Amin Rihani
1876 – 1940
The Apostle of the Arab-American Relationship

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Georgetown University

Center for Contemporary Arab Studies
Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service
241 Intercultural Center
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C. 20057-1020
202.687.5793
http://ccas.georgetown.edu

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Foreword

One of Georgetown University's most distinguished scholars, Dr. Irfan Shahîd was appointed the first Sultanate of Oman Professor in Arabic and Islamic Literature in 1982. On the occasion of his retirement in 2008 we are happy to reproduce his valedictory lecture, just as we published his inaugural lecture in 1982. That lecture, "Omar Khayyam: The Philosopher-Poet of Medieval Islam," represents only one facet of this extraordinary scholar's intellectual range. Dr. Shahîd's interests run from *The Martyrs of Najran* (1971) to *Al-Awda ila Shawqi* (*The Return to Shawqi*) (1986), a study of the foremost neoclassical poet in modern Arabic literature. This is a teacher whose legendary courses ranged from "The Holy Qur'an" to "Modern Arab-American Literature."

Dr. Shahîd's research and publications turn round three themes: (1) the area where the Graeco-Roman world meets the Arabic and Islamic worlds in late antique and medieval times; (2) Classical and Medieval Arabic poetry; (3) Islamic studies, particularly the Qur'an.

But Dr. Shahîd's *magnum opus* deals with another subject entirely: Byzantium and the Arabs. Since 1984 he has published no fewer than ten lengthy books on this topic, beginning with the fourth century and ending with the sixth century—a century alone to which he devoted four volumes. His latest work, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. IV, was published in 2009 by Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.

Irfan Shahîd earned his undergraduate degree in classical studies at Oxford University, and in 1954 he obtained his Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic studies from Princeton University. He began his teaching career at the University of California, Los Angeles in the Department of Near Eastern Languages. Later he moved to Indiana University for two years before being appointed an associate professor in the Arabic Department at Georgetown in 1963. He was promoted to full professor in 1967. He has accumulated many honors over the years, among them the Elizabeth Procter Fellowship at Princeton, a Fulbright Fellowship, a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, a Mellon Fellowship, and fellowships from the American Philosophical Society and the Center for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks. In 1976 he held a fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.

In addition to his many books, Dr. Shahîd has published articles and chapters in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, *The Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, *Arabica*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, *Le Muséon*, *Byzantion*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, and *The Journal of Semitic Studies*.

Dr. Shahîd has been an inspiration and a demanding mentor to generations of Georgetown graduate students. He has brought great distinction to the Arabic Department, the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, and the University as a whole.

Michael C. Hudson
Seif Ghobash Professor of Arab Studies
Director, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies
Georgetown University

The tragic events of Black September, 2001, the year that opened the twenty-first century and the third millennium, more popularly called 9/11, is now a landmark in American history that is deeply carved in the psyche of the American people and is annually perpetuated by commemorative anniversaries. It practically destroyed the bridges that had been constructed between America and the Arab-Muslim world. What had been America's main adversary in the Cold War, namely Communism, has now become the Arabs and the Islamic world, which, ironically, had been America's allies against Communism.

The sequel to Black September was Black June 2003, when the United States mounted the disastrous invasion of Iraq, the consequences of which are too tragic for words. Black June ruined the image of *America* in the consciousness of the Arabs and the Islamic world, as two years earlier in 2001, Black September had ruined the image of the *Arabs* and *Islam* in the American perception.

In the midst of this vertigo/vortex in Arab-Muslim-American relations, Dr. Clovis Maksoud, the distinguished political analyst, delivered a speech at the Hewar Center in Washington in which he pointed out that the Arab-Muslim attitude towards America is now not inspired by hate but by anger—anger generated by a sharp disappointment that the great democracy which saved the world twice in the World Wars of the twentieth century, which microscopically split the atom, and which macroscopically conquered space and landed an astronaut on the moon—that this America committed such a "howler" in foreign policy and left in ruins the Cradle of Civilizations, not one, but five of them: the Sumerian, the Babylonian, the Biblical (ancestral home of Abraham, the first patriarch, and the home of the prophets of the Babylonian captivity), the Sasanid Persian, and the Arab-Muslim civilization of medieval Abbasid times.

This sound, constructive analysis on the part of Dr. Maksoud represents for me the first step on the road for the restoration of the bridges of Arab-Muslim-American relations. I am not a politician, but an academic, and so I think of the world in academic terms. Hence, Dr. Maksoud's identification of the correct sentiment that lashes the consciousness of the Arabs and Muslims, that is, anger and not hate, immediately reminded me of the Arab-American figure who can be truly credited with the title, "The Apostle of the Arab-American Relationship," a man of letters who was in fact the father of Arab-American literature in the first quarter of the twentieth century.[1] It is therefore the memory of Amin Rihani that I should like to resuscitate and commemorate in this address and to demonstrate his relevance in the present crisis of Arab-Muslim-American relations.

