all types of constructed order vanish. Thus, we can notice that Mirdad is prone to pantheistic tendencies when he appears to venerate nature as equal to man and as an element filled with life. Mirdad also encourages his supporters to delve into nature through meditation, which would enable them to be free and achieve a spiritual epiphany realized by merging themselves, physically and spiritually, with other components from nature. He explains:

If you would face the calumny of Day with heads aloft and eyes alight with faith, hasten to win the friendliness of Night. Be friends with Night. Wash thoroughly your hearts in your own life blood and place them in her heart. Entrust your naked yearnings to her bosom, and immolate ambitions at her feet save the ambition to be free through Holy Understanding. Then shall you be invulnerable to all the shafts of Day, and Night shall bear you witness before men that you in truth are overcomers.¹¹¹

In this brief observation, Mirdad believes that to be a pantheist also means that natural elements can be effectively able to interfere in one’s actions, and one can be able to interact with nature in order to generate reflection, find freedom, or even attain redemption. Since nature and humans are far from being separate according to the pantheist thought, humans can thus link their emotions and destinies to the mechanisms and restless motions of nature. For example, and on a more textual scale, Mirdad admits, through the use of pathetic fallacy, that mother nature and man are psychically and telepathically indivisible. He exclaims:

Though feverish days toss you hither and yon,
And starless nights enfold you in their gloom,

¹¹⁰ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. 166.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.168.

And you be cast upon the world's crossroads,
With no footprints or signs to show the way,
Yet would you fear no man or circumstance,
And would you have no shadow of a doubt
That days and nights, as well as men and things
Would seek you soon or late and meekly beg you (...)¹¹²

This aphorism also suggests that Man's sentiments, passions, and reactions are associated with Nature's alterations, and that she represents a refuge and a protective shield for man as a part of her duties towards all its constituents. From a transcendentalist point of view, Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American author who belongs to this chain of thought, "holds to "the sublime creed, that the world is not the product of manifold power, but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere active, in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool; and whatever opposes that will is everywhere balked and baffled (...)". He will always doubtless be open to the charge of pantheism, because (...) he (...) emphasizes the unity of nature and man with God as to seem to blot out all distinctions. He sometimes says that man becomes God in his moments of ecstatic intuition."¹¹³ The pantheistic worldview is also defined as such:

Pantheism is the worldview that sees God and Nature as the same and, since some Transcendentalists, in particular Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David THOREAU, seemed to —worship|| nature as a God or at least emphasized that nature was divine, Transcendentalism was characterized by some as a pantheistic spirituality [...] Pantheism differs from and is seen as antithetical to orthodox Christianity, in one sense then, because it challenges biblical morality, since in pantheism there is no moral obligation to God but only to oneself and to the abstract goal of seeking to perfect oneself. In addition, biblical Christianity teaches that God is not only separate from but creator of and therefore above nature.¹¹⁴

Therefore, similarly to Emerson, Mirdad holds that connection with nature is indispensable and essential to form a pantheistic version of unity, and to equate all elements from nature with God and Man. On the Other hand, Khalid's understanding of nature does not differ from that of Mirdad's. Indeed, both clearly express their reverence and longing for nature as God-like.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Cooke, George Willis. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy*. University Press of the Pacific. 2003.p. 291. (Originally published in 1881).

¹¹⁴ Wayne, Tiffany K. *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism*. InfoBase Publishing. 2006. p. 208.

They also hold that life and death in nature are identical for eternal rebirth is one of nature's blessings and assets. Everything in it culminates in a unification of its elements, which annihilates the concept of 'end' or 'death', and restores life in nature's revitalized and rejuvenated newborn constituents. For instance, Khalid, in a meditative euphoria, addresses nature and speaks to her:

O Mother eternal, divine, satanic, all encompassing, all-nourishing, all-absorbing, O star-diademed, pearl-sandaled Goddess, I am thine forever and ever: whether as a child of thy womb, or an embodiment of a spirit-wave of thy light, or a dumb blind personification of thy smiles and tears, or an ignis-fatuuus of the intelligence that is in thee or beyond thee, I am thine forever and ever: I come to thee, I prostrate my face before thee, I surrender myself wholly to thee. O touch me with thy wand divine again; stir me once more in thy mysterious alembics; remake me to suit the majestic silence of thy hills, the supernal purity of thy sky, the mystic austerity of thy groves, the modesty of thy slow –swelling, soft-rolling streams, the imperious pride of thy pines, the wild beauty and constancy of thy mountain rivulets. Take me in thine arms, and whisper to me of thy secrets; fill my senses with thy breath divine; show the bottom of thy (...) spirit; buffet me in thy storms, infusing in me of thy ruggedness and strength, thy power and grandeur, (...) sing me a lullaby, O Mother eternal!¹¹⁵

Here, in “Book the Second” entitled “In the Temple”, Rihani makes use of a laudatory, admiring, and appreciative tone to give Khalid a voice by which he praises nature as the source of all things, and as the giver of life. Indeed, Khalid, in a trance-like manner, calls for mother nature as a paradigm of salvation, freedom, and fertility. In a poetic prose, he vows his fidelity and unconditional surrender as a way to express his recognition and yearning for her through his prophetic spirit. Besides, Khalid relinquishes his body and soul to nature, and to her “majestic hills” and “soft-rolling streams” to highlight that the human being is purely an infinitesimal fragment instilled within her larger magnitude and vastness, despite his strength. This passage is also reminiscent of Lucretius' poem entitled *De Rerum Natura* or “On the Nature of Things”, in which the infinity of the universe, along with its atomic characteristics are enumerated and analyzed in connection with the human mind, body, and spirit. Khalid's stream of thought echoes that of Lucretius because the latter saw that venerating nature is a valid alternative and replacement for established religion— traditional Roman deities in the case of the poet, and the Maronite church in Khalid's context-. Indeed, Lucretius “approached the problems of his age with a strongly-marked temper and a very decided bias. It was not sufficient

¹¹⁵ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York. 1911.p. 95.

for him to take up, as did so many of his contemporaries, a position of sceptical indifference towards religion. Nor could he (...) attempt to get rid of the grosser elements of superstition".¹¹⁶ Indeed, Khalid's pantheistic visions and belief in the divine quintessence of nature is a response to religious corruption, and an ardent acceptance of man as part of nature and vice versa. In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius also pays tribute to mother nature and writes:

Mother (...) joy of men and gods, the life-giver, who beneath the gliding stars of heaven fillest with life the sea that carries the ships and the land, that bears the crops; for thanks to thee every tribe of living things is conceived, and comes forth to look upon the light of the sun. Thou, goddess, thou dost turn to flight the winds and the clouds of heaven, thou at thy coming; for thee earth, the quaint artificer, puts forth her sweet-scented flowers; for thee the levels of ocean smile, and the sky, its anger past, gleams with spreading light.¹¹⁷

