

About Gibran Khalil Gibran

Biography

Key Dates 1883: Gibran Khalil Gibran was born in Bsharri, a village in the north of Lebanon. He originated from a humble family. His father, Khalil, worked as a tax collector. His mother Kamileh Rahmeh had one son from a previous marriage (Boutros; Arabic for Peter). After Gibran, Kamileh gave birth to two daughters: Mariana and Sultana.

1895: Gibran's mother immigrated to Boston with her four children, hoping to flee misery, while her husband stayed in Lebanon drowning in financial problems. In the United States, Gibran met the famous photographer Fred Holland Day.

1898: Gibran returned to Lebanon to study Arabic and French at College La Sagesse in Beirut.

1902: In fifteen months' time, Gibran lost his mother, sister and half-brother.

1904: Gibran met Mary Haskell, an American citizen and a great influence in his life who will encourage and help him throughout his path. The same year, Gibran published several poems in prose gathered later under the title *A Tear and a Smile*.

1908: He settled down in Paris to pursue an artistic training.

1911: From thereafter, Gibran settled in New York where he started a rich and intimate correspondence with May Ziadeh, a Lebanese intellectual living in Cairo.

1918: *The Madman*, Gibran's first book written in English was published.

1920: Gibran founded, with other Arab and Lebanese co-writers and poets living in the United States, a literary society called *Al Rabitat al Qualamiya* (The Pen-bond Society).

1923: *The Prophet*, Gibran's seminal work, was published. The book was an immediate success. Concurrently, Gibran started a solid friendship with Barbara Young who later became his confident.

1928: *Jesus, the Son of Man* was published after 18 months of uninterrupted work.

1931: Gibran died in a hospital in New York at the age of 48. His body was transferred to Lebanon. Today, it still lies in his native town of Bsharri, in the monastery of Mar Sarkis (Saint Serge) turned into a museum.

Family Background Gibran's father was a strong, sturdy man with fair skin and blue eyes; and despite his basic education, he was a man of considerable charm. Although he owned a walnut grove in his village, his meager income was soon wasted over gambling and alcohol. He was known to be "one of the strongest men" in Bsharri and everyone feared him, including his wife and kids...

Later on in his life, Gibran expressed his feelings towards his father, while moderating the harsh reality of this autocratic relationship:

"I admired him for his power, his honesty and integrity. It was his daring to be himself, his outspokenness and refusal to yield that got him into trouble eventually. If hundreds were about him, he could command them with a word. He could overpower any number by any expression of himself."

However, in truth, Gibran had never felt close to his temperamental father; an unloving man who was hostile

to his artistic nature and skills.

On the other hand, Gibran always evoked his mother with the deepest feelings of affection and admiration.

Kamileh Rahmeh, the daughter of a Maronite clergyman, was described as a thin graceful woman with a slight pallor in her cheeks and a shade of melancholy in her eyes. She had a beautiful singing voice and was a devoutly religious person. When she reached a marriageable age, Kamileh was given to her cousin Hanna Abed Al Salaam Rahmeh, but like many Lebanese of his time, Hanna immigrated to Brazil seeking fortune, and died there leaving a widow and a son, Boutros (Peter). Sometime after his death, the young Kamileh remarried to Khalil Gibran, giving birth to a son and two daughters: Gibran, Marianna and Sultana.

In contrast to her husband, Kamileh was an indulgent and loving parent. She had ambitions for her children, and despite her informal education, she possessed an intelligence and wisdom that had an enormous influence on her son Gibran. Fluent in Arabic and French, artistic and musical, Kamileh ignited Gibran's imagination with the folk tales and legends of Lebanon as well as other stories from the Bible. Her spiritual nature and the mystical Maronites ceremonies she attended with her children had also a big impact on Gibran's life and work.

In one of his earliest works - *Al Ajnihah Al Mutakassirah* (The Broken Wings) - Gibran Khalil Gibran clearly expressed his deepest respect and admiration for motherhood: "The most beautiful word on the lips of mankind is the word "Mother", and the most beautiful call is the call of "My mother". It is a word full of hope and love, a sweet and kind word coming from the depths of the heart. The mother is everything; she is our consolation in sorrow, our hope in misery, and our strength in weakness. She is the source of love, mercy, sympathy, and forgiveness."

