

The 'Blue Flame': An 'Elliptical' Interaction between Kahlil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on certain aporias in the life and works of a Lebanese American writer, Kahlil Gibran, that reveal his idiosyncratic interest in and preoccupation with India, neither his native nor his adopted country. It also charts out the 'elliptical' connection that this Lebanese immigrant forged with the Indian Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. A "belated" (Behdad 1) reading of these aspects opens up the possibility of critiquing Gibran's life and writings through the theoretical framework of Nico Israel's "outlandish"-ness (ix), a state that exists between, as Israel has stated, "exilic emplacement" and "diasporic self-fashioning" (16-17). This kind of "reading behind" (Behdad 4) rewrites "a kind of philosophical *décalage*" (2) that ruptures existing West-centric discourses by destabilizing and displacing them through "other locations...other trajectories of subjectivity, and...forms of knowledge" (Behdad 1). My critiquing of Gibran's life and texts, in this manner, show how his sense of identity, generated out of trans-cultural and transnational spaces, not only engenders a counter discursive practice to the West-centric politics of exclusion but also tries to rescue non-Western writers, and their literatures, from the "anamnesiac order" (Behdad 3) of such politics.

Keywords: Kahlil Gibran, diasporic identity, transnational, trans-cultural, India, Rabindranath Tagore.

This article attempts to analyze the aporias¹ in the life and the writings of Kahlil Gibran, a Lebanese who immigrated into the US in 1892 and lived there until his death in 1931. The illustrations of this Lebanese-American's extraordinary interest in and preoccupation with India, neither his native nor his adopted country, are what I call the 'aporias' which, in turn, reveal the significance of a transnational, trans-cultural 'conviviality'² (it can also be called connection/exchange/mediation) that existed between him and the Indian Nobel-laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. Here, through a "belated" (Behdad 2) reading³ of these aporias, I try to critique Gibran's interest in India vis-à-vis his connection with Tagore and show how this emerges as a site that re-defines his diasporic identity. My rationale in engaging with this kind of reading lies in the hiatus existing in critical discourses on Gibran: those that have tried to assess his life and works either by highlighting the "modernist conception of exile" as "a privileged state of consciousness" (Giles 31)⁴ or by producing a counter-practice which evaluates his works as the "representational machineries" of a national culture (Prasad 72)⁵, either of America (his adopted land) or of Lebanon (his Native land). As both assess Gibran's life and works in terms of an identity-

politics based on binary-oppositions, they not only classify him as the significant 'Other' but also assert that his exposure to the West—through language, literary tradition, and audience—is the only precondition to his enriched literary propensity. These limitations, thus, articulate the need for initiating a new/different discursive practice that would remain outside the identity-politics of power.

My "belated" (Behdad 2) reading proposes to re-discover and re-situate Kahlil Gibran's life and works within the current "practice in negotiation and exchange" (4) through "a kind of philosophical *décalage*" (2) capable of mediating "new oppositional possibilities" (2). It attempts to destabilize pre-existing discourses through "other locations...other trajectories of subjectivity, and...forms of knowledge" (1). This article, therefore, is not just an "orthodox reiteration or a reapplication of a previous theory", it is "an interventionary articulation of a new problematic through a detour—or, perhaps more accurately, a retour—of an earlier practice" (Behdad 3). Moreover, through this critical intervention I try to rescue certain forgotten and marginalized connection/mediation—as the one existing between Gibran and Tagore—from the "anamnesiac order" (Behdad 3) which had/have been enslaved by those "omnipotent definitions" (Shih 18) created by and in the West. My analysis, here, shows how identity-politics based on, as Stuart Hall has suggested, a "deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'" and not on "the many points of similarity" (112)⁶ can underscore the importance of the extraordinary connection that Gibran built up with India, through Tagore, and how it became seminal to his writings.