In this brief narrative, Lucretius also posits nature as eternal and life-giving. Indeed, both Khalid and Lucretius confirm the position of Nature as an invincible, all-encompassing, and immanent "Goddess", which confirms the pantheistic proclivity of the Khalid the Baalbakian. This spiritual worldview is additionally voiced by American Transcendentalists, who also influenced both Nuaimah and Rihani's perspectives on the Universe, among them Walt Whitman. According to the Encyclopedia of Religion, pantheism is "the idea that (...) individuals are acquiring a mystical awareness that allows them to see God as the unifying principle binding humanity to nature".¹¹⁸ This spiritual proclivity of envisaging the universe, thus, incorporates all components of nature and introduces them as necessarily equal to one another. In "Song of My Self" Whitman writes:

You shall possess the good of the earth and sun (...)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through
The eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books (...)
I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is (...)
And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,

¹¹⁶ Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. Oxford University Press. 1910. p. 10. (Translation and Introduction by Cyril Bailey).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.27.

¹¹⁸ Schultz, Jeffery D (Ed). *Encyclopedia of Religion in American Politics, Volume 2*. The Oryx Press. 1999.p.173.

For I who am curious about each am not curious about God (...)

I hear and behold God in every object (...)¹¹⁹

Whitman's thought, progressively revealed through this poem, entails the oneness, equality, and the unity of all elements on earth on all measures. Indeed, he addresses himself and humankind in general to highlight this sense of equity and fairness among all beings. He also insists on the importance of obliterating any kind of hierarchy or ranking whether on the social level, or even on a more natural and universal scale. Whitman also integrates a new meaning and an innovative definition of man. He actually re-establishes the dignity of humans by not degrading the body at the expense of the soul. More importantly, he perceives both the spiritual and the physical as even and balanced; the body is no longer a pit for transgressions, lapses, and wrongdoing. Instead, it has become, with Whitman's declaration, as pure and valuable as one's soul. Thus, God, the self, and the outside world are combined and inextricably interwoven, which confirms the pantheistic worldview of nature. Therefore, through their literary work, one can also affirm that Nuaimah, Rihani, and Whitman are prophets because they sought for their respective communities to achieve greatness. This grandeur was pursued by discarding all forms of social problems, especially the ones caused by politicized religion. To conclude, Whitman recapitulates by stating that "the priest departs, the divine literatus comes."¹²⁰

2) Mirdad, Khalid, and the Over-Soul.

In this part, we will seek to grasp the protagonists' relation to transcendence on the personal and spiritual levels, and in connection to nature. In *the Book of Mirdad*, and specifically in chapter 22, Zamora recounts to Mirdad his painful experience with his beloved Hogleh. Indeed, he explains: "I loved a maiden in my youth. Fairer than the morning star was she. Her name to my tongue was sweeter by far than sleep to my eyelids. when you spoke to us on prayer and the bloodstream I was the first, I trow, to drink in the healing substance of your words. For Hogleh's love – that was the maiden's name – was the commander of my blood, and I knew what well-commanded blood could do (...) But Hogleh died, and Zamora, the flaming phoenix, became a

¹¹⁹ Hass, Robert. *Song of Myself and Other Poems by Walt Whitman*. Counterpoint Berkeley. 2010.pp. 66-72-129. (originally published in 1855).

¹²⁰ Whitman, Walt. *Democratic Vistas*. The Walter Scott Publishing Co. New York. P 6. (Originally published in 1871).

heap of ashes with no new phoenix to emerge out of the cold and lifeless heap. Zamora the fearless lion became a frightened hare. Zamora the pillar of the sky became a woeful wreck in a pool of stagnant waters.”¹²¹ Inspired and touched by Zamora’s traumatic experience, Mirdad finds himself obliged to remedy his disciple’s wounds and to comfort him. Therefore, he refers to him as a future ‘Overcomer’: “But love abundant has Mirdad for all things, even for the flesh; and more so for the Spirit that takes the grosser form of flesh only to melt in it its own formlessness. And Mirdad’s love shall raise Zamora from his ashes and make of him an overcomer.”¹²² Indeed, according to Mirdad, the Overcomer is one who is raised from ashes— is reborn-- and whose soul is renovated in order for it to be able to bear emotional affliction and spread, instead, a new power of love and tolerance. The soul of the overcomer expands as a defense mechanism and becomes connected to all elements of the universe. Thus, this vision of the Overcomer is summarized in the idea that the latter’s spirit is all-embracing and every other particle in Nature embraces Him: “An Overcomer’s life touches the life of every man on every side; for it contains the lives of all men. Whereas no man’s life touches an Overcomer’s life on every side. To the simplest of men, the Overcomer appears as the simplest of men. To the highly evolved he appears as one highly evolved. But there are always sides of him no less than an Overcomer can ever feel and understand.”¹²³ Mirdad’s creation of the Overcomer is also reminiscent of Emerson’s reformulation of the Over-Soul. Indeed, the transcendentalist writer explains the term: “That Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission.”¹²⁴ The Overcomer and the Over-Soul resemble each other because they are both all-comprehending and all-surrounding. According to Emerson, this Over-soul implicates the presence of the Divine in the human spirit, and is also able to transcend the physical body in order to receive nature and the constituents of the Universe. Besides, both the Overcomer and the Over-Soul cultivate the intellect and elevate the human mind as a way to assert a spiritual power that inhabits the body and unites other elements to achieve connection. On the other hand, Khalid, in Rihani’s TBK, while still in America, seems to pertain to a certain goal: “To graft the strenuousness of Europe and America upon the ease of the Orient, the materialism of the West upon the spirituality of the East, --this to us

¹²¹ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p. 110.

¹²² *Ibid.* p.111.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p.174.

¹²⁴ Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Self-Reliance, the Over-Soul and Other Essays*. Coyote Canyon Press. 2010.p. 56. (originally published in 1841).

seems to be the principal aim of Khalid.”¹²⁵This purpose of Uniting his home country with America is a reflection of his belief in the unity of the universe despite the presence of oppositions in nature. As a matter of fact, Khalid holds that “the true life, the life, pure, robust, sublime, is that in which all the nobler and higher aspirations of the soul AND THE BODY are given free and unlimited scope, with the view of developing the divine strain in Man, and realising to some extent (...) the hopes of the race”¹²⁶. This passage refers to Man—a being whose soul and body are equal—as the most important focus because through meditating his own position in the world, one could comprehend that oppositions, such as East and West, are designed to cause to deviate the human mind from its utmost quality of unification. Therefore, Khalid is also a representative of the Over-soul because he maintains that the human soul should not be imprisoned in one culture, area, or thought. It rather embodies a more sophisticated version of Man and paves the way for him to connect with nature and culture in peaceful and cultivating fashion.