Another influence in Gibran's early life was a local man named Selim Dahir, a poet-physician who had sensed very early the boy's thirst for knowledge. Gibran, who was denied formal schooling the first twelve years of his life, remembered him in these words: "But some people are so wonderful that I wonder whether their life isn't creation after all. You remember Selim Dahir? He was a poet, a doctor, a painter, a teacher, yet he never would write or paint as an artist. But he lives in other lives. Everybody was different for knowing him. All Bsharri was different. I'm different. Everybody loved him so much. I loved him very much, and he made me feel very free to talk to him."

Who is Mary Haskell?

"A remarkable face... You know that I find beauty in you. You know I use your face again and again in my drawings, not an exact likeness, but you... you have the face I want to paint and draw the eyes with their ins and outs all around them. It is the face I can say things with."

Mary Haskell and Gibran became acquainted through photographer Frederick Holland Day in Boston, at Gibran's first art exhibition in 1904.

"I was drawn to you in a special way the very first time I saw you... I loved talking to you that day... I knew many people in Boston at that time, some of them among the very finest... The others found me interesting. They liked to get me talking, because I was unusual for them; they liked to watch the monkey. And they would have people meet me, as someone who was interesting. But you really wanted to hear what was in me and you weren't even content to hear what I had to say, you kept making me dig for more. That was very delicious to me."

Over the next twenty five years, the couple built an enduring and complicated relationship. Mary's natural ability to teach and her unstoppable work ethics led the unlikely pair down a path of friendship and spiritual enlightenment that would change their lives, and impact the world.

"I told him frankly how I used to wish people might know he loved me, because it was the greatest honor I had. I wanted credit for it; I wanted the fame of his loving me. He wanted it known that I had faith in him and made his start possible. And he desired to conceal our friendship, but didn't want it to be called a mistress-and-lover affair as it might be."

Mary's early recognition and support to Gibran, especially her encouragement to write in English, her editorial support and her financial backing for his study trip to Paris and studio in New York City, gave Gibran the opportunity and freedom to focus on his creative work. He trusted her to fulfill "(his) wish that they [his art] shall become eventually the property of the public in a museum - and that they shall be kept together as far as possible..."

Written nineteen years later, in 1930, Gibran's final will reflected this similar desire: "Everything found in my studio after my death - pictures, books, objects of art, etcetera - goes to Mrs. Mary Haskell Minis, now living at 24 Gaston Street West, Savannah, Ga. But I would like to have Mrs. Minis send all, or any part of these things, to my hometown, should she see fit to do so."

After Gibran's death in 1931, Mary both directly and indirectly placed Gibran's art in numerous public collections including The Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge-Massachusetts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and the Newark Museum in Newark-New Jersey. She also donated the majority of Gibran's artwork, left in his studio at the time of his death, to his hometown of Bsharri in Lebanon. Her donation made possible the establishment of the Gibran Museum, today the world's largest public collection of his artwork.

Early Childhood (1883 - 1895)

Gibran Khalil Gibran, later known as Kahlil Gibran, was born on the 6th of January 1883 in Bsharri, a village in the north of Lebanon perched on a small plateau at the edge of Wadi Qadisha, known as the sacred valley.

Khalil Gibran, his father - whose name the child inherited - was a tax collector in Bsharri. His mother Kamileh Rahmeh, the daughter of a Maronite clergyman, was thirty when she begot Gibran from her second husband Khalil. Gibran had an elder half-brother, Peter, and two younger sisters, Mariana and Sultana.

Very early, Gibran showed a passion for drawing; and if there was no paper in the house, he would just go outside and spend hours sketching on fresh snow. At four, he would already dig some holes in the ground and carefully plant tiny scraps of paper, hoping that the summer harvest would provide him with a plentiful supply of paper.

At six he got fascinated by some old Leonardo Da Vinci prints given to him by his mother. He was never to forget this definitive moment, and the discovery of this "incredible man" acted for Gibran "like a compass needle for a ship lost in the mists of the sea" awakening in him a yearning to become an artist.

From an early age, the little boy was spirited and single-minded. As a child of three, he would tear off his clothes and run out into the fierce storms that lashed the mountain.

Storms similar to the ones at home, where his father's heavy drinking fueled his imperious temper. Indeed, Gibran's father barely shouldered the responsibilities of his family and quickly frittered away his small income: this atmosphere of distressing poverty and bitter recriminations weighed on the family and on Gibran...