In discussing Gibran's interest in India, I have divided the aporias (in Gibran's life and works) into three broad categories: (1) those found in Gibran's life, (2) those found in Gibran's correspondences with his acquaintances, and (3) those—often defined as "ambivalent" by various critics—found in his English writings. The first category becomes evident from Mario Kozah's statement: "...when Aridah requested biographical information from Gibran about himself for the September 1916 issue of the journal he received and published exactly what he was given: 'Gibran was born in the year 1883 in Bsharri, Lebanon (though some say Bombay, India)...'" (214). It was, indeed, strange as to why Gibran would say that he was born in India, and that too in a journal that was primarily addressed to the "Arabic speaking world", though in the US he was frequently referred to as "'the famous Indian poet'" (214). Kozah further observes:

The [...] citation may be usefully compared to a conversation recorded by Mary Haskell in which Gibran confirms to her and Charlotte Teller his belief in reincarnation and speaks of his past lives with confidence and conviction

..... it represents a genuine and personal belief in reincarnation to the extent that it seems that Gibran believed that he spent one of his past lives in India. (215)

In *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet*, Joe Jenkins and Suheil Bushrui mention that Gibran told many of his American acquaintances that he was born to an aristocratic family in India and that one of his relatives (probably his grandfather) had pet lions. The second category of aporias is best exemplified by the letters Gibran wrote to his friends, particularly to Mary Haskell and May Ziadeh. One such example, not to enumerate many others, is found in Mary Haskell's (a long-time companion and patron) Journal where she noted that Gibran spoke about his previous lives with "conviction" (Kozah 215): "Twice in Syria – short lives only; once in Italy till I was 25; in Greece till 22; in Egypt till an old, old age; several times, maybe six or seven in Chaldea; once in India; and in Persia once — all as a human being ..." (Hilu 62). The third kind of aporia is well illustrated by critics like Joseph Peter Ghougassian who has documented those narrative sites where Gibran "speaks of" such concepts as "reincarnation and Nirvana" (54). In his PhD thesis entitled *An Arab Expatriate in America: Kahlil Gibran in his American Setting*, Suheil Hanna shows how the similarities, between *The Prophet* and Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself", highlight that both poets were inspired by the Upanishads:

... the God underlying both *The Prophet* and "Song of Myself" is immanent in character; his divinity is within nature. Historically he is the Lord of the *Upanishads* in which the Brahman "is all in all" — the One, absolute, eternal, all-encompassing Consciousness. (81-82)

The best analysis of the third category of aporia is found in Suheil Bushrui's *Kahlil Gibran of Lebanon* where the critic refers to the similarities between Gibran's Prophet, Almustafa, and Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita. He argues that in symbolizing the seer-poet as a bird flying towards the sky, Gibran "recalls the mysticism of the Hindu Upanishads ..." (66). Almustafa's "departure for 'the isle of birth' in fact symbolizes his return to the unborn state from which, as he promises at the end, he will again be reincarnated: 'A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me'" (69). It is intriguing to see how Gibran, born into a monotheistic religion and into a culture that has given the world three monotheistic religions, created a Prophet who, "like Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita", "reincarnates not only out of the need for continued self-realization, but also to provide an example for the spiritually uninitiated" (Bushrui 69). More interesting in the fact that his Jesus, in *Jesus, the Son of Man*, is also reincarnated: "Many times the Christ has come to the world, and He/ has walked many lands. And always He has been deemed a/ stranger and a madman" (Gibran 161).

While most critics and scholars have tried to trace the root of Gibran's preoccupation with India, and with the Hindu scriptures, to the works of American Transcendentalists and doctrines of Middle Eastern Sufis, I would re-root/re-route this phenomenon into the Lebanese-American's "conviviality" with the Indian poet-philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore. That Gibran did not know/learn Sanskrit, or any other Indian language, in order to have a direct access to the Indian philosophical tradition(s) and to the well-known Hindu and Buddhist spiritual texts does not make it inevitable that he borrowed his Hindu/Buddhist, rather 'Indian', concepts from the American Transcendentalists and the Arabic Sufis alone.