To conclude this chapter, it is important to signal that Prophethood and immanence are related and indirectly portrayed throughout Khalid and Mirdad’s characters and journeys. Being a prophet conveys a certain insight into nature and the Self, which allows the creation of a more elaborated and non-traditional idea of God.

¹²⁵ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York. 1911.p. 220.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.p.223.

Chapter III: Transcendence and Its Limits.

To transcend is to overcome, to go beyond, and to overreach, whether this takes place on the levels of the physical world, the soul, or on a wider and universal perspective, transcending alludes to finding an innovative vision of things, and entails an unusual conception of the space-time compound that permits the latter to become useful for humanity. Indeed, denying all conflicting cultural entanglements implicates a use of space and character in both novels, in a way which paves towards comprehension and unity. The use of transcendence, therefore, is not religious in this context, it is rather connected to the notions of movement and shifting, as well as to the idea of discarding all contradictions and privileging a fruitful human connection. For example, in the cases of both Lebanese writers, Mikhail Nuaimah and Ameen Rihani, the goal and the purpose behind stretching out an Arab-American literature to the world, is to show that these two cultures can be fathomed without being separated or looked upon as rivals. The stereotype of rivalry between the East and the West is a major concern that the writers seek to debunk, especially that they, themselves, are immigrants. This entails finding a compromise, which is surely not impossible, yet quite critical to discover. Rihani, for instance, thinks that this territorial and cultural unity would never happen unless problems in both countries are solved. For instance, the Arab World or at least the Levant, had to be independent and decolonized, while the Western world, meaning especially America, had to recognize the ability of the Eastern hemisphere to be its equal. Khalid shows this through his voyages and through sacrificing his belonging to each country as a way to create a sole belonging; a hybrid form of identification. To be independent, the Arab World had to construct its nationalism and needed to become secular as to no longer confuse religion and political action. Nijmeh Hajjar explains:

Rihani viewed sectarianism as one of the major obstacles to Arab unity and progress. He believed that unity would remain impossible unless the narrow sectarian identity was replaced with Arabism as a broader national identity. And he argued in favor of secular pan-Arab nationalism to counteract all the sectarian and regional nationalisms. He insisted that in a secular Arab national state under a government established on rational “solid civil bases”, not on religious hegemony, all citizens would be equal in rights and duties. The fear of minorities would be unjustifiable, and Europeans would no longer have a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of the nation (...) national secular education should expand to embrace the modern sciences and philosophy because only such a broadened pedagogy would develop the “new Arab nationalism” into “universal” nationalism.”¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Funk, Nathan C. and Sitka, Betty. J (Ed). *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West. A Pioneering Call for Arab- American Understanding*. University Press of America. 2004. pp.141-142.

Therefore, it is important to transcend all religious divisions in order to manifest union and universal human coherence. This section will also take into consideration the limits of “Transcending”, which means that the latter cannot always come out as a solution for the unity of humankind, nor for general optimism. In fact, there could be obstacles that delimit and demarcate the positivity and certainty of the act of transcending as always being a tool for emancipation or for development. Indeed, humanity’s flaws and rules sometimes prohibit and prevent such a concept to blossom, especially when it comes to perceiving the self as ephemeral, and the world as finite and meaningless.

A) Exploring the Scope of Transcendence.

In this brief part, we will be explaining the relation between transcendence and Deterritorialization; a concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari and referring to “the complex movement or process by which something escapes or departs from a given territory.”¹²⁸ Indeed, we will be examining how the physical and the spiritual shift from a territory to another or from a culture to the other is capable of bringing to life a new form of a hybrid identity, through the culmination of various experiences in the West and the East, especially in Khalid’s situation. As for Mirdad, Nuaimah seems to rather focus on the universal traits of the protagonist, and how he is more of a transcendent human being because of his resemblance to Jesus-Christ and his prophetic journey.

1) Transcendence as a Necessity for the Union of East and West.

In TBK, the protagonist Khalid was subjected to different hostilities in both Lebanon, his home country, and the United States, the country in which he saw ambition, dream, and success. Indeed, he found himself rejected by both the East and the West despite his attempts at creating a bond between the two cultural backgrounds. In fact, when in the Levant, Khalid discovered his lack of affinity to his original traditions when he was banned by the Maronite church to be

¹²⁸ Patton, Paul. *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics*. Stanford University Press. 2010.p 56.

tied, through the ceremony of marriage, to his beloved Najma. As a consequence, the protagonist suffered excommunication from his local church and was denied respect because of his criticism of the system. As Najma and Khalid are cousins and related by blood, the religious institution discarded his request and accused him of defiling and violating long, deep-seated cultural rules and rites. Although, in general, marriage between cousins is somehow common in the Arab World and in some communities, Khalid was not able to reconcile the demands of the church with his personal sentiments. This led to a general disillusionment in regard to the workings of religious establishments, and prompted Khalid to question and deny his allegiance to the entire Maronite structure because of its unjustified interference in his personal choices. Besides, this small incident triggered Khalid's skepticism and rejection. The narrator explains Khalid's reaction when conversing with one of the representatives of his community's local church:

There is that little knot of consanguinity to be considered. And your priest is good enough to come and explain this to you. Understand him well. "An alm of a few gold pieces," says he, "will remove the obstacle; the unlawfulness of your marriage resulting from consanguinity will cease on payment of five hundred piasters (...) All of which startles Khalid, stupefies him (...) "And where you have this, O Reverend, about consanguinity, prohibition, and alms! Khalid asks. "Why, my child, in the Canons of our Church, Catholic and Apostolic. Every one knows that a marriage between cousins can not be effected, without the sanction of the Bishop. "But can we not obtain this sanction without paying for it?" "You are not paying for it, my child; you are only contributing some alms to the Church." "You come to us, therefore, as a beggar, not as a spiritual father and guide." ¹²⁹

Indeed, Khalid's anger and suspicion do not merely result from the unjustified rejection for his marriage request, they are also rooted in the Church's will to consent to this marriage only if he pays a sum of money. This definitely indicates a fault in the religious establishment's announced "faith" and principles, as its representatives are ready to relinquish their beliefs and sell them as long as financial benefit is guaranteed. This first event, in Khalid's life, acted as a watershed in his journey for finding "truth" and honest belief, as it debunked a major scandal regarding his vision of the church. Indeed, the latter is no longer a holy place for spiritual refuge, it rather became a pit for corruption and unlawful, heretical search for profits. Besides his experience with the church, Khalid, after his voyage to The United States, was also a subject for another rejection. In fact, upon his arrival in New York, Khalid acquainted himself with members from the City's political scene, especially Tammany Hall, for it was a political organization known

¹²⁹ Rihani, Ameen. *The Book of Khalid*. Dodd, Mead and Company, New York. 1911.p. 160.

to encourage the integration of Syrian immigrants into the political sphere and prompt them into representing their community through activism. Thus, the protagonist was called for a specific mission—a political canvasser for the Syrian district-- from Patrick Hoolihan:

Dear Khalid:

I have succeeded in getting Mr. O'Donohue to appoint you a canvasser of the Syrian District. You must stir yourself, therefore, and try to do some good work, among the Syrian voters, for Democracy's Candidate this campaign. Here is a chance which, with a little hustling on your part, will materialise. And I see no reason why you should not try to cash your influence among your people. This is no mean position, mind you. And if you will come up to the Wigwam tomorrow, I'll give you a few suggestions on the business of manipulating votes.