Amidst intrigue and corruption, the father found himself facing charges of embezzlement. Although Kamileh tried to clear his name, her husband was found guilty and all his property was confiscated. Like many before her, Kamileh had to make a stark choice: either to endure a life of increasing poverty, or to embark on an arduous journey to the U.S. to seek a better life for her children.

Immigration to the U.S. (1895 - 1898) On June 25, 1895, the strong-willed mother embarked with her four children on a voyage to the American shores of New York, leaving the father behind in Lebanon.

The Gibran family settled in Boston's South End where Kamileh began to work as a peddler on the streets.

Gibran was the only member of his family to pursue scholastic education. His sisters were not allowed to enter school, thwarted by Middle Eastern traditions as well as financial difficulties. Later on in his life, Gibran championed the cause of women's emancipation and education, surrounding himself with strong-willed, intellectual and independent women.

Gibran entered school on September 30, 1895, merely two months after his arrival to the U.S. Having no formal education, he was placed in an ungraded class reserved for immigrant children to learn English from scratch. With Kamileh's hard work, the family's financial standing improved and her savings allowed Peter (Gibran's elder brother) to set up a goods store in which both of Gibran's sisters worked.

Gibran's curiosity led him to the cultural side of Boston. He got exposed to the rich world of Theatre, Opera and artistic Galleries. Prodded by the cultural scenes around him and through his artistic drawings, Gibran caught the attention of his teachers at the public school. They saw an artistic future for the Lebanese boy and

lead him to meet in 1896, Fred Holland Day, an artist and supporter of artists, who introduced him to Greek mythology, world literature, contemporary writings and photography...

Fred Holland Day kept on encouraging Gibran to improve his drawings and sketches, and got Gibran's images printed as cover designs for books in 1898. Concurrently, Gibran began to develop his own technique and style which led him to enter the Bostonian circles. Despite his artistic talents who brought him fame at an early age, Gibran's family decided, with Gibran's approval, to send the young artist back to Lebanon to finish his education and learn Arabic.

Back to Lebanon (1898 - 1902)In 1898, Gibran arrived to Beirut to enroll in College La Sagesse, a Maronite-founded school that offered a nationalistic curriculum partial to church writings, history and liturgy. As a student, Gibran left a great impression on his teachers and fellow students whom he impressed with his outlandish and individualistic behavior, self-confidence, and his unconventional long hair. His Arabic teacher saw in him "a loving but controlled heart, an impetuous soul, a rebellious mind, an eye mocking everything it sees."

However, the school's strict and disciplined atmosphere was not to Gibran's liking. He flagrantly flouted religious duties, skipped classes and drew sketches on books. There, he met Joseph Howayek with whom he started a magazine called Al Manara (The Beacon). They both participated in its editing while Gibran also illustrated.

Gibran immersed himself in Arabic literature - ancient and modern - he learned French and excelled in his studies, especially in poetry. Meanwhile, his relationship with his father became strained over Gibran's advanced erudition, driving him to move in with his cousin.

During his summer vacation in Bsharri, Gibran fell desperately in love with a beautiful young woman, but found his first love-affair both frustrating and disappointing and he soon returned to Boston. Several years later, he will describe the unhappy affair in *The Broken Wings*.

In 1902 Gibran was forced to hurry back to Boston upon receiving news of his sister Sultana's dire illness.

Death in the Family and Return to the U.S. (1902 - 1908)Sultana died at the age of fourteen in April 4, 1902, and was the first in a series of three family deaths of tuberculosis within few months. The sickness and operation of Gibran's mother forced him to take over the family business (the goods store) abandoned by his half-brother Peter, now pursuing his fortune in Cuba.

This new burden weighed on Gibran's spirit, depriving him from dedicating his time to his artistic pursuits. During this time, Holland Day tried to distract him by inviting him to artistic shows and meetings in Boston's artistic circles, allowing him to shy away from the house and escape the atmosphere of death, poverty and illness.

In the following month, Peter returned to Boston fatally sick, only to die days later on March 12.

His mother's death followed later, that same year on June 28, leaving Gibran alone with his sister Mariana, mourning the dead and irremediably sad.

Josephine Peabody, a young Bostonian poet and intellectual, who slowly captured Gibran's heart, became an inflectional person in his life; her care and attention helped him ease his pain as well as advance in his career.