Kahlil Gibran met Rabindranath Tagore several times. In a letter to Mary Haskell, on December 19, 1916, Gibran wrote: "I met Tagore. He is beautiful to look at and to be with, but I was disappointed with his voice" (Hilu 282). More observations followed in a letter, written on January 3, 1917: "... He is an Indian with all the beauty and charms of India. God is, to Tagore, a perfect Being." (283). Interestingly, on January 12, 1917, a few days after his meeting with Tagore, Gibran wrote to Mary Haskell about sending "another little parable" for her to read (284). He remarked: "the poem on God is the key to all my feeling and thinking" (284). This poem appeared in *The Madman* (1918) and the concepts adopted by Gibran bear close resemblance to that of Tagore. Later, on December 18, 1920, Mary Haskell recorded, in her Journal, that Kahlil "...spoke at a dinner to Tagore [...]" and she added that he said: "You know Tagore has talked about America as a money grabbing land without a vision..." (356). Suheil Bushri, in "Kahlil Gibran of America", argues that though Gibran did not support Tagore's observation on America, only a few months later he was complaining that America had become a "money grabbing" machine. Thus, it was no mere coincidence when one of the reviews of his first English book, *The Madman*, reads: "...the parables collected in *The Madman* are more reminiscent...of the long rising rhythms of Tagore" (BF 16).

Though Rabindranath Tagore was not the first Indian intellectual to land on the shores of America and though he was not the first to infuse, in the minds of the Americans, a profound reverence for India's religious tradition and cultural legacy, what was exceptional about his visit to the US was that when he "came to the United States again and again—in 1912-13, 1916-17, 1920-21, 1929 and 1930" his "repeated confrontations with his American public...exposed an unprecedented number of Americans to Indian thought and culture, and to its leading modern exponent" (Hay 439). Stephen Hay reports that many of these lectures, "collected for publication as *Sadhana*" (442), were based on the concepts of the *Upanishads*, the *Vedas*, the *Gita*, and the Buddhist religious scriptures. In these lectures, delivered in the US, Tagore was primarily speaking "of the complementary character of spiritual 'Eastern' civilization and material Western civilization" (441), of transmigration of soul and the immanence of God in a rather unique manner. For, he was interpreting India and its traditions

without, for once, speaking about the divisive boundaries that existed/exist between its cultural and religious denominations. He, perhaps deliberately, played down the accounts of the clashes/dissimilarities that informed/informs India's socio-cultural and geo-political contexts. He, thus, tried to present India as *the* abode of an all-inclusive syncretic vision, where a golden balance was/is reached between human cultures and between civilization and nature.

In one of his lectures—"The Relation of the Individual to the Universe"—Tagore observed: "the Upanishads show that "*whatever there is in the world*" is "*being enveloped by God*" and, hence, it enthuses all to "bow to God over and over again who is in fire and in water, who permeates the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees" (*Sadhana* 18). He perceived that the *Brahman* is "all-consciousness in space, or the world of extension; and he is all-consciousness in soul, or the world of intension" (20). The integration of these ideas is evident in Gibran's *Madman*, published after his first meeting with Tagore. Here Gibran wrote: "...I climbed the sacred mountain and again spoke unto God, saying, 'My God, my aim and my fulfillment; I am thy yesterday and thou art my tomorrow. I am thy root in the earth and thou art my flower in the sky, and together we grow before the face of the sun.'/..." (*Best of Kahlil Gibran* 58). In *The Prophet*, published in 1923, after Gibran met with Tagore for three times or perhaps more, Almustafa reflects:

Rather look about you and you shall see Him playing with your children.
And look into space; you shall see Him walking in the cloud, outstretching
His arms in the lightning and descending in rain.
You shall see Him smiling in flowers,
then rising and waving his Hands in trees. (521)

Tagore quoted from the *Upanishads*, in "The Realization of the Infinite", to prove the immanence of God: "Therefore when the Upanishads teach us to realize everything in Brahma, it is not to seek something extra, not to manufacture something new. / *know everything that is there is in the universe enveloped by God...*" (*Sadhana* 160). In a similar manner Gibran, in *Spiritual Sayings*, asserted: "Everything in creation exists within you,/ and everything in you exists in creation" (*Best of Kahlil Gibran* 48). Mary Haskell, too, recorded Gibran saying: "...If all the other inhabitants of the earth, for instance, believed that the individual soul perishes with death it would move me not an atom to agree with them, because I know my soul won't perish" (Hilu 342). On June 18, 1924, Mary wrote that it was Gibran's belief that "we kill nothing. You only change its place, you transfer it from one vessel to another" (430). All these statements are closely linked with the concepts Tagore propounded in his lectures in the US, particularly to those that were compiled in *Sadhana*.