Yours truly,
Patrick Hoolihan.¹³⁰

In this letter directed to the protagonist, there is obvious evidence for corruption, manipulation, and political misconduct. Indeed, Khalid was asked to “hustle” and assemble public money for the campaign through convincing voters and dragging them under the ‘charms’ of his linguistic influence. This leads to conclude that Khalid’s disillusionment stemmed out of his discovery of the vehement falsifications in this domain, as well as the dishonesty of political work in general, especially that Khalid is one who strongly maintains a strict moral conduct, and believes that “We are indebted to our forebears, therefore (...) for the confidence and trust, the faith and hope they had in our innate or immanent morality and intelligence. This will of the dead is law for the living.”¹³¹ This corruption in America was also enough for Khalid to result in his expulsion and discharge from each organization he joins, because of his unwillingness to participate in these fields of “oppressive gloom”¹³², which also engendered a confirmed distaste for his jobs and his journeys. Finally, at the end of the book, Khalid is reported to be missing, and is said to have disappeared in the Egyptian desert, after being chased away from the capital, Cairo, for his lectures on Secularism:

And the reader will remember that the tears rushed to his eyes when we inquired of him about his Master and Friend. “He has disappeared some ten days ago”, he then said, “and I know not whither.” Therefore, ask us not, O gentle Reader, what became of him. How can we

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p.99

¹³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 81-82.

¹³² *Ibid.* p.82.

know? He might have entered a higher spiritual circle or a lower; of a truth, he is not now on the outskirts of the desert: deeper to this side or to that he must have passed. And passing he continues to dream of “appearance in the disappearance; of truth in the surrender; of sunrises in the sunset.” Now, fare thee well in either case, Reader. And whether well or ill spent the time we have journeyed together, let us not quarrel about it. For our part, we repeat the farewell words of Sheikh Taleb of Damascus: “Judge us not severely.” And if we did not study to entertain thee as other Scribes do, it is because we consider thee, dear good Reader, above such entertainment as our poor resources can furnish, *Wassalmu aleik!*

This final affirmation by the Scribe explains that Khalid’s quests to search for knowledge, new spiritual and political horizons, as well as for morality in both the East—the Levant, Egypt and Arabia—and the West—The United States--, were all mere vain attempts that resulted only in his demise. Indeed, he simply sacrificed his family, his intellect, and his physical strength in order to create a new territory that could accept him: A place where American success and Eastern traditions meet through morality; a hybrid utopia. Therefore, it could be possible to refer to Khalid’s voyages as both enriching but quite draining, and which paved the way for him to step into a new country of origin built, imagined, and inspired by the cultural paradigms of the previous countries that rejected him, and as response for their ‘ingratitude’. Indeed, we can confirm that Khalid entered a phase of Deterritorialization, by which he no longer exclusively belongs to Lebanon or America, but transcends this distinction and this separation, and restarts the fashioning of his identity in an area—defined by his intellect and his experiences—where he is simply Lebanese-American, or Arab-American, and in which the heterogeneity of these cultures is harmonious and embracive. Deterritorialization, therefore, from another sociological point of view, refers to: “The ways that networks of connections are transcending traditional boundaries. The term foregrounds the idea that, in a globalized world, many (...) activities can take place without geography functioning as a constraint.”¹³³

According to this definition, the boundaries of geography, for Khalid, became invisible because he privileged thought to be the uniting force of both cultures.

On the other hand, throughout *The Book of Mirdad*, Mirdad seems to greatly insist upon the importance of dualities as functional entities responsible for balance in life. Indeed, he believes that life’s opposites are its fuel for continuity and for humanity to remain interactive. In the chapter entitled “The Master Warns the Crowds of The Flood of Fire and Blood, Points the

¹³³ Campbell, Patricia J. and Aran MacKinnon. *An Introduction to Global Studies*. Blackwell Publishing. 2010.p. 5.

Way of Escape, and Launches His Ark”, Mirdad points at dualisms as being responsible for the birth and flourishing of humanity:

When Holy Omniwill clove Adam into twain that he may know himself and realize his oneness with the One, then he became a *male* and a *female*—an he-Adam and a she-Adam. Then was he deluged with desires which are the offspring of Duality—desires so numerous, so infinite of hues, so very great of magnitude, so profligate and so prolific that till this day Man is a derelict upon their waves (...) for his desires are paired as he himself is paired. And though two opposites but complement each other in reality, yet to the ignorant they seem at grips and blows and never willing to declare even a moment’s truce. That is the flood that Man is called to breast hour by hour, day by day, throughout his very long and arduous dual life.¹³⁴

In this extract, Mirdad posits that the Omniwill-- which is at the origin of things, and not concretely specified as God, but as rather an omnipresent power in the universe upon which humanity has no control whatsoever—had brought Adam into life and split him into two; the male and the female. This is indeed the first duality known by humanity, and from which stems reproduction and all sources of life. He also seems to highlight that human desire is a consequence of this duality without condemning it. Rather, he believes that only are the ignorant responsible for their devaluation of this desire, and that they cannot grasp the complementarity occurring between contradictory elements producing it. The flood, in this situation, is thus assimilated to a ‘flood of desires’; which probably alludes to the fact that humanity destroyed itself because it was not capable of reconciling its dualisms, which led to an uncontrollable overflow of human yearnings and impulses. Therefore, Mirdad indirectly asserts that dualities are to be embraced, reconciled and unified as to prevent humanity from descending and sinking into its own chaos of conflicts caused by its unmanageable desire for hostility, war, and even for belligerency. Indeed:

To be in duality is to perceive opposites. To be in singularity is to experience unity. The two perspectives dance together in our minds to give us our everyday experience of life. Duality gives us the ability to compete, complement, analyze, describe, dissect, discern, categorize (...) set goals and experience achievement and failure (...) Only the mind that is firmly planted in duality can say that singularity is better than duality (...) The mind in duality still retains a memory of singularity (...) The awareness of singularity translates into a sense of equality.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p.186.