Following the three family deaths, Gibran sold out the family business and began improving both his Arabic and English writings, a twin task which he was to pursue for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, Holland Day and Josephine were helping him launch his debut art exhibition which was to feature his allegorical and symbolic charcoal drawings that so fascinated Boston's society. The exhibition opened on May 3, 1904, and was very successful with the critics. However, during the exhibition, Gibran was introduced to Mary Haskell, and that encounter was to mark the beginning of a lifetime relationship, which will greatly influence Gibran's writing career.

Mary Haskell, who was thirty at the time, and ten years older than Gibran, will go on financing Gibran's artistic development, encouraging him to become the artist that he aspired to be. As a school head mistress, Haskell was an educated, strong-willed and independent woman, as well as an active champion of women's liberation. Mary was the reason behind Gibran's decision to explore writing in English as she persuaded him to refrain from translating his Arabic works to English and concentrate instead on writing in English directly.

Mary's collaboration polished Gibran's English work, while most of them underwent her editing before going to the publishers. She would spend hours with Gibran, going over his wording, correcting his mistakes and suggesting new ideas to his writings. She even attempted learning Arabic to gain a better grasp of Gibran's language and thoughts.

The significance of Mary's relationship with Gibran was revealed through her diaries in which she recorded Gibran's artistic development, their personal and intellectual conversations and his innermost thoughts for nearly seventeen years and a half. These recordings have provided critics with valuable insight into Gibran's personal thoughts and ideas that kept away from the public's eye.

In 1904, Gibran started writing articles for the Arabic-speaking-émigré newspaper *Al Muhajer* (The Emigrant), marking his first published written work.

His first publication was called *Vision*, a romantic essay that portrayed a caged bird amidst an abundance of symbolism. His Arabic writing had a colloquial feel, which made it accessible to his audience. According to Gibran, rules of language were meant to be broken and he went on encouraging Arab émigré writers to break out of tradition and seek an individual style.

Throughout his life, Gibran's Arabic writings did not receive the critical acclaim his English books did, which led him later to concentrate more on his English writings. Gibran's first Arabic written work came out in 1905 with the publication of *Nubthah Fi Fan al Musiqah* (Music).

Gibran also started a column in *Al Muhajer* called *Tears and Laughter* that was to form the basis of his book *A Tear and a Smile*. At the time, Gibran published several Arabic poems and wrote in newspapers about various subjects related to love, truth, beauty, death, good and evil. In 1906, Gibran published his second Arabic book *Arayis Al Muruj* (The Nymphs of the Valley), a collection of three allegories that take place in Northern Lebanon. The allegories - *Martha*, *Yuhanna the Mad*, *Dust of the Ages and the Eternal Fire* - dealt with issues such as prostitution, religious persecution, reincarnation and pre-ordained love. The allegories were heavily influenced by stories he once heard in Bsharri, and his fascination with the Bible, the mystical, and the nature of love. Gibran returned later to the subject of madness in his English book *The Madman*, whose beginnings can be traced to Gibran's early Arabic writings.

What characterized Gibran's early Arabic publications was a strong sense of bitterness and disillusionment: Gibran's main purpose was to reform society. The use of irony, the realism of the stories, the portrayal of second-class citizens and the anti-clerical tone contrasted with the formalistic and traditional Arabic writing. Gibran published his third Arabic book *Al Arwah al Mutamarridah* (Spirits Rebellious) in March 1908: a collection of four narrative texts based on his writings in *Al Muhajer* (The Immigrant). The book dealt with social issues in Lebanon, portraying a married woman's emancipation from her husband, a heretic's call for freedom, a bride's escape from an unwanted marriage through death and the brutal injustices of Lebanese feudal lords in the 19th century.

These writings received strong criticism from the clergy for their bold ideas, their negative portrayal of clergymen and their encouragement of women's liberation.

Gibran later recalled the dark period in which *Spirits Rebellious* was written, a time when he was haunted by death, illness and loss of love. In it, Gibran revealed his first book illustration - a pen and ink self-portrait - and dedicated the first pages to "the spirit that did embrace my spirit".

While Gibran was enjoying modest success with his Arabic publication, his romance with Josephine Peabody came to an end in 1906, when she married an acquaintance of Mary Haskell; a move that brought Mary closer to Gibran.

Gradually, Gibran and Mary began to share events and conversations. She offered money in return to his painting sessions at her school and persuaded him to take her offer and travel to Paris to study drawing at the French artistic school *Académie Julien*.