In one of his lectures, Tagore observed:

To live in perfect goodness is to realise one's life in the infinite... This is the vision of the heavenly kingdom of Christ. When we attain that universal life, which is the moral life, we become free from the bonds of pleasure and pain, and the place vacated by our self becomes filled with an unspeakable joy which springs from measureless love. In this state the soul's activity is all the more heightened, only its motive power is not from desires, but its own joy. This is the *Karmayoga* of the Gita [...] (61-2)

The most interesting point, here, is the way in which the Indian poet-philosopher analyzed his concept of *Karmayoga* through the figure of Christ. In *Jesus, the Son of Man*, Gibran makes his Jesus a *Karmayogi* who is able to attain a vision like "a hill beyond their (ordinary man's) vision" (*Best of Kahlil Gibran* 453) and become a "God too much man" (454). The 'Baul-sahajiya' concept, of the divinity of Man, that so inspired Tagore, is also reflected in the works of an Arab immigrant with no direct geo-political, cultural and linguistic connections with India. Thus, it is my argument that Gibran's "conviviality" with Tagore was one of the important events in his life that escorted him to the Indian philosophical tradition(s). This analysis is further explicated through one of Tagore's comments:

Buddha, who developed the practical side of the teaching of the Upanishads, preached the same message... *To live in such a consciousness... is Brahma vihāra, or, in other words, is living and moving and having your joy in the spirit of Brahma.* (19-20)

Tagore (in almost all his lectures) tried to fuse the tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism; he never highlighted the differences between these two religions. He not only amalgamated Upanishadic beliefs with Buddhist doctrines but also included Christ within the ambit of his understanding of "universal life". In doing so, he was perhaps trying to interpret Adi Sankaracharya's 'Advaita-Vedantic' idea of all-inclusivity. It is my understanding that Gibran appropriated this idea of all-inclusivity from Tagore, for he believed that this was/is the foundational stone of the Indian philosophical tradition(s). And he articulated his belief through his writings.

Kahlil Gibran's understanding of the Indian tradition (philosophical, religious, etc.) and culture, through Tagore in particular is, thus, a Bloomian "misreading" (14)⁷ of that tradition. Here, I would elaborate with a few illustrations to clarify my point. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna speaks of reincarnation but the purpose of his reincarnation ("*sambhabami yuge yuge*") is to enact *karmayoga*. His *karmayoga* is based on the following actions: "*paritrānaye sadhu*" (saving the good), "*vinashayak dushkritam*" (destroying evil), and re-establishing "*dharma*" (this term cannot be restricted to religion but can also be interpreted as proper ideology and ethical responsibility). Gibran's Almustafa and Jesus, as also his

other protagonists, reincarnate in order to preach, teach and contemplate, but not to act, i.e., their *karmayoga* does not lie in the Krishna-like action. Again, in Buddhism, rebirth or the transmigration of the soul, defined through the term '*samsara*', means moving about continuously or coming again and again to rebirth. The inevitability of *samsara*, as explained in *Samyutta-Niyaka II*, does not refer to rebirth only in human forms. The whole range of sentient beings, from the tiniest insect to the noblest man, is included to form an unbroken continuum. At one stage, however, *samsara* can be transcended through *Nirvana*.⁸ Release from this chain comes through *moksha*. Gibran did not speak of either *Nirvana* or *moksha* in this manner; he spoke about reincarnation in human forms alone. For example, in *The Prophet*, Alm Mustafa says: "Forget not that I shall come back to you/ dust and foam for another body.... A little while, a moment of rest upon the/ Wind, and another woman shall bear me" (*TP* 94-95). Again, in *The Garden of the Prophet*⁹, the protagonist asserts:

"I rise to you, a mist,
And together we shall float upon the sea until life's second day,
When dawn shall lay you, dewdrops in a garden,
And me a babe upon the breast of a woman" (*Best of Kahlil Gibran* 66-7).

Always a human being would be the new mother of the reincarnated soul which takes new shape only in the human body. Besides, this Lebanese-American intellectual, unlike an Indian Buddhist, also did not feel that it necessary that we be released from the "chain" of existence through *Nirvana* because according to him "Nirvana is motionless" (Hilu 336). The cycle of birth and death and re-birth, on the other hand, remains an eternal process.