I do this, fully aware of the enormous difficulties that beset the path of those who are anxious to restore these relations to their halcyon days, but I am also

an incorrigible optimist and a verse[2] of Mutanabbi is *à propos* to recite in this context:

إذَا قَلَّ عَزْمِي عَن مَدًى خَوفُ بُعْدِهِ فأَبْعَدُ شَيْءٍ مُمْكِنٌ لَمْ يَجِدْ عَزْ ما

although incense may be burnt to a couplet of his, also *à propos*, as a chastening corrective:[3]

نَحْنُ أَدْرَى وَقَدْ سَأَلْنا بِنَجْد أَقَصيرٌ طَرِيقُنا أَمْ يَطُولُ
وَكَثِيرٌ مِنَ السُّؤالِ اشْتِيَاقٌ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْ رَدِّهِ تَعْلِيل

As has already been indicated, the events of Black September, 2001, and those of Black June, 2003, have destroyed the two bridges of the Muslim-American relationship and of the Arab-American. It also seriously affected the special Saudi Arabian relationship with the United States. These bridges had been constructed, academically and perceptively, almost a century ago by the one who is the subject of this address.

Of all the Arab-American writers of his generation, Amin Rihani alone fully understood the existence of these bridges in medieval times[4] before they were buried far too long as a result of the Muslim-Christian confrontation during the Crusades and subsequently during the long Ottoman period. Rihani spent much of his life in the process of reconciling the Arab-Islamic world with the West, especially the United States, and this present contextualization of his efforts imparts a new significance to his lifework.

How he was able to accomplish this reconciliation forms the first of the three parts of this address, namely, the American factor in his formation, which was deep and pervasive.

His Formation

Rihani's colleagues, the Arab-American men of letters, did not take kindly to America, and felt oppressed living in the big urban and industrial center of New York—"the Babylon of the twentieth century" according to one of them[5]—and thus, they turned their backs to the challenges and opportunities of the American scene. Rihani did the opposite. Unlike his colleagues, he saluted it, though not uncritically. While the others lived only in America, he both lived *in* it and was *of* it. No member of the *Rabita*, the Arabic Pen Association of the 1920s, would have apostrophized Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty, which Rihani did in a moving essay, entitled "Min 'ala Jisr Brooklyn."[6]

متى تحولين وجهك نحو الشرق ايتها الحرية؟

The inanities of life in the Big Apple did not attract him. What attracted him was the real America, the abode of universities, research centers, laboratories, charitable foundations, and above all, the land of the free and of true democracy, especially meaningful to one who had emigrated from an Arab homeland that moved in the shadow of the Hamidian regime and Ottoman oppression. Although a romantic himself and suffering from no lack of nostalgia for his tiny Lebanon, he won free from the attitude of his colleagues, whose nostalgia and romanticism became escapist and sentimental. He explored every aspect of American life, and chose what seemed to him worthy of adoption without forgetting the ideals and values of the Old World to which he belonged, all of which he expressed eloquently in the last stanzas of his attractive prose poem, "A Return to the Wadi,"[7] which he composed on his return to Lebanon and his home in Furayka after his historic journey to Arabia in 1922. This is how he addressed his mother in that prose poem:[8]

وما الذي جئتني به, بعد هجر طويل

جئتك بسكينة الدهناء والنفود
تلك التي تملأ النفس ورعاً وخشوعاً
فتزيل منها الهواجس والهموم

جئتك بقناعة البدوي ومروءته
بشجاعة البدوي وحريته
باستقلال البدوي واطمئنانه

جئتك بالشمم العربي والاباء
بالشهامة العربية والوفاء
ببساطة العيش وكرم الاخلاق
بالجرأة والبطولة في الشدة والرخاء
جئتك ياأمي, بفكرة سامية من المدنية الاوربية
العمل الصالح أصح الاديان

جئتك بحرية الافرنسي في ثورته
وبنشاط الاميركي في عمله
وبايمان الاحراربالحياة وبالناس

This total immersion in America made Rihani the Apostle of the Arab-American Relationship, and this represented the first stage in his later effort to foster this relationship between America and the people he belonged to—the Arabs and the

civilization that came into being through the Arabs and was sponsored by them—Islam and Islamic civilization. And in this effort, he was influenced by American men of letters.