Travelling to Paris and Moving to New York (1908 - 1914) On July 1st, 1908, Gibran left Boston to head to Paris and study at the arts school. Upon his arrival, Gibran got fascinated by the French cultural scene and indulged his time examining paintings at various art museums and exhibitions. However, Gibran's travel to France revealed his lack of artistic training, a sore point which left him critical of his drawings. In truth, Gibran had earlier refused to receive a formal training, relying solely on his talents and feel for objects. But soon the academy's formal education alienated Gibran, who left the academy to pursue a freewheeling self-exploration of his art.

Together with Joseph Howayek, his school class mate in Lebanon, he sketched models and visited exhibitions. Then, Gibran moved to tour London with fellow Arabic writer Amin Rihani, whom Gibran admired for his sarcastic wit and writing style. Both writers shared memories of Lebanon and an involvement in the social issues of the time.

In June 1909, Gibran received news of his father's death.

Gibran returned to the U.S. in October 31st, 1910, ending all his travels abroad to settle down and concentrate on his writing. Upon his arrival in Boston, he suggested to Mary a move to New York, to escape the Lebanese quarter and seek a greater artistic space in the city's cultural scene. He left his sister Marianna in Boston, unmarried and illiterate, under the sole care of Mary Haskell.

The month of December 1910 marked the beginning of Mary's daily journal dedicated to her personal memories of Gibran's life; a journal she would continue to write for nearly seventeen years. On December 10 of that year, Gibran proposed marriage to Mary but was yet again refused due to the ten-year age difference. This issue of age stood between the developments of a love relationship between the two of them, and was topped with Mary's worries about social reaction.

Another subject also weighed on the relationship: money. Indeed, the issue of money was constantly present between both of them, as Gibran feared that the role of Mary as a financier might cloud their spiritual bonding. However, Mary's benefice extended to other immigrants, and she financed the education of several other promising students, but none rose to the acclaim Gibran attained.

In New York, Gibran started working on his next book *The Broken Wings* - started in 1906 and published in January 1912 - a spiritual biography despite recalling to Mary that the experiences in the book were not his. *The Broken Wings* - the longest of his Arabic novels - dealt with the story of Selma Karamah, a married woman, whose ill-fated love affair with a young man left her dead at childbirth.

In 1911, Gibran was to draw a portrait of the Irish poet W.B Yeats, one in a series of portraits which Gibran was to call the Temple of Art series. The series featured face-to-face portraits of renowned figures such as Auguste Rodin, Sarah Bernhardt, Gustav Jung, and Charles Russell. Gibran's political activity began to capture his attention as he joined the Golden Links Society, a group of young Syrian immigrant men who worked for the improvement of Syrian citizens' lifestyle around the world.

Concurrently, Italy declared war on Turkey and this incident revived the hope among the liberal Syrians of a free-home-rule in the Ottoman occupied countries. Gibran's dreams of a free Syria were fueled when he met the Italian general Giuseppe Garibaldi - the grandson of the grand Italian general - with whom he fantasized about heading a legion of immigrant Syrians to overthrow the Ottoman rule.

Later on, during World War I, Gibran became a great advocator and instigator of a unified Arabic military action against the Ottoman rule.

Gibran began to enjoy the new attention he was receiving in New York, especially with Mary's financial backing providing him with both a secret source of income and her artistic contacts which worked on promoting Gibran's works.

Gibran was great a socializer and an intriguing personality who captured the attention of his hosts. In 1913, he joined the board of the newly founded Arab émigré magazine *Al Funun*, a periodical published by the Arabic-speaking community of New York and dedicated to the advancement of literary and artistic issues. The magazine's reflection of Gibran's liberal approach to style and taste led him to contribute with several articles that later formed the basis of his first English book, *The Madman*.

In 1913, Gibran started working on *The Madman*, exploring a subject that fascinated him ever since. He learned about the history of treating the mad in Lebanon; and in his hometown of Bsharri, he heard how the mad were thought to be possessed by the spirit of the jinn (the devil), with the church in charge of exorcising

the devil out of the possessed people.

Meanwhile, the love relationship between Mary and Gibran dwindled, as quarrels over money, sex and marriage led to an interesting development. Soon Mary was to become Gibran's mentor and editor, initiating a tutorial course that aims at improving his English writing while developing his cultural education.