¹³⁵ Scarfalloto, Rudy. *The Alchemy of Opposites*. Writer’s Showcase. New York. 1997.p.10.

This extract, as well as Mirdad's that describes his vision of dualisms, confirm the idea that these dualities can easily result in a union, or in a singularity if they complete each other, and when people alleviate the intensity of their willingness to divide themselves. However, this notion of completion cannot be realized unless humans learn how to control their compulsions and whims. In fact, a large dualism like that of the East versus the West, can never be overlooked nor dismissed if both cultures continue to display their chauvinistic attachment to their regions, allowing as a consequence the infiltration of discrimination, xenophobia, and therefore, imminent clashes and wars between the two geographical territories, as well as between two different mindsets.

Nuaimah and Rihani, thus, emphasize dualisms as life's indispensable components and constituents, and the more they retain balance and are connected as singularities, the less collisions there will be. Besides, for both Khalid and Mirdad, dualisms are a reflection for humanity's astonishing ability to convert differences and opposites into tools for communication and coexistence.

B) The Need for Transcendence: An Existential Anxiety Unveiled.

“A man finds himself, to his great astonishment, suddenly existing, after thousands and thousands of years of non-existence: he lives for a little while; and then, again, comes an equally long period when he must exist no more. The heart rebels against this, and feels that it cannot be true.”

Arthur Schopenhauer

The idea of transcendence stems from the human and mental need to explain the unexplainable, to step beyond traditional and conformist ways of thinking, and to find new ways of perceiving the world, especially from spiritual perspectives—as alternatives for institutionalized religious thinking. However, despite the attempts of humanity to renovate the mind through literature and philosophical knowledge, the fact of being infinitely physically and culturally tied to earth, or even limited by the inability to control one’s destiny or formulate a logical explanation for one’s existence and purposes on earth, induces a sense of meaninglessness and sometimes overshadows the optimistic will for transcendence through various ways. Indeed, this part will cast light upon the diverse limits of transcendence, and its eventual and possible failure as a concept and as a paradigm of optimism and constant innovation. In fact, this notion is sought and created as a way to prevent humanity from blindly plunging into its own unknown—such as Death and the future—with fear and pessimism. Yet, it seems that, through Mirdad and Khalid, we can distinguish episodes in which both fail to save themselves and their respective disciples and communities from the inexorable reality of doom.

1) Anxiety: A Psychoanalytical Overview:

In TBM, manifestations of anxiety and psychological restlessness pervade within characters throughout the book and Mirdad’s journey. Indeed, anxiety is officially defined as “an apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness usually over an impending or anticipated ill (...) a

mentally distressing concern or interest.”¹³⁶ Indeed, many unanswered questions are asked by the disciples of which Mirdad generally finds an answer. Yet, ambiguously enough, these answers seem not to deter those who implore their Master for a satisfying answer from becoming even more troubled and frightened. For example, in the Chapter entitled “On Judgment and Judgement Day”, Mirdad reflects upon the idea of the afterlife—from a Christian point of view”, and examines the fact of judging the previous actions of Man during life. He explains:

Too overburdened now is Man with burdens self-imposed. Too rough and crooked is his road. Each judgment is an added burden, alike to the judge and the judged. If you would have your burdens light, refrain from judging any man. If you would have them vanish of themselves, sink and be lost forever in the Word. Let Understanding guide your steps if you would have your pathway straight and smooth. Not judgment do I bring you in my mouth, but Holy Understanding. Bennoon: What of the Judgment Day? ¹³⁷

In this brief meditative explication, Mirdad talks to his disciples about one of Man’s most pervasive concerns. Indeed, he tells them that judgment is merely a problem that incites one to sometimes run away from communication for fear of being labelled and treated according to his or her outlook and manners of thinking. Indeed, being judged or ‘prejudiced’, according to Mirdad, is not the requirement of other people, but it is solely the duty of oneself towards one’s intellect and actions. This idea stirs further questioning from Bennoon, another disciple, who even begins to imagine the workings of the upcoming “Judgment Day”, and if Man will ever be punished and thrown into the grapples of Divine wrath and eternal anger of God based on his choices. These questions and such wonderings are proof for existing anxiety and uncertainty that lays hidden among human beings. Mirdad answers that Judgment Day is simply not a particular inevitable day to come, but it is rather something they deal with every day, and he also encourages his followers to avoid casting a random and judgmental presuppositions upon any other Man. Indeed, he seeks to alleviate the level of perturbation and strong emotions of struggle by displaying an unorthodox vision of this ‘Day’ and by considering it as a time not to be waited for in a state of panic, but to perceive it as penetrating their lives depending on the quality of their actions. He thus affirms that “every day is Judgment Day.”¹³⁸

From a psychoanalytical analysis, “Kurt Goldstein (1963) describes the anxiety as a sense of

¹³⁶ The Merriam Webster Dictionary. Website : <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anxiety>

¹³⁷ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p.65.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*.p.66.

dissolution of the self.” The person “experiences the dissolution of the existence of his personality as anxiety (...) It involves fear of a major disorganization of a usually voluntarily controlled vital functioning and anticipation of the psychic experience accompanying that disorganization—jointly, what Goldstein has designated as “catastrophic reaction. Anxiety is both *fear of the onset* of that subjective sensation and *the subjective sensation itself* that accompanies a catastrophic disordering of function.”¹³⁹ According to this reference to anxiety, the psychological state of Mirdad’s followers, and Mirdad himself for that matter, seems to entail a sense of disorder and incomprehension, which elicits this yearning to acquire comforting knowledge. In another chapter entitled “Mirdad Divines the Death of Himbal’s Father and the Circumstances Thereof. He Speaks of Death. Time is The Greatest Juggler, The Wheel of Time, Its Rim and Its Axis.”, Mirdad tries to relieve Himbal’s shock of losing his father to a brutal death. Simultaneously, he continues to remind his follower that Death will also hover over everybody else in the Universe:

What would you do when all your family die? What would you do when all the fathers and the mothers, and all the sisters and the brothers in this world pass out of and beyond the reach of your hands and eyes? Himbal: Aye, Master. My father died a violent death. A steer he had recently bought gored his belly and crushed his skull but yestereve. I have just been told it by the messenger. Woe is me. Ah, woe is me. Mirdad: And he died, it seems, at the very time when the fortunes of this world were about to smile to him. Himbal: It is so, Master. It is even so.¹⁴⁰

In this response, Mirdad does not eventually offer a comforting answer. He actually provides a more realistic one. Indeed, he tries to warn his friend and disciple of the inevitable happenings in life, especially death. This also shows the level of existential anxiety pervading among characters, reinforcing more their recognition of their inability to control their existence and prevent ruin. Mirdad also asserts in another episode with Bennoon, that “Logic is immaturity weaving its nets (...) wherewith it aims to catch the behemoth of knowledge. When logic comes of age it strangles itself in its nets and then becomes transmuted into Faith, which is the deeper knowledge.”¹⁴¹ Here, Mirdad explains that the line of logic is ephemeral and mostly not useful to find information. Rather, he prefers faith, which is stronger and more consistent, and is actually a form of intact knowledge by which one can explain the illogical scenes in life. This confirms that an anxious Mirdad could not rely on mere logic to find satisfaction in life. He

¹³⁹ Bonime, Walter. *Collaborative Psychoanalysis: Anxiety, Depression, Dreams, and Personality Change*. Associated University Press. London. 1989.p 26.