The Muslim-American Bridge

In a moving autobiographical section in his *Mulūk al-'Arab*, Rihani explained that it was not in Lebanon but in Manhattan that he discovered his identity as an Arab. At its famous public library, he stumbled on the *Alhambra* of Washington Irving, who introduced him to the glories of Islamic civilization in Spain.[9] A new world now opened before Rihani, the cultural analyst, namely, Islamic medieval civilization, especially in its Spanish Islamic version, which flourished on a slice of European soil. This was most relevant to the concern of an Arab living in the United States, which derived its culture from Europe. His ancestors, the Arabs in Spain, thus appeared to him now as participants in the formation of that European culture in the midst of which Rihani was living in the States, and they had succeeded in transmitting the Greek heritage to Western Latin Christendom, a transmission that vitalized medieval scholastic thought, revived the scientific spirit in the nascent universities of Western Europe in Italy and France, and finally contributed its share towards the Italian Renaissance. Rihani could thus engage fruitfully in a dialogue with the West, dominated in the America in which he lived by Anglo-Saxon culture, and he could feel comfortable with the thought that his ancestors were not exactly camel-riding, sabre-rattling tetragamists, but philosophers, logicians, scientists, and physicians, to whom came the European ancestors of America to learn. Indeed, "the first prominent European man of science who came to Toledo was Adelard of Bath, an English mathematician and philosopher," and it was another Englishman, Roger Bacon, who expressed the indebtedness of Europe to the Arabs most eloquently.[10]

In conformity with his style as an indefatigable traveller, Rihani did not remain an armchair cultural analyst of Arab and Islamic civilization in Spain. He decided to make the journey and, in his case, the pilgrimage[11] to Andalusia. He visited Granada, Cordova, and other landmarks of Islamic civilization, and wrote an essay on Cordova's philosopher, Ibn-Rushd (Averroes), whose impact on Western thought is well known through St. Thomas Aquinas, the foremost medieval theologian; even Dante, the foremost medieval poet, saluted him.[12]

Rihani was very much aware of Islam as a world civilization and of its cultural mission in medieval times to Western Europe. Hence the confidence that characterized his dialogue with the West in his perception of the place and role of the Arabs and Islam in the world of the twentieth century. As such, he conceived of himself as the apostle of this Arabic-Islamic civilization to America, and the apostle of America to the Arab-Muslim world. He vigorously preached not confrontation

or the clash of civilizations between the East and the West, but conciliation and dialogue, like the dialogue that had obtained in medieval times and should also obtain in the present. The man of letters in him expressed it in his *Book of Khālid*,[13] thus smashing the iron curtain erected between East and West by such writers as Rudyard Kipling with his "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet"[14] and nowadays by the late Samuel Huntington in his *Clash of Civilizations*.[15]

Philip Hitti, the distinguished historian, took up Rihani's gallant effort in the construction of this bridge in a more effective manner academically from his professorial chair at Princeton University. At Princeton, Dr. Hitti wrote his magisterial volume, *History of the Arabs*,[16] which presented Islamic civilization in a most attractive and compelling manner. He was also the first to establish at Princeton a department in which Islam finally attained its majority in the American curriculum, represented by the study of the three major Islamic languages and literatures: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.

The Arab-American Bridge

-A-

The construction of Rihani's Arab-American bridge was more complex. It began when Rihani was a relatively young man in the first decade of the twentieth century, during which he converted Arab journalism in America into literature in the strict sense of *belles lettres*. He did this both in prose and poetry, in which he was influenced by two American writers.

1) Although Arabic literature, and poetry in particular, had always had romantic elements in it in classical and medieval times, these elements remained unrelated to a systematic Romantic school as the term is understood in modern literary criticism and theory. Rihani was the first of the Mahjar Arab-American *literati* to write Romantic compositions resting on theoretical principles. Nature, photographically reflected in classical Arabic poetry, was not expressed in true Romantic fashion in which it was personified, idealized, and made a participant in the poet's emotion. Its idealization and most perfect expression took place later in the composition of al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya, the Pen Association,[17] but it is already well expressed in his famous "Wadi al-Furayka."[18] It was later published in his *Rihaniyyat*, a landmark in the history of Arabic literature, and so understood and saluted by Western critics such as the Russian scholar, Ignatius Kratschovsky.[19]

Within this literary facet of the Arab-American bridge, it was the American transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, who was the inspiration. To the recluse of Concord and author of *Walden*, Rihani owed much of his conception of nature and the pleasures of solitude. These found expression in one of the essays of the

Rihaniyyat already referred to, i.e., "Wadi al-Furayka," which may still be read not only for its historical interest. This was a new conception of nature, unlike that of the classical Arab poets whose conceptions were plagued by certain limitations, such as lack of reciprocal responsiveness to nature on the part of the poet. Rihani's little house overlooking Wadi al-Furayka in Lebanon was not unlike Thoreau's hut on the pine slope overlooking the shores of Walden Pond. And Thoreau's devotion to Concord and its neighborhood, which for him had all that a worshipper of nature needed and wanted, may have inspired Rihani to undertake an intensive inspection of the beauties of Lebanon, which finally found expression in the charming *Qalb Lubnān*.[20] As a man of letters, Rihani owed more to transcendentalist Thoreau than to Emerson, since the former was the literary artist of that pseudo-philosophical club, and it is significant that in a short essay in which he answered questions about books that influenced his life, Rihani chose to mention Thoreau's *Walden* rather than Emerson's *Nature*.[21]