Gibran attempted to translate his works for Mary to read and edit, but frustrated with the difficulties of translating and the language barrier which prevented Mary from helping him improve his writings, Mary encouraged Gibran to drop translating his Arabic works and concentrate instead on writing directly in English.

Nonetheless, Mary urged immigrants to retain their mother tongue while pursuing their second language education. And in no time, Gibran began to get over his grammatical mistakes and spelling errors, while adopting a reading appetite. He took a liking to Nietzsche's style and his will-to-power concept despite his diverging opinion on Christ, who he didn't see as the weak person portrayed by Nietzsche, but an admirable mortal to whom he dedicated his longest English writing: Jesus, the Son of Man.

Meanwhile, Mary and Gibran worked together on editing and revising *The Madman*, and in 1914, Gibran published his fifth Arabic book *Kitab Dam'a wa Ibtisama* (A Tear and a Smile), an anthology of his works based on his column in the newspaper *Al Mouhajer*.

The Publication of The Prophet(1914 - 1923)In his attempts to master the English language, Gibran was fortunate to have the unstinting help and encouragement of Mary Haskell.

As early as 1912, he told her of his determination to write in English and his plans for two works in particular. One of these, he had already called *The Madman*, published six years later; and the other, as yet untitled and simply referred to as "My Book," was to be built around the teachings of an "Island God" in exile. It took a full eleven years for the book to evolve into the work we now know as *The Prophet*.

Mary was, from the start, a consultant on Gibran's English writings; a role she accomplished with relish.

Starting in June 1914, Gibran sought Mary's comments on most of his English output while it was being written and rewritten: first *The Madman*, then *The Forerunner*, and finally *The Prophet*, whose publication in 1923 marked the end of their collaboration.

Of the corrections she made to *The Prophet*, Gibran wrote: "Your blessed touch makes every page dear to me. The punctuations, the added spaces, the change of expressions in some places, the changing of "Buts" to "Ands" and the dropping of several "Ands", all these are just right."

May Ziadeh said of him later, in 1920: "He knows more English than any of us, for he is conscious of the bony structure of the language, its solar system."

World War I, which extended to all parts of the distant Ottoman Empire, including his beloved Lebanon, made Gibran melancholic. *The Madman*, published as the war came to a close, is a somber collection of parables and poems characterized principally by a strong sense of irony; likewise *The Forerunner* published two years later. The astringency of these books contrasts sharply with the consoling tone of Gibran's most famous work.

In June 1918, Gibran met another American who contributed materially to his success. After *The Madman* had been refused by a number of publishers, he turned to the young and inexperienced Alfred Knopf. "Everybody speaks highly of Knopf as a man, and also as a publisher" wrote the poet shortly before their first meeting. "He is young and has an eye for the beautiful... and he is honest, he does not leave anything unsaid". *The Madman* was signed a few days later.

It was a bold gamble from Knopf's part, but his remarkable faith in a writer unknown to English-speaking readers was to be richly and deservedly rewarded. He subsequently published all of Gibran's English works including *The Prophet*, as well as several works originally written in Arabic and translated by others into English.

Both *The Madman* and *The Forerunner* enjoyed largely favorable critical reviews, which ensured enough sales for Knopf to persevere with Gibran. Ironically, *The Prophet* was much less sympathetically received, gaining its readership almost exclusively by word-of-mouth recommendation. It was *The Madman* that established his credentials as a writer to be taken seriously in America.

In 1919 Gibran's success as an artist - often compared to the great poet-painter William Blake - reached its zenith with the publication by Alfred Knopf of a volume entitled *Twenty Drawings*.

Concurrently, Gibran also became founder-president of a literary society called *Al Rabitat al Qualamiya* (The Pen-bond Society).

The original members of *Al Rabitat* were all leading Arab-American writers, and only few would contest Gibran's status as the greatest of Arab Romantics and father of a 20th century Romantic tradition.

His success as a writer, in both Arabic and English, gave him a platform to express views that he felt his fellow Arabs needed to hear.

His Arabic articles in the early 1920's were dominated by the message that the developing Arab nations should "adopt only the constructive aspects of Western society" as he feared that the East was either being seduced by the most dangerous attractions of the West, or it was turning its back altogether to it.