¹⁴⁰ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. pp.95-96

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*.p.100.

actually perceives faith as the ultimate solution by which one can arm himself against fatality.

Moreover, in another encounter with his friend and follower Naronda, Mirdad seeks, in prophetic manner, to explain and decipher the images of a dream his other disciple Micayon had. He recites this dream:

MIRDAD: a certain man once had a dream; And this is the dream he had:

He saw himself upon the green bank of a broad, deep, and noiselessly flowing river. The bank was alive with great multitudes of men, women and children of every age and tongue; and all had wheels of various sizes and tints, which they rolled, up and down the bank. And the multitudes were dressed in festive colors, and were out to frolic and to feast; and their hubbub filled the air. Like a restless sea did they heave up and down, back and forth. He alone was not dressed for the feast, for he was aware of no feast. And he alone had no wheel to roll. And hard as he strained his ear, he could not catch a single word from the polyglot crowd that was akin to his own dialect. And hard as he strained his eye, it could not rest upon a single face that was to it familiar. And furthermore, the crowd, as it surged about him, cast meaningful glances in his direction as if to say, 'Who is this comical being?' Then it dawned in upon him that the feast was not his, and that he was a total stranger, and he felt a pang in his heart. Anon he heard a great roar coming from the upper end of the bank, and forthwith he saw the multitudes fall to their knees, cover their eyes with their hands and bend their heads to the ground, breaking as they fell in two rows and leaving between an open, straight and narrow aisle all the length of the bank. He alone remained standing in the middle of the aisle not knowing what to do and which way to turn. As he looked up to whence the roar was coming, he beheld an enormous bull spitting tongues of flame from his mouth and blowing columns of smoke from his nostrils, and dashing down the aisle at a lightning speed. In terror he looked at the furious beast, and sought escape right and left, but could find none. He felt as if transfixed to the ground, and was certain of his doom.¹⁴²

The dream commences on a relatively calm and undisturbed note. Indeed, the person dreaming is picturing himself among a crowd and his surroundings appear to be peaceful and unthreatening. However, feelings of loneliness and loss travel throughout the dream until everything is interrupted with the advent of a beast: The bull. Generally, this animal symbolizes strength and fertility. However, from a psychoanalytical point of view, the presence of a threatening sign or creature connotes fear and anxiety. The beast is also portrayed as ready to attack and to follow the dreamer until it finds a way to crush him. This also symbolizes a restless and agitated state of mind. At the end of the extract, the dreamer appears to fall into dread and horror by trying to escape in vain. In *Jungian Dream Interpretation: A Handbook of Theory and*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*p.150.

Practice, “A number of classic anxiety dreams can be seen in many patients. There are (...) major types that deserve notice (...) Dreams of being pursued by some threatening person or creature; and dreams suggesting physical danger to the dream-ego, such as dreams of falling or being threatened by natural events—earthquakes, tidal waves, forest fires, etc.—where there is no malicious motive toward the dream-ego. Anxiety may of course take many other forms in dreams, but these (...) patters are particularly recurrent.”¹⁴³ Therefore, this part of the dream clearly echoes Micayon’s psychological state as uneasy and perturbed. Micayon responds to his Master by explaining that “it haunts(s) him till this day and gives (him) no repose.”¹⁴⁴ The disciple addresses himself to Mirdad: “It made me a stranger to myself. Because of it Micayon no longer knows Micayon. Yet I dreamed that dream soon after you were led away to *Bethar*. How come you relate it in such minute details? What manner of man are you that even dreams of mean are to you an open book? (...) Save me, O my Great Companion. I languish away for a vision.”¹⁴⁵ In his discourse with Mirdad, Micayon traces back the inspiration to his dream, or rather tries to find the trigger for his vision. Indeed, he explains that Mirdad being tricked and taken away to Bethar—the place where the Master was kidnapped and violently chained by his rivals Shamadam and the Prince of Bethar—was a symbol of decay and a sign of deterioration; as if all of the followers had lost their beacon of knowledge. Therefore, the dream originates from a real-life trauma that led to the manifestation of anxiety and helplessness within Micayon the dreamer.

Finally, it could be grasped that signs of anxiety, whether through dreams, questions, and imagination are sufficient to create a kind of growing dependency to what is known and tangible, while scaring away all kinds of change and attempts at re-envisioning meaning. Indeed, there prevails an existentialist questioning among all characters that sometimes leaves no path for relying on transcending the ordinary.

¹⁴³ Hall, James. *A Jungian Dream Interpretation: A Handbook of Theory and Practice*. Inner City Books. Canada. 1983. p. 46.

¹⁴⁴ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948. p.152.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

2) The Connection Between Existentialist Thought, Anxiety, and Transcendence:

To be an existentialist is to believe that, you alone, are responsible for your own existence and your own destiny because of Deities abandoning the world and because the Universe in which we exist is simply meaningless, and we are obliged to, in spite of our will, to always, grapple with its problems, reinforcing even further its unending repetitiveness and the unfathomable purpose behind its absurd existence. To be anxious, therefore, is according to Søren Kierkegaard, a result for being aware of one's sole responsibility to draw his own singular pathway and control one's actions as long as one is charged with freedom. The prevalence of anxiety, which is itself a symptom of existentialism, does not necessarily imply a pessimistic worldview. Rather, it confirms the idea that the classical vision of transcendence, manifested in God, is no longer valuable or reliable. With existentialism comes skepticism. This directly leads to evading the notion of finding hope and psychological, as well as spiritual, reconciliation in the metaphysical. This doubt, misbelief, and hesitant distrust is quite noticed in TBK, specifically in Khalid's attempts to reach God or the Divine. He tries to contact God:

To God,

In the religious systems of mankind, I sought thee, O God, in vain; in their machine-made dogmas and theologies, I sought thee in vain; in their churches and temples and mosques, I sought thee long, and long in vain (...)¹⁴⁶