Rihani's Romanticism bore fruit later in the work of his colleagues. Its ripest fruit was *al-Mawākib*,[22] in which Gibran presented an element in Lebanon's nature, namely the Wood (*al-Ghāb*), as the answer to the philosophical problem of dualism,[23] and the foremost poet of the Mahjar, Iliyya Abu-Mādi, was a Romantic. Fayrūz's vocal chords have immortalized a lyric in Gibran's *Mawākib*, transmitting it to millions in the Arab world. In so doing, and ironically, she does Gibran an injustice because listeners, enchanted by the magic vibrations of her voice, forget all about Gibran's poetry. So, here for connoisseurs of Arabic poetry are a few verses from Gibran's *Mawākib*, an example of how Arab-American Romantic poetry has progressed from Rihani's Romanticism through Gibran, who was partly influenced by Rihani:[24]

هل تخذتَ الغاب مثلي ... منزلاً دون القصورْ
فتتبعتَ السواقي ... وتسلقتَ الصخورْ
هل تحممتَ بعطر ... وتنشفت بنور
وشربت الفجر خمراً ... في كؤُوس من اثير
هل جلست العصر مثلي ... بين جفنات العنب
والعناقيد تدلتَ ... كثريات الذهب
فهي للصادي عيونٌ ... ولمن جاع الطعامْ
وهي شهدٌ وهي عطرٌ ... ولمن شاءَ المدامْ
هل فرشتَ العشب ليلاً ... وتلحفتَ الفضا
زاهداً في ما سيأتي ... ناسياً ما قد مضى
وسكوت الليل بحرٌ ... موجهُ في مسمعكْ
وبصدر الليل قلبٌ ... خافقٌ في مضجعكْ

This is Arab-American Romantic poetry at its most diaphanous, the *sahl mumtani*ᶜ, of prose applicable also to poetry, when—as expressed in Arabic—

يَدْخُلُ عَلى القَلْبِ بِلا اسْتِئذان

it enters the heart directly without permission.[25]

2) Equally important was the revolution Rihani tried to effect in the classical structure of Arabic poetry. It was again an American who was the inspiration: Walt Whitman, the nineteenth-century American poet who stood for literary revolt. It was from Whitman that Rihani derived his conception of the New Poetry[26] that he preached—namely, the prose poem.

Just as Whitman broke with tradition in a radical manner, so did Rihani—perhaps even more radically—when he introduced the prose poem into Arabic poetry. Unlike English, Arabic poetry goes back to at least the fifth century, and throughout these 15 centuries, it was composed within the very rigorous framework of the *ʿAmūd* metrical system with its sixteen meters and its monorhyme. The strophic Andalusian experiment was only a ripple that did not affect the fundamental structure of Arabic poetry.

Rihani was the first to preach a true revolution in the composition of this poetry when, as early as 1905, he published the first of these prose poems in *al-Hilāl* in Cairo, which was confessedly a new departure and to which in the same issue was applied the technical term, *al-Shiᶜr al-Manthūr*. Rihani was a pioneer who did not perfect but left it to others to do the perfecting, which in this case was done by Gibran. However, the fact remains that the innovator was Rihani, and this is a permanent contribution of his to modern Arabic poetry, traceable to his American model, Whitman.

In the second half of the twentieth century, another American poet, T.S. Eliot, was the model for poets of the Free Verse Movement in Iraq. Because Eliot lived long in England and became a British citizen and even an Anglo-Catholic, he is sometimes thought of in the Arab East as an English poet, but he was an American, and so on him and Whitman, two Americans, the New Arabic Poetry in the twentieth century was modeled. The "Prose Poem" and "Free Verse" are not identical, but insofar as they are departures from the rigid classical Arabic metrical system they are in the same boat, and hence the innovation introduced in 1905 by Rihani may be seen in its true light *historically*, if not actually, as the first that stimulated the whole current of New Poetry in the twentieth century. His influence thus reached beyond the *Rabita* to the New Poetry, which in the Arab world has succeeded in establishing its legitimacy in the second half of this century as Free Verse. Although it was not directly inspired by him, it is allied to his advocacy of it when he was the first to vigorously call for an entirely new way of composing Arabic poetry and

when he ushered in the new dawn with his own compositions, for which he rightly earned the title: The Father of Prose Poetry.[27]

So much for the *literary*[28] aspect of the Arab-American bridge contributed by Rihani. It conveniently precludes the non-literary aspect to which I now turn.