The eminent Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore, whom he met in December 1920, was given a stern lecture on this subject, as Gibran subsequently reported to Mary Haskell: "You know Tagore has talked about America as a money-grabbing land without a vision. I tried to say that spirit may be manifest in machinery, that material and spiritual are not opposed, but that spirit is in all of life and in everything."

However, Gibran still had ambivalent feelings towards the West, which he clearly expressed in a letter written a week later to Mikhail Naimy: "The West is now a machine, and everything in it is tied to the machine."

But the overall effect of the unreserved acceptance into American society on Gibran was to make him feel more truly like a "citizen of the world", a genuine cosmopolite bestriding both East and West; and to underline this acceptance, in 1925, Gibran was invited to become an officer of the *New Orient Society* in New York, a group which was dedicated to the promotion of East-West understanding.

It was a singular honor for Gibran, as the society's quarterly journal boasted a distinguished list of writers including Annie Besant, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, H.G Wells, and Claude Bragdon.

Later, Gibran was to complete four more books in English: *Sand and Foam*, *The Earth Gods*, *The Wanderer*, and the best of his late works, *Jesus, the Son of Man*.

Yet, the work on which his fame rests will probably always be *The Prophet*; a work which Mary Haskell called "the most loving book ever written."

In *The Prophet*, the character of "Almitra" is thought by many to be based on Mary Haskell, while Gibran is identified as "Al Mustafa", and New York (or perhaps America) as the city of "Orphalese".

If such an interpretation is valid, Gibran not only saw himself as the teacher bringing a breath of spirituality to the West, but as the recipient of many bounties in his adopted land, for "Al Mustafa" departs for the isle of his birth with a heavy heart, grateful to the people who have given him his "deeper thirsting after life."

In truth, *The Prophet* is a work of such universal appeal that there is little to be gained from speculating on the identity of persons or places represented in it. For Gibran's purpose was a lofty one, and his belief in the "unity of being" led him to call for universal fellowship and unification of the human race.

Inspired by his experiences in a country far from the land of his origins, he strove to resolve cultural and human conflict by transcending the barriers of East and West.

He became not only Gibran of Lebanon, but Gibran of America, Gibran the voice of global consciousness: "a voice which increasingly demands to be heard in the continuing Age of Anxiety."

The Last Years of Gibran's Life and His Homecoming (1923 - 1931)

By 1923, Gibran had developed a close correspondence with the Arab writer and intellectual May Ziadeh. The correspondence began in 1912, when she wrote to Gibran recalling to him how moved she was by the story of Selma Karameh in *The Broken Wings*.

May was an intellectual writer and an active proponent of women's emancipation. She was born in Palestine where she received classical education in a convent school, and in 1908, she moved to Cairo where her father started a newspaper.

Similar to Gibran, May was fluent in English, Arabic and French, and in 1911, she published her poems under the pseudonym of Isis Coptia.

May found *The Broken Wings* too liberal for her own tastes, but the subject of women's rights still occupied her lifespan: a common passion between her and Gibran.

Later, May came to replace Mary's role as an editor and conversant. By 1921, Gibran received her picture and continued corresponding with her until the end of his life.

Mary's role in Gibran's writing career was gradually decreasing, but she still came to his rescue when he made some bad investments. She had always handled Gibran's financial affairs, and was ever present to extricate him from his bad financial keeping.

However, Mary was about to make her life decision in 1923, by deciding to move into the house of a Southern landowner, to become his future wife in May of 1926.

Gibran helped her reach this decision, which slightly clouded their relationship.

An important move, after which, Gibran still confided in Mary and told her about his second and third parts of *The Prophet* that he intended to write:

The second part, *The Garden of the Prophet*, would recount the time the prophet spent in the garden, on the island, talking to his followers; and the third part would be called *The Death of the Prophet*, in which he would describe the prophet's return from the island, his imprisonment and liberation that would lead to his death, stoned in the market place.

Gibran's project will never be completed due to his health deterioration and his preoccupation with writing his longest English book *Jesus, The Son of Man*.

As Mary slipped slowly out of his life, Gibran hired a new assistant, Henrietta Breckenridge, who later played an important role following his death, by organizing his works, helping him edit his writings and managing his studio.

By 1926, Gibran had become a well-known international figure, but seeking a greater cosmopolitan exposure, he began to contribute with articles to the quarterly journal *The New Orient*.