At this point, I would move back to Stuart Hall's observation (quoted earlier in this article) once again. He argues that identity-politics, today, is based on "difference" rather than on similarities. Thus, it is my suggestion that Gibran's reading of the Indian philosophical tradition(s), through Rabindranath Tagore, not only marks the way in which this immigrant writer developed a different and differential understanding of an alien culture and its traditional values, but also highlights the way in which he incorporated this understanding into his life and works. Such integration, different in nature, is decisive in the evolution of Gibran's sense of identity, not merely as an exiled but more importantly as a diasporic individual. The Gibran-Tagore connection/mediation, then, emerges as an "elliptical" (Damrosch 514)¹⁰ phenomenon because it, neither charting a vertical or a horizontal path, travels through an elliptical one by connecting two individuals, like the two foci of an ellipse not located in the centre (i.e. the West) but outside it. It is "elliptical" also because it has undergone a deliberate state of ellipsis/omission in the hands of critics and scholars (those who are hypnotized by the "omnipotent" discourses generated by/in the West). In Kahlil Gibran's "misreading" of Tagore, and through him the Indian culture, I see the emergence

of a trans-cultural and transnational space, which is not rooted either his adopted land nor in his native. It grows out of some place else and, hence, it is not bound by any geo-political location. Though scholars and critics, like Suheil Bushrui and Eugene Paul Nassar,¹¹ have defined this space as 'ambivalent', I would call it "outlandish" (Israel x)—one that exists in-between a writer's "exilic emplacement" (16) and "diasporic self-fashioning" (16-17).

While initiating, a "mode of reading between exile and diaspora" (ix), Nico Israel argues that because exile and diaspora are the two essentially dissimilar "descriptions of displacement" which produce the "struggle to assert identity out of place" (ix), therefore, to write from within this in-between—luminal—condition is to take "neither side or refuge" "for granted". Such writing oscillates between "the perceived existential stability of the individual and the nation and the claims put forth for a migrancy that reroutes or revises them" (3). Building his thesis on a vast array of postmodern and postcolonial theorists— Martin Heidegger, Edward Said, James Clifford, Paul Gilroy, Benedict Anderson, Paul de Man, Aijaz Ahmed, Rob Nixon and Bruce Robbins—Israel asserts that this "outlandish" state, one that exists between "exilic emplacement" and "diasporic self-fashioning" (17), is seminal to an author's sense of identity. Borrowing the term "emplacement" from Samuel Weber, he explains that the displacement in exile calls for being placed in a place that is at once a starting point and a secured fort and so "Exilic emplacement" is an emancipatory experience in that it simultaneously charts out a beginning and a destiny. "Diasporic self-fashioning", on the other hand, with the term "self-fashioning" taken from Stephen Greenblatt, is a desire to "fashion a self out of (a) place" (16). As a result, it is forged out of mis-recognition and mis-representation. Instead of liberating the individual this experience allures him to return to an imagined 'place'. But both are unavoidable in the life of an immigrant. Israel, moreover, observes:

.... my aim, in pursuing the "question" of outlandish writing, between exile and diaspora, is neither merely to replace the modernist metaphor of exilic deracination ... with the postmodern/postcolonial metaphor of diaspora...nor, vice versa, to replace diaspora with exile. Rather, it is to read the two metaphors and experiences as involved in a kind of tension without resolution...(18)

The Gibran-Tagore connection/mediation, when critiqued through Israel's theoretical framework, reveal that the aporias, in the immigrant's life and works, are those blind-spots which delineate the liminal state existing in-between "exilic emplacement" and "diasporic self-fashioning". This "outlandish" (x) condition helps us understand why Gibran's sense of identity was/is problematic vis-à-vis his contemporary and our current socio-political urgencies. Given the context in which Gibran lived and wrote, the aporias, which probably resulted out of the Gibran-Tagore connection/mediation, shows how, as an exiled individual desiring

to reconstitute his broken life, Gibran's tried to create an identity that would substitute the disturbing sense of displacement with a calming sense of "emplacement". Within our current socio-political exigencies, the aporias and the Indian/Tagore connection shows how Gibran's identity, forged out of a diasporic "self-fashioning", becomes "a fundamental misrecognition" (Israel 16) and, thus, a re-construction of an imagined self. This grows not out of his adherence to the native land, neither through the assimilation into his adopted culture, but through the creation of an affinity for an alien land, and its culture, one that had/has nothing to do with his real sense of belonging. This identity, then, reveals a "coherent spatial and cultural geography in which all can be mapped, comprehended" (16).