-B-

The political and economic facet that shored up the Arab-American bridge was a major intellectual contribution and remained such during Rihani's lifetime, but it turned out to be of major importance not long after his death, not only in the narrower context of the Arab-American relationship, but the much larger global context.

As has been said earlier, it was Washington Irving who unfolded before Rihani the Islamic civilization of medieval Spain, which he decided to visit. This civilization soon led him to the modern Arab world. He quickly developed a passionate feeling for Arab nationalism and a vision of an independent Arab world after the end of the First World War. The other extremity of the Arab world was also within the range of his interest; witness his later meeting with Generalissimo Franco on the future of the Arab Occident.[29] Even as early as 1917, when he was contemplating the beauty of al-Hambra in Granada, he dreamt of taking action and helping to shape the future of the Arab world. He then conceived the desire of visiting Arabia for that purpose, which took place five years later, in 1922.[30]

In the preceding year, he wrote a letter to then Under-Secretary of State, Henry P. Fletcher, in which he said, "I am now planning a trip to Arabia, not for 'recreation' or as a 'tourist.' I have no axe to grind except the axe of civilization...My interest in Islam, in Arabia rather, is that of a friend who desires to see her go forward hand-in-hand with European Civilization."[31] Rihani visualized a new relationship between the United States and the emergent Arab world in the political and economic sphere, in which Arab resources and American technology could meet and complement each other. The result was that incredible episode of his career—the historic journey to the Arabian Peninsula.

Frail in constitution as he was, and with a nervous disorder in his right hand, he braved the inclement elements of Arabia, and travelled by every means of transportation: automobile, airplane, camel, horse, and donkey. He affected Bedouin dress, slept in tents and on the sands, and ate as the Bedouins did. During that journey, he met and talked with everyone who was anyone in Arabia and Iraq, encounters which resulted in the publication of his classic volume, *Mulūk al-'Arab*.[32] Just as Rihani, the man of action, conceived the *Muslim*-American bridge partly by travelling to a center of Islamic civilization, namely Spain, so he did in conceiving the *Arab*-American bridge by travelling to Arabia. What he wrote was based on autopsy.

Within the context of this self-image as a go-between involving the Arabs and the American West, special mention should be made of his efforts to see a Saudi-American relationship. Rihani was the first to write fundamental works on the late King Ibn-Saud, whom he introduced to the Arabophone[33] world and then translated those works into English and made the king known to the Anglophone world.[34] He tried hard to bring his country of adoption to a serious involvement in the larger Arab homeland, especially Saudi Arabia. But the mood of the United States Congress was not favorable. Isolationism prevailed, and so the very special relationship had to wait until after the end of the Second World War. But Rihani died in 1940 and so did not witness the harvest of his labors in building the Arab-American bridge in the political-economic sector.

Such was the state of non-involvement in Arab-American relations when Rihani died. Five years later it suddenly and dramatically reached a climax, made possible by an American counterpart of Rihani, one who spent his life working for an Arab-American relationship, although he and Rihani never met. It was Colonel William Alfred Eddy who arranged a meeting of King Ibn-Saud and President Roosevelt in 1945 aboard the destroyer, *Murphy*, in the Suez Canal.[35] Thence followed that Saudi-American relationship, during which the vast resources of Arabia were discovered and activated by American technology, and the result was the well-known revolution in the life and history of Arabia. Although Rihani was not involved, it was he who had first conceived of this relationship, which has matured into one of the enduring relationships between the United States and an Arab country.

Sixty years or so after what might be termed the zenith of the Arab-American relationship, this has plummeted to what with equal truth might be called its nadir in September 2001. The two bridges that Rihani strove hard to construct have collapsed, and their collapse is reflected in common American parlance by two neologisms: Islamophobia and Arabophobia. The Saudi-American relationship, too, has received a serious jolt.

As is well known, the Arab-Muslim-American relationship foundered on the rock of the Palestine Question, which began in 1948 and has been exponentially deteriorating.

I have no intention of politicizing this address, which is purely cultural and non-political, but in view of the hopes that were voiced last week in Annapolis on the final resolution of the conflict and the manner in which this will be effected, I should like to invoke the name of Rihani again in this context, and it is very *à propos*.

In the interwar period, Rihani was one of the very few who understood the size and dimensions of the Palestine Question, especially how it was going to develop and whom it was going to envelop. Rihani did not write a monograph on this question but Albert, his brother, assembled the *disiecta membra* in a volume which he published under the title *The Fate of Palestine*,[36] where Rihani's thoughts on the

question may be examined. Two or three items in this volume may be singled out as illustrations of Rihani's statesmanship and vision.