The same year, Gibran started writing *Jesus, The Son of Man*, his lifetime ambition, especially with the attempt at portraying Jesus as no one else had done before: to Gibran, Jesus appeared as human, acting in natural surroundings.

By January 1927, Mary edited the book.

In 1928, Gibran's health began to deteriorate, and the pain in his body, due to his nervous state, was increasing, driving Gibran to seek relief in alcohol.

Soon Gibran's excessive drinking turned him into an alcoholic at the height of the prohibition period in the U.S.

Gibran had already started thinking of his post-life and began inquiring about purchasing a monastery in Bsharri, owned by Christian Carmelites. But in November of 1928, *Jesus, the Son of Man* was published and received good reviews from the local press.

The artistic circles thought it was high time that Gibran was honored; and by 1929, every possible society gave him a tribute. In honor of his literary success, a special anthology of Gibran's early works was issued by Al Rabitat under the title *Al Sanabil (Spikes of Grain)*.

But by 1930, Gibran's excessive drinking, to escape the pain in his liver, aggravated his disease and his hopes of finishing the second part of *The Prophet (The Garden of the Prophet)* dwindled.

Gibran revealed to Mary his plans of building a library in Bsharri and soon he drew the last copy of his will. To May Ziadeh, he revealed his fear of death as he admitted: "I am, May, a small volcano whose opening has been closed."

On April 10, 1931, Gibran died at the age of forty-eight in a New York hospital, as the spreading cancer in his liver left him unconscious. The New York streets staged a two-day vigil in his honor as his death was mourned in the U.S. as well as in Lebanon.

His will left large amounts of money to his country. Mary, Mariana and Henrietta, all attended Gibran's studio, organizing his works and sorting out books, illustrations and drawings.

And to fulfill Gibran's dream, Marianna and Mary travelled in July of 1931, to Lebanon, to bury Gibran in his hometown of Bsharri. The citizens of Lebanon received his coffin with celebration rather than mourning, rejoicing "their prophet's" homecoming.

By January of 1932, the Mar Sarkis monastery was bought and Gibran's body was moved to his final resting-place.

Upon Mary's suggestion, his belongings, the books he read, and some of his works and illustrations were later shipped to provide the monastery with a local collection, which would later form part of the Gibran museum.

Mary, who handled the dilution of the New York studio, sorted out Gibran's real estate properties and put on a posthumous art exhibition as per his wishes.

In 1932, Mary also edited his remaining works and last book *The Wanderer*. But her greatest contribution was the publication of her diaries, which provided critics with personal insights into Gibran's thoughts and ideas.

Both Mary and Marianna spent their last years at nursing homes, with Mary's death in 1964 and Mariana's in 1968.

Notes on Gibran Khalil Gibran, from His Life and World by Jean Gibran and Khalil GibranThe authors write: "The date of my birth is unknown", Khalil Gibran once said. In an isolated village, like his birthplace of Bsharri-Lebanon, births and deaths were as ordinary as the tasks of the seasons [...]. It is only by such tales that we may deduce, with a fair amount of accuracy that the poet was born on January 6, 1883."

The confusion over Gibran's date of birth, however, was cleared up in a letter he wrote to one of the foremost women writers in Arabic literature, May Ziadeh: " [...] let me tell you a little story, May, and you may laugh awhile at my expense. Nassib Aridah, wishing to collect the articles of *A Tear and a Smile* [...] decided to append that assortment of meager pieces with the article "My Birthday", to which he would add the appropriate date. As I was not in New York at the time, he began searching for my date of birth - he is an indefatigable researcher - until he eventually identified that date in the distant past, and translated the English "6th January" into "Kanoon Al Awal 6th!" In this way he reduced the span of my lifetime by nearly a year, and delayed the real day of my birth by a month! To this day, ever since the publication of *A Tear and a Smile*, I have enjoyed two birthday celebrations each year...."

Note that in Arabic, "Kanoon Al Awal" (Kanoon the first) is the month of December, while January is actually "Kanoon Al Thani" (Kanoon the second).

As for Gibran's given name: "Gibran's full name in Arabic was Gibran Khalil Gibran, the middle name being his father's. It is a convention among the Arabs to use the father's name after one's first name. Gibran always signed his full name in his Arabic works; however, in his English writings, he dropped the first name and changed the correct spelling of "Khalil" into "Kahlil", this at the instigation of his English teacher at the Boston school he attended between 1895 and 1897."