In this supplication, Khalid tries to find a justification for his skepticism, and seeks to find the aura of God elsewhere. Indeed, he even infiltrates and evokes, in his brief speech, emotions of abandon. He believes, as a human being who is unsure about God's existence, that he was, along with his human compatriots, abandoned by deities, especially after his banishment from church, and his inability to find refuge and consolation in his community's beliefs. He repeats the expression "in vain" to highlight the futility and the vainness of his search. This anxiety also evokes a Nietzschean mindset summarized in what the philosopher calls "The Death of God", which indirectly means the inability of the traditional thinking about God to keep up with scientific creations and function as an equal to the development of humanity. Khalid's blatant skepticism is also noticed several times in the book, especially when faced with rejection from

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 201.

his church, and when he started to pursue unorthodox beliefs as ways to find Divinity like beseeching nature and insisting on the godly qualities of Man himself, partially denying the Universal God as religious reference. The narrator, thus, recounts Khalid's semi-confrontation with atheism:

When I heard the people asking each other, "Why does he not come to Church like honest folks?" And soon I discovered that my apprehensions were well-grounded; for the questioning was noised at Khalid's door, and the fire crackled under the roof within. The father commands; the mother begs; the father objurgates, threatens, curses his son's faith; and the mother, prostrating herself before the Virgin, weeps, and prays, and beats her breast. Alas, and my Khalid? He goes out on the terrace to search in the Nursery for his favorite plant (...) You will either go to Church like myself, or get out of this house: this the ultimatum of Abu-Khalid. And needless to say which alternative the son chose.¹⁴⁷

The narrator describes Khalid's disillusionment with God and his obvious and outwardly skepticism. This, indeed, is stirred because of Khalid's inability to identify with the teachings of the Church and its rules, which engendered a lack of interest into the idea of the Christian Divinity. Therefore, it is possible to say that Khalid freely recognized and confessed to his disinterest in religion and the God portrayed in scripture, which, by the definition of an existentialist, gives birth to an anxiety in the belief in nothingness. In the *Dictionary of Existentialism*, various references to explaining anxiety are put forth:

In existentialism, anxiety and concepts such as ANGUISH, FEAR, and dread point to a human condition stemming from FREEDOM. For JASPERS, anxiety is experienced in boundary situations, such as death, in which I confront extreme limits. NIETZSCHE considers anxiety an original and most fundamental feeling through which everything, including original virtue and SIN, is explained (...) KIERKEGAARD distinguishes between fear and anxiety: fear takes on a definite object; anxiety has no proper object. As such, it is an anxiety of nothing (...) Anxiety over my existence is indicative of the fact that I am free (...)¹⁴⁸

Although the idea of being anxious is intertwined with an existentialist spirit that denies transcendence, this does not necessarily mean that anxiety is a problem per se. On the contrary, it is a sign of freedom because Khalid, in this context, is able to alleviate his anxiety through the search for other alternatives of God, and to liberate himself from the shackles of his previous, 'egotistic' Church superiors. To conclude, anxiety is a symptom of reflection and a pathway towards Khalid's freedom. Certainly, it limits transcendence on the metaphysical

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 141.

¹⁴⁸ Gordon, Haim (Ed). *Dictionary of Existentialism*. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers. 1999. Michigan, USA. pp. 11-12.

levels, but actually allows a transcending of the beliefs of institutionalized religion, and paves the way for Khalid to go beyond his thinking while still confined within the physical world.

C) The Limits of Transcendence as a Source for Knowledge and Optimism.

Along with anxiety as a limiting factor that intervenes in interrupting the pursued pathway of metaphysical transcendence, there seem to be other reasons that prevent the fulfilment of the meaning of this concept. Indeed, it is not always evident to have the faculty, as a prophet or as a regular human being searching for spiritual guidance and explanations, to reach the ‘Truth’ by any means. As a matter of fact, in TBK and TBM, we are in the presence of two exceptional characters –a Prophetic Teacher and an Adventurer—who were almost able, through their respective experiences, to seek alternative methods of spirituality whether by discarding traditional deities and pursuing them in nature and in the tangible world, or by going beyond their human self towards seeking extreme adventures because of which they were victimized, scapegoated, and almost sacrificed because of their beliefs. Thus, to find a way towards transcendence is by far not an easy quest. It demands endurance, knowledge, falling into many pits of countless mistakes, and even voicing unwanted difference. Therefore, we will venture to search for many factors that could inhibit reaching the gist of transcending.

1) Transcendence and the Doctrine of Predestination.

In puritan Christianity, the doctrine of predestination is defined as God selecting a few—the Elect—to be saved in the afterlife while the others are merely condemned to eternal torture. Indeed, each person’s destiny is already drawn and previously known by God. However, one can be able to redeem his situation as –condemned and cursed—through prayer, a hard work ethic, and good deeds as solutions for salvation and redemption. In TBM, in the chapter entitled “Is it Lawful to Kill to Eat?” Mirdad explains that all living things are condemned to death, and what Mirdad calls the ‘Omniwill’—or the equivalent for an omnipotent presence of Godly universal

power— would never ask someone to commit a killing or to murder unless this person is someone “fit” for this kind of action. He explains:

While it is true that all the living are condemned to die, yet woe to him who is the cause of death of any living thing. As you would not commission me to kill Naronda, knowing that I love him much and that no blood lust is in my heart, likewise the Omniwill would commission no man to kill a fellowman, or an animal, except it find him fit as an instrument for killing. So long as men are what they are, so long shall there be thefts and robberies among them, and lies and wars and murders and every kind of dark and evil passions.¹⁴⁹

Here, Mirdad believes that men are indeed condemned to an end. However, in order to alleviate the scares and scars of that end, people can actually be able to change themselves and disregard lust for blood, and destroy belligerency. Mirdad holds that if a Man is unwilling to change himself as to become an instrument of his own will, and atone for his misdeeds, Destiny and the Omniwill will definitely claim him as evil. Indeed, man should internally know that killing is a dark and mischievous side which humans should seal in order to gain the recompense of the Omniwill manifested in an unpainful ending. By taking this logic into consideration, those who are ‘elected’ by the Omniwill will have been able to change their methods, and thus transcend the somber character that was hovering over their futures.

Thus, predestination is an idea that Mirdad holds plausible, yet he believes that it crushes attempts at transcendence through redemption, because of the inability of man, sometimes, to own up to his own horrid actions and to his nature.

¹⁴⁹ Nuaimah, Mikhail. *The Book of Mirdad*. (Publisher unknown). Lebanon. 1948.p. 121.

2) Transcendence and Dionysian Excess.