At a time when one party in the conflict would not think of a partitioned Palestine or a binational state, Rihani entertained this solution and accepted it. He even met with Dr. Judah Magnes, the President of the Hebrew University, who had preached the gospel of the bi-national state and worked tirelessly for an Arab-Jewish accord. Some of his statements such as this one must have appealed to Rihani, as a cultural analyst of the conflict:

> One of the greatest cultural duties of the Jewish people is the attempt to enter the promised land, not by means of conquest as Joshua, but through peaceful and cultural means, through hard work, sacrifices, love, and with a decision not to do anything which cannot be justified before the world conscience.[37]

A version of this solution, if not a replica, was the main theme in the Annapolis Conference, namely the two-state solution, a hundred years after it was entertained by Rihani.

Reference to the president of the University, Judah Magnes, leads to the University itself, the official opening of which took place in 1925. While students in Arab schools demonstrated, Rihani saluted the University in a spirited passage as a place where Arab and Jew could meet. He enthused, "It stands on Mt. Scopus as the noblest instrument today, as the most effective instrument tomorrow of peace and good will and progress."[38]

At a time when Great Britain was the dominant power in the Near East and still had her mandate over Palestine, while the United States was quite distant from both, Rihani could foresee even then that inevitably the latter would be drawn into the Palestine Question,[39] as indeed happened as soon as Britain withdrew from the scene. Yet even he could not have imagined the extent and seriousness of this involvement and the dire consequences.

So much then for this extraordinary Arab-American whose memory I have evoked in this address as the dreamer, even the statesman, who hoped to build the Arab-Muslim-American relationship.

Epilogue

As I preluded my address with the faith of an optimist in spite of the dark clouds that hover over the Arab political horizon, I should like to sound the same note in the conclusion.

The pronouncements that have emanated from Annapolis suggest a glimmer of

hope, though only a glimmer, for the resolution of the conflict. But as this conflict has been considered the root of the Arab-Muslim-American conflict, perhaps those bridges conceived by Rihani may, after all, eventually be restored, though the task of restoration may turn out to be hard and long. As an architect of cultural bridges, Rihani has descendants in the spirit among members of the Arab-American community who have continued his work, directly or indirectly, and hopefully the community will continue to produce such descendants who can perpetuate his legacy. I should like to give recognition to four of them from the last century.

In the first quarter of it, this community produced Gibran, "the philosopher of the people," whose masterpiece, *The Prophet*, has made millions of Americans happy;[40] in the second quarter it produced Philip Hitti, the distinguished Princeton professor whose volume, *A History of the Arabs*, has uncovered for the American public the achievements of medieval Islam as a world civilization;[41] in the third quarter, Charles Malik was the inspiration behind the Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations; and in the fourth decade the community produced one who is still alive as a force in American life, the consumer-advocate and presidential candidate, Ralph Nader.

These and such others are the true representatives of the Arab-American community in these United States and not the new ones that the media has been profiling; they can resume the process of bridge-building, which hopefully may cause a turn in the tide of Arab-Muslim-American relations. Academics such as we can only wish that hope still resides in Pandora's box, and that it will enable us to continue to think of how to repair and restore. Two verses from one of the poets of the *Rabita*, the Syrian Nasib, suggest themselves in this context:[42]

فلنَسرْ, فلنَسرْ, وإما هلكنا قبل إدراكنا المنى والمواعد
فكفانا أنّا ابتدأنا وأنّا إن عجزنا فقد بدأنا نشاهد

Wassalam!

Irfan Shahîd
Oman Professor of Arabic and Islamic Literature

Appendix

Amin Rihani's Letter to Undersecretary of State, Henry P. Fletcher

Ameen Rihani
43 East 27th Street
New York
325 East 68th Street

October 15, 1921
Hon. Harry P. Fletcher
Under-Secretary of State
Washington, D.C.

File MB October 27, 1921

Dear Sir;

I did not have the pleasure of seeing you in Mexico City when I was there in the winter of 1918 doing some work for our Government and the Allies and getting, as you perhaps remember, "thirty-three-ed" for it.

I am now planning a trip to Arabia, not for "recreation" or as "a tourist", but on a business of high importance. The enclosed list of questions, which are of vital interest to the whole world to-day and which I shall not answer until I have gone over the ground thoroughly, will give you an idea of what I propose to do. I have many friends among the Arabs; and one of them, who is an official of the Government of Hejaz, is going to accompany me through the Peninsula. I shall probably get at sources of information, without running any danger, that are hardly accessible to a European or American writer. And I have no axe to grind except the axe of Civilization. Local politics will not concern me. I shall go through the country as an observer only and I shall be very careful, as a good American, not to do anything that might embarrass the Government.

Now, I write to you about this matter for two reasons: First, our Government is no doubt interested in the development of conditions in the Near East, particularly in Mesopotamia and Arabia; and I shall be pleased to furnish it, from no other than a purely patriotic motive, a report on the subject. There will be a book, of course, which I shall publish later. My interest in Islam, in Arabia rather, is that of a friend who desires to see her go forward hand in hand with European Civilization. Is this possible? That is what I would like to find out.