At this juncture, I emphasize that the Gibran's fashioning of the 'Indian self'—an 'imagined' identity—arose out of his need to negotiate with disturbances both within and without. The deliberate construction of the Lebanese-American's identity as the "Eastern (Indian) wise man" might perhaps be seen as an attempt to create an alternative capable of making him forget, even if temporarily, the complexities and torments of living a life 'in-between' his native and adopted cultures. The Hindu (which he understood as Indian) doctrine of the reincarnation of the soul—which relates to a mental perception that the *atman* (soul) is immortal and is a microcosmic manifestation of the absolute (*Brahman*)—was, perhaps, for an exiled individual like Gibran a comfortable refuge capable of mitigating the disruptive tension of one's "outlandish" state. The Euro-centric Christian concept of predestination, primal sin and the Fall, and its redemption through suffering, on the other hand, became an extra burden for him as he was already burdened with the agony of non-belonging. To carry out a *jihad* implied the enforcement of more and more borders and, hence, the generation of fragmented identities. Belief in reincarnation generated the hope of belonging somewhere and, at the same time, not be inhibited by boundaries. It nourished the feeling that despite this life being a 'broken arc' the next will be a 'perfect round'. Gibran's attempt to reconcile with the external disturbance(s) can be seen in the formation of his diasporic identity, which, in turn, emerges as a contested site showing that liminality is not an emancipatory experience but is, in actuality, a manifestation of the refusal to acknowledge the dominance of a hegemonic culture. When his Western (white) contemporaries were trying to construct a coherent culture by delineating the wholeness of a fragmented world through the "ruined towers predicated upon a theory of collapse" (Manganaro 55), Gibran was trying to deconstruct this exercise of defining and, hence, constructing a homogenous culture. He, therefore, took recourse to an alternative pluralism, one that he found in Tagore's portrayal of the Indian culture.

For this Lebanese-American, living liminally within the rubrics of the white/dominant culture the 'elliptical' conviviality with Tagore generated an imagined space where he could "continue to move forward though the heavy

burden bends our backs” and “draw strength from our weakness” (BF 13-14). It was in Tagore's India that he located his "strength", one that would substitute his “weakness” of non-belonging. The meeting of the two great minds—and through them two different national, cultural, religious and ideological identities—kindled a 'Blue Flame'¹². It not only calls for worldwide recognition but also needs to be understood through a “*discours de voyage*” (Behdad 1) that remains outside the hegemony of the West/dominant culture. This connection/conviviality does become a meta-narrative of identity-formation, in a diasporic space, capable of transcending borders—national, cultural, linguistic, political, ideological and religious, among others.

Notes

¹ I borrow the term from Derrida in order to show how the rhetorical signals, in texts, sent to a perceptive reader can explain the disruptive forces working within the text. I intend to show that these aporias, in Gibran's life and his English works, are sites that undermine the rhetorical structure of the texts and, hence, dismantles and deconstructs it.

² Borrowing the concept from Rasheed Araeen's essay 'A Very Special British Issue? Modernity, Art History and the Crisis of Art Today' (*Third Text* 22.2, March 2008: 125-44), I argue that conviviality, which stands for friendship is a horizontal concept where both people, connected to each other, stand on the same plane, on the same level. On the other hand, when we speak in terms of influence, we are engaging with a vertical relationship where one is placed higher than the other, and hence is engaged in a politics of power.

³ In *Belated Travellers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Ali Behdad explains how he views writing (also reading) as a "mode of travelling theory that involves displacement of time and space" (1). According to him, his reading is "belated" (2) because it is, first, "inescapably late, lagging behind what it hopes to transform and write beyond" and, second, it "belongs to an *anamnesiac* order of discourse" (2). In this paper, I have tried to build on Behdad's theory of "belated" reading by showing how my reading, though lagging behind in time, succeeds in reinterpreting Gibran's texts through such discourses that can "transform" these texts and "write beyond" the existing critical works on Gibran.