To fall into Dionysian excess, or to be entranced through the unlimited and overt pursuance of raw desire, is—from the point of view of Greek Mythology—to display all kinds of worship to the God of Wine, Excess, Ecstasy, and Ritual Madness Dionysus. Here, in the context of TBM, we notice that there takes place a type of heathen or pagan ritual, reminiscent of Dionysian festivals, called “The Day of the Vine”. The narrator describes the setting:

And when all had filled their cups the Senior would ask them to raise them high and sing with him the Hymn to the Sacred Vine which is said to have been sung by father Noah and his family when they first tasted of the blood of the Vine. And having sung the hymn, the crowd would empty their cups with shouts of joy and then disperse to pursue their various trades and pleasures. And this is the Hymn to the Sacred Vine:

Hail the Sacred Vine!
Hail the wondrous root
That feeds her tender shoot
And fills her golden fruit
With vivifying wine.
Hail the Sacred Vine!¹⁵⁰

Mirdad, upon the festival, expressed his disdain for the people’s reactions and for their great engrossment and immersion into these festivities, considering that to be a sign of deliberate forgetfulness and materialist greed. He responds:

Heavy is Mirdad with his crop. But the harvesters, alas, are busy in other vineyards. And choking is Mirdad with an overflow of blood. But the cupbearers and the drinkers are fast adrunken with other wines. Men of the plough and pick and pruning-hook, I bless your ploughs and picks and pruning-hooks (...) Have you ploughed up the dreary wastelands in your souls, so overgrown with all manner of weed, and thus become a veritable jungle where fearsome beasts and hideous reptiles thrive and multiply? (...) Or have you pruned away those branches of yourselves which are hollowed by busy worms, or withered by onslaughts of parasites?¹⁵¹

Mirdad argues that these parties are not an efficient way to realize releasement nor to achieve purification of the soul. He descants on the idea that the celebrators should not have wasted their

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.124.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 126.

lives upon useless wine-drinking and drunkenness. As a matter of fact, he maintains that wine—which is reminiscent of the Doctrine of the Eucharist—symbolizes the blood of Jesus who incarnates himself into each drinker. Therefore, the spiritual and religious value of wine was not respected because of the participators' ignorance and sole interest in leisure. The latter, when performed in an excessive manner, clouds people's minds from any 'Truth', and limits their attaining transcendence manifested in a pure soul whose goal is to be devoted to the acquirement of knowledge and to meditation.

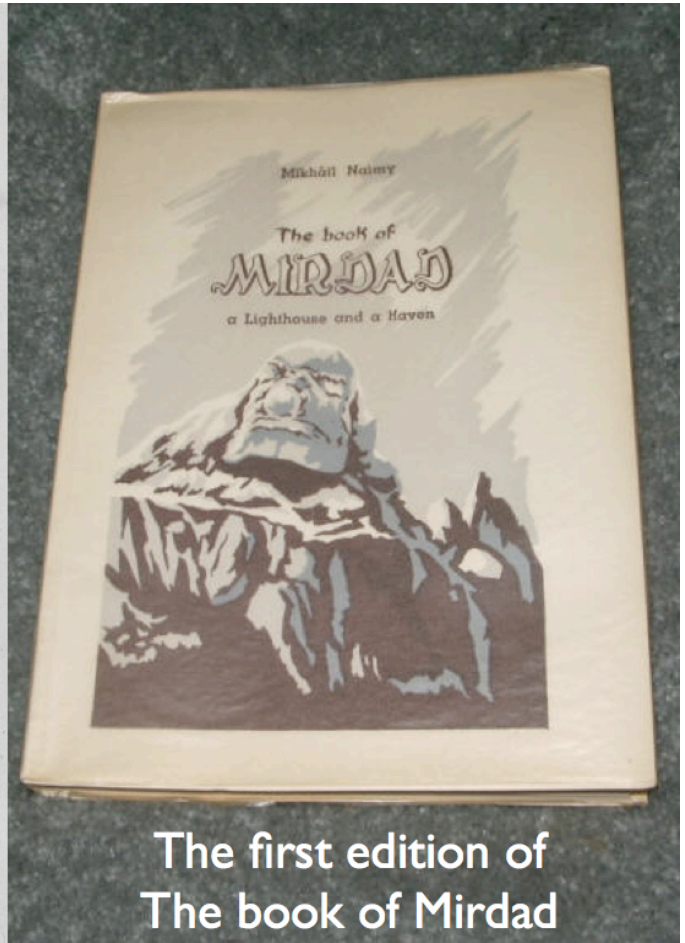
In conclusion, Mirdad disproves of the participators' behavior because It leans more towards a manifestation of chaos and carelessness rather than a festival in which spirituality is elevated and Jesus incarnated. Indeed, transcendence is sought, whether on earth or beyond what is perceptible, through complete devotion, concentration, and even strife. Festivals in which Dionysian character is put to the fore rather reminds the reader of a trance-like state in which all values are diminished and the quality of search and thought depreciated.

Conclusion

Throughout this extensive analysis, the term 'Transcendence' was dissected and reformulated depending on the context in which it occurred. Indeed, transcendence was physical, metaphysical, postmodern, spiritual, and classical. The two books by Rihani and Nuaimah were mere attempts at conveying a new spiritual outlook for the reader, and encouraging him or her to seek more reflection and analysis, especially for both the Arab and American readers. This collection, from the Pen League, was an amalgamation of East-West dynamics, depicted in the guise of voyages, of a Lebanese-American character such as Khalid, and of a reformist Prophet, Mirdad, who spurs curiosity and questions through his ambiguous and wise character at once; a character that gives the impression that the protagonist could be Jesus, a parody of Jesus Christ, or even a new reformed form of the Christian God. Besides, Nuaimah is not only addressing himself to Christian Lebanese readers, he is mainly prompting every social sample of both the Arab and American worlds into discovering this God-Man, who is at once all prophet-figures and all humanity with his pieces of wisdom and instances of flaws. In this dissertation, we humbly sought to understand the relation of the concept of transcendence with the major characters, and how they perceived it and conveyed it to the world. Our specific idea was to analyze the term as an attempt to comprehend how could the Eastern and Western Worlds finally unite, even through mere theoretical suppositions. Because we managed to detect the malign reason behind division, which is mainly sectarianism and the lack of belief in humanity, we sought, through this work, to direct our readers towards a more global vision in which 'Transcending' would be our means of transportation. Indeed, the literature of Nuaimah, Rihani, and even Khalil Gibran was mostly centered upon allegorical and prophetic figures, who represented the woes and the indelible pains of humans in order to incite these international communities to reform their religious perspectives and worship Man rather than allocating unfathomable importance to superstitions and bleak beliefs that resulted in wars and many deaths. Transcending, thus, is a solution for the appreciation of hybridity, universality, humanity, and spiritual growth. The *Immigrés* literature, therefore, represents a mixture of many sources of knowledge and culture waiting to be explored and comprehended as attempts to transcend the ordinary, and introduce drastic levels of transformation in human mentalities.



Mikhail Naimy



The first edition of
The book of Mirdad