If our Government's interest goes even beyond this, and there are other questions which you or whoever is in charge of the Near East Department would add to the list, I shall thank you for so doing. I will come to Washington for the purpose if it is preferred.

Secondly, I am now writing to ask you to facilitate the matter of obtaining a passport. I want to go to Djeddah first, where my friend is, thence, either through the Peninsula or around it, up to Basra and Baghdad. I shall return from Baghdad to Damascus and Beirut, to be able to visit my mother and sisters who are still in the old country in Mt. Lebanon.

I shall not make an application for the passport until I hear from you. I want to leave next month. With the hope that you will be so kind as to let me have an early reply, I am, sir

Very truly yours,
[signed]
Ameen Rihani

ENDNOTES

1. See M. Naima, *Sabᶜūn*, (Beirut, 1966-67), vol. II, p. 149.
2. See his *Diwan*, ed. A. al-Barqūqi, (Cairo, 1930), vol. II, p. 369, line 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 114, line 4 - p. 115, line 1.
4. With the exception of Nasīb ʿArīda; for his poems on the United States, see his "Amirkiyyāt" in his *Diwan al-Arwāh al-Hāʾira*, (New York, 1946), pp. 267-278.
5. Mikhaʾil Naima, *op. cit.*, II, p.58.
6. See his *Rīhāniyyāt*, (Beirut, 1956), vol. I, pp. 71-75; for the apostrophe, see p. 73, line 17.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 71, line 2.
8. See his *Hutāf al-Awdiya*, (Beirut, n.d.), pp. 115-118; for these last stanzas, see pp. 117-118.
9. See his *Mulūk al-ʿArab*, (Beirut, 1967), p. 10.
10. On all this see *The Legacy of Islam*, eds. J. Schacht and C. E. Bosworth, (Oxford, 1974), pp. 73- 96.
11. This is how he preferred to describe his visit to al-Andalus, for which, see *Nūr al-Andalus*, (Beirut, 1969), p. 214, line 4; see also following note.
12. His essay, written in 1917 when he visited Spain, is entitled "Nūr al-Andalus." It includes the part on Ibn-Rushd (Averroes), and has been reprinted by his brother, Albert, as part of a volume, which has an account of his second visit to Spain after he met with Generalissimo Franco in 1939. The volume is also entitled *Nūr al-Andalus* (Beirut, 1969) and the essay may be found on pp. 208-229. For the part on Ibn-Rushd (Averroes), see *ibid.* pp. 219-229. On Thomas Aquinas and Averroes, see The Legacy of Islam, pp. 363, 384-385. For Dante and Averroes, see the chapter "Dante, Averroes, and the Rise of Modern Secularism" in Majid Fakhry's forthcoming volume, *The Dialogue of Civilizations.*
13. See *The Book of Khālid*, (Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1911); it was illustrated by Gibran.
14. For "The Ballad of East and West," see *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Inclusive Edition, 1885-1926*, (Doubleday, Doran & Company, New York, 1931), pp 268-272.
15. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, (New York: Touchstone Books, Simon & Shuster, 1997). The most recent on this is Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*, (London: Penguin, 2007).
16. *History of the Arabs* (MacMillan, St. Martin's Street, London) was first printed in 1937 and has had many editions. The revised tenth edition of 1970, not long before Hitti's death, was reprinted in 2002. The volume has been translated into many languages, including Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Urdu, Serbo-Croatian, and Polish. Daniel MacMillan commissioned Hitti to write this classic, and the first edition of the book appeared in 1937, after 10 years of hard work by the Princeton professor.
17. The Pen Association, founded in 1920, for which, see S. Jayyusi, *Trends and*

Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry, (Brill, Leiden, 1977), vol. I, pp. 121-122. It had as a predecessor another association with the same name, which had come into existence in the previous decade for which, see Richard Popp. "Al-Rābita al-Qalamiyah," in *The Journal of Arabic Literature*, 32, no.1 (2001), pp. 30-52.