⁴ For examples of the idealization of "exiles and émigrés" (Giles 31), please refer to the theoretical works of Edward Said (*Culture and Imperialism* and *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*), Julia Kristeva (*Strangers to Ourselves*), and Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*), among others.

⁵ Please refer to Madhava Prasad's essay "On the Question of a Theory of (Third World) Literature." *Third World and Postcolonial Issues*. Special Issue of *Social Text* 31-32 (1992): 57-83. Prasad not only examines the politics of suppression of the

"national/political" in the analysis of literatures from the First World but also tries to study how Third World literatures are popularized only for their "national/political" articulations.

⁶ Stuart Hall, in "Cultural identity and the diaspora", argues that this "sense of difference" is not the "pure 'otherness'" that engendered/engenders the formation of binaries like the East/West, Us/They; rather it remains elusive to, and outside of, the stark oppositional forces operating within both colonial and postcolonial discourses. Hence, Hall suggests:

.... we need to deploy the play on words of a theorist like Jacques Derrida. Derrida uses the anomalous 'a' in his way of writing 'difference' —*differance*— as a marker which sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding or translation of the word/concept. It sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the trace of its *other* meanings. (115)

Hall's belief that identity-politics should be based on/generated from "difference", thus, tries to unsettle existing discourses by rupturing those grand-narratives that are viewed as "omnipotent definitions" by Shu-mei Shih in *PMLA*.

⁷ Please refer to Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. 15-16, 139-55. Bloom argues that, through various "revisionary ratios", a poet misreads and thus misinterprets his/her precursor. This is essential to the birth of great and original literature.

⁸ Here, I refer to the *Samyutta-Niyaka*, II. Also, please refer to Martin Buber's *Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). 28. There is a similarity between Buber's use of the expression "talk to God" and what Gibran speaks about God. In Part II of *Samyutta-Niyaka*, there is a detailed discussion about *samsara*, the meaning of *dukkha* or suffering that is innate in existence, the problematic of the unending chain of rebirth, about our Holy Truths, and finally about *Nirvana*. Buddha has assured that the chain of suffering through rebirth can be broken, even transcended, through a release, which is final peace. It is a state in which the finite self is obliterated. Like a fire put out, feelings, perceptions, impulses are also to be put out, so that what remains is the unfathomable calmness, much akin to a serene void.

⁹ This work was posthumously published. As it was compiled and written by Barbara Young, when Gibran was fatally ill, critics are suspicious of the authenticity of this text.

¹⁰In "World Literature, National Contexts." (*Modern Philology* 100.4, 'Toward World Literature: A Special Centennial Issue'; Chicago: The U. of Chicago Press, 2003, 512-531), David Damrosch writes:

World literature is [...] as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence, it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of an ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither (514).

Taking the cue from Damrosch's observation that this kind of literature is not only connected to both cultures (the host and the source) but also "circumscribed by neither", I have tried to forge a third connection in which such literature is able to dialogue with another/other culture(s) of the world, a culture that is neither the host nor the source but one that strangely becomes elliptical.

¹¹ Though Suheil Bushrui and Eugene Paul Nasser have taken exactly opposite stand-points in their evaluations of Gibran's writings, both have used the term "ambivalent" to define and analyze, what they see as, the inexplicable complexity in Gibran's works. They argue that the complexity in Gibran's writings arise from his inability to endorse either nationalism or assimilation. Bushrui explains this ambivalence through his 'universalist' view-point that Gibran, being a spiritualist, was trying to bridge the discordance of two disparate cultures. Nasser, on the other hand, sees this as the outcome of a "cultural discontinuity" (21) intrinsic to an immigrant writer.

¹² Blue flame is that part of the fire which is the hottest. The Sufis believe that the divine union with God, realizable in this life, is the blue flame. This belief is associated with certain concepts in Hindu *Vaishnavism*, which highlights the importance of the colour 'blue' as emblematic of world consciousness, the *Atman* and the *Brahman*, all represented by Lord Krishna. Ref. Idris Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Anchor Books, 1971). Here, I use this concept to highlight the almost telepathic connection that existed between Gibran and Tagore, one that engendered a discourse remaining outside and being subversive to the Western discourses.

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Original Sanskrit Texts used in this article

Bhagavad Gita
Samyutta Niyaka II

Abbreviations used

BF: The Blue Flame.
TP: The Prophet.

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