18. See *al-Rīhāniyyāt*, (Beirut, 1956), pp.31-42.
19. On Ignatius Kratchovsky's salute to Rihani, see the French version of his autobiography, entitled *Avec les Manuscrits Arabes*, trans. Marius Canard, (Alger, 1954), pp. 51-52. Kratchovsky remembered Rihani appreciatively in five pages of his autobiography, pp. 51-56, and included a photograph of him (facing p. 52) dressed in Bedouin clothes, which he put on during his journey in the Arabian Peninsula in 1922.
20. See *Qalb Lubnān: Siyāha Saghīra fi Jibālina wa Tārikhiha*, (Beirut, 1965).
21. See *Adab wa Fan*, (Beirut, 1957), p. 48, in answer to a questionnaire addressed to him on books; his reply is titled "Fi al-Kutub," pp. 48-49.
22. For *al-Mawākib* of Gibran, see one of the best editions, illustrated by Gibran himself, ed. N. Arida, (Cairo, 1923). The standard biography of Gibran now is *Khalil Gibran, Man and Poet: a New Biography* by Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkinns, One World Publication, (Oxford, 1998). On Gibran's contribution to modern Arabic poetry, see S. Jayyusi, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 91-107.
23. The "Wood" had already been hallowed by Thoreau, whose *Walden* had the alternative title, *Life in the Woods*. For the latest on the influence of the transcendentalists Thoreau and Emerson on Gibran's *Mawākib*, see A. Majdoubeh, "Gibran's 'The Processions in the Trancendentalist Context,'" in *Arabica*, tome, XLIX, 4, (2002), pp. 477-493.
24. For these verses in the *Mawākib*, (supra, n. 22), see p. 29. The debt of the Arab-American *literati* to their adopted country, the United States, may be said to have been paid by Gibran, whose *Prophet* has found its way to the hearts of millions of Americans! See infra n. 41.
25. One may be forgiven taking liberties in wringing from the last two words of the felicitous Arabic phrase the notion of reaching the heart "without the permission of the ear!"
26. His salute to Whitman as the innovator and father of the New Poetry was expressed at the end of the second volume of the first edition of *al-Rīhāniyyāt*; see S. Jayyusi, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 321, n. 187. The new edition of *al-Rīhāniyyāt*, edited by his brother Albert, is very differently structured, and reference to Whitman does not appear in one of the volumes of this new edition, the one which I have at my disposal.
27. The case for Rihani is well stated by S. Jayyusi, op. cit., p. 86. In addition to being the "Father of Arabo-American Literature," he thus becomes also the "Father of Prose Poetry" in Arabic. For prose as a medium of the New Poetry in Arabic and for some important distinctions, see S. Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry: 1800-1970* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 289-311.
28. For a short monograph on the literary dimension of Arab-American relations,

see Gregory Orfalea: "U.S.-Arab Relations: The Literary Dimension," in which the author explains the efforts of the Arab *literati* of the al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya to bridge the communication gap between America and its Arab *émigrés*. It was published by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the Arab-American Cultural Foundation, Washington, D.C., 1984. Professor M.L. Bradbury, who was one of the participants in the second meeting of the Arab-American History Conference, made an important contribution to the literary dimension of Arab-American relations when he drew attention to the circle of American poets in Greenwich Village with whom Rihani was associated, namely Michael Monohan, George Sterling, Edwin Markham, and Richard Le Gallienne, to whom may be added Max Eastman, who visited Rihani in 1930 in Furayka, Lebanon.

29. His trip to meet with the Generalissimo found literary expression in his book *al-Maghrib al-Aqsā*, Dar al-Maᶜarif, (Cairo, 1952).
30. Which he expressed in *Mulūk al-ʿArab*; see supra, n. 9.
31. I published this letter in an article on Rihani, contributed to the *Festschrift* of the late Constantine Zurayk. See the present writer in "Amin al-Rihani and King Abd al-ʿAziz Ibn-Saᶜūd" in *Arab Civilization: Studies in Honor of Constantine Zurayk*, eds. George N. Atiyeh and Ibrahim M. Oweiss (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988), pp. 231-240. For this letter see the Appendix.
32. Published in two volumes in 1926 in Beirut and many times since.
33. As in *Mulūk al-ʿArab*, vol. II, pp. 40-44, 49-50, and later in a volume specially devoted to the Saudi dominion, *Tārikh Najd was Mulhaqātihi*, Dar al-Maᶜarif, (Beirut, 1964). Like *Mulūk al-ʿArab*, it was reprinted several times since its first publication in 1927.
34. See *Ibn Saʿoud of Arabia*, Constable, (London, 1928) and *The Maker of Modern Arabia*, (Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1928).
35. See C.A. Prettiman, "The Many Lives of William Alfred Eddy," in *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, vol. LIII, no. 2, winter 1992, pp. 200-201, 209-210.
36. See *The Fate of Palestine*, ed. Albert Rihani, (Beirut, 1967).
37. See the entry "Magnes, Judah Leon," in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (Thomson-Gale, London, 2007), vol 13, p. 354.
38. *The Fate of Palestine*, p. 83.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
40. According to the publicity department of his publisher, Alfred Knopf, the figure was more than eight million. But that was on May 24, 1991. See the present writer in "Gibran and the American Literary Canon: The Problem of the Prophet" in *Tradition, Modernity, and Post-modernity*, Festschrift, I. Boullata, edd. K. Abdel-Malek and W. Hallaq, (Brill, Leiden, 2000), p. 321, n. 4.
41. For this, see supra, n. 16.
42. *al-Arwah al-Haʾira*, p. 112, lines 5-6.

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