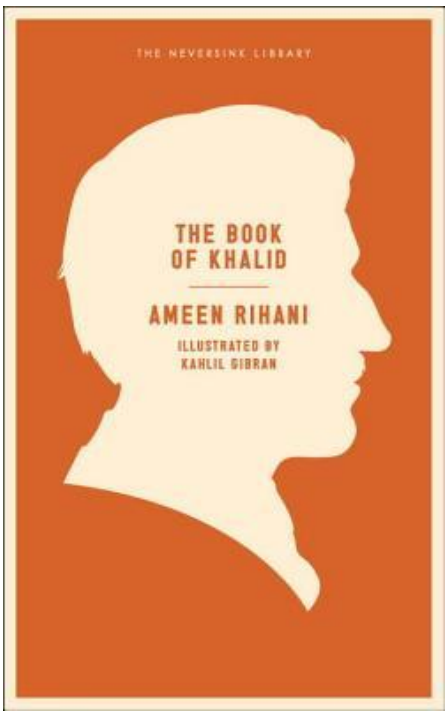

The Book of Khalid

Ameen Rihani , Kahlil Gibran , Todd Fine (Afterword)

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The Book of Khalid Ameen Rihani , Kahlil Gibran , Todd Fine (Afterword)
This long-awaited re-publication of the first Arab-American novel—inspiration for Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*—deals with Arab/American relations, religious conflict and the American immigrant experience.

Told with great good humor and worldly compassion, and with illustrations by Kahlil Gibran, *The Book of Khalid* recounts the adventures of two young men, Khalid and Shakib, who leave Lebanon for the United States to seek their fortune in turn-of-thecentury New York. Together, they face all the difficulties of poor immigrants—the passage by ship, admittance through Ellis Island and the rough immigrant life. Khalid, always the dreamer, tries to participate in the political and cultural life of the teeming city—to often humiliating and comic result.

Tiring of their sojourn, he convinces Shakib they should return to Lebanon. But their heads are now full of New World ideas. And Khalid, trying to improve his brethren, turns his understanding of Western thought into a call for political progress, and religious unity and tolerance in the Arab world. A call that has him, accidentally, almost founding a new religion—and almost becoming its first martyr, when his ideas incite the faithful to riot.

Playing with classical Arabic literary forms, as well as Western literary conventions, Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid* is a unique contribution to American and World literature.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

The Book of Khalid Details

Date	:	Published June 12th 2012 by Melville House (first published 1911)
ISBN	:	9781612190884
Author	:	Ameen Rihani , Kahlil Gibran , Todd Fine (Afterword)
Format	:	ebook 178 pages
Genre	:	Fiction, Novels, Literature

From Reader Review The Book of Khalid for online ebook

Marieke says

i feel like i've read this before....need to get my hands on it.

David says

The first Arab-American novel, though not as cut-and-dried as that may sound: Rihani was born in Ottoman Syria, spent his teens in the U.S., wrote this book in English when back in his native land, and after its 1911 publication wrote a number of books in English and still more in Arabic. But it's far from a mere curiosity: The depictions of the Arab immigrant experience in New York City are interesting as a social and historical document, but the bulk of the book takes place in the Middle East, following the many lives and multiple transformations of the continually conflicted, occasionally heroic Khalid. The novel contains three contrasting texts, principally a hagiography by Khalid's staunch friend, the poet Shakib, with running commentary by unnamed American editors, plus journal entries by Khalid himself... The device allows Rihani to show off his facility at different styles of writing, but more importantly it addresses his main theme: The multiplicity of perspectives on humanity's place in the universe, where they contrast and where they overlap, and the limited validity of each. As Khalid tries on and discards a succession of identities on two continents, he is encouraged and ennobled by what he sees as the particular strengths of the West, the East, Christianity, Islam, commerce, art, women, men - while at the same time he is disappointed and corrupted by the weaknesses and flaws inherent in each of the above. At certain points, and particularly as the novel draws near a close, Khalid's views seems to be a proxy for the author's own, but even so he rejects easy answers: In a world where nothing quite lives up to its billing, certainty and stability are the most illusory of all.

Lisalou says

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Amazing a book written over 100 years ago still addresses so many of the same East/West issues. Down to Khalid's vision of an Arab Spring with much the same consequences. An engaging, funny book as well as a little depressing when one realizes all of the wasted opportunity on both sides.

Elias Ziade says

I couldn't continue this book!!!

Karem Mahmoud says

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Naila says

Lots of spunk. Lots of falsafa. Lots of heart.

Debbie Zapata says

Couldn't finish it....too dated.

Harry Rutherford says

I heard about *The Book of Khalid* because last year was the centenary of its publication, and there was a burst of publicity to celebrate it as the first Arab-American novel. There's a fuller biography of Rihani here, but here's the snapshot version: Ameen Fares Rihani was born in Lebanon, but the family moved to New York for business when he was eleven. He moved back to Lebanon at 23 for health reasons [and later back to New York and back to Lebanon again] and he wrote books in both English and Arabic?—?The Book of Khalid being one of those written in English.

Obviously it occurred to me that I could read *The Book of Khalid* as my book from Lebanon for the Read The World challenge, and it's out of copyright, so I downloaded the ebook from Project Gutenberg. But there are quite a few contemporary Lebanese writers available in English translation, and I was also considering those. So I didn't get round to reading it until a few days ago when I was looking at my Kindle, wondering what to read, and thought I might as well give it a go.

And I have to say that I was immediately quite impressed; it struck me as more interesting and more modern than I was expecting.

It is the story of Khalid. He grows up as a muleteer in Baalbek in Lebanon, and raises enough money to move to New York; while living there he becomes an autodidact, reading literature and philosophy from second-hand books, and moving in various interesting New York circles; later he moves back to Lebanon and becomes a bit of a philosopher and political activist. Quite a lot of it is clearly somewhat autobiographical from Rihani: self-education in a basement in Brooklyn, and a period of asceticism in the mountains of Lebanon, for example.

The book is written in the voice of someone who has found an autobiographical manuscript written in Arabic by Khalid, but who is also working from another account written by Khalid's friend Shakib. Large chunks of the novel are supposedly directly quoted from these manuscripts, but they are tied together by the unnamed 'Editor', who (i) is presumably responsible for the translation into English; (ii) tells quite a lot of the story as a third person narrative; and (iii) provides a certain amount of running commentary, which is frequently sceptical or at least slightly sardonic.

So you have Rihani writing the 'autobiography' of a character who is clearly a poorer, less sophisticated version of himself, with commentary provided by that character's more conventional, earnest, slightly comical friend, and then commentary on both of them from a worldly and distinctly patronising Editor. You can see why I think it feels modern.

It also makes me unsure how to unpick the prose style. It is distinctly flowery by modern standards; this obviously reflects changing literary fashion, but I wasn't sure whether it was also a stylistic device as part of the characterisation of the Editor. Some of the vocabulary in particular?—?umbrageous, stivy, nephelococcygia, propylon, steatopygous, edacious?—?makes it seem like a parody of a certain kind of writing. Or take these little passages. This is commentary from the Editor:

> This leisure hour is the nipple of the soul. And fortunate they who are not artificially suckled, who know this hour no matter how brief, who get their nipple at the right time. If they do not, no pabulum ever after, will their indurated tissues assimilate. Do you wonder why the world is full of crusty souls? and why to them this infant hour, this suckling while, is so repugnant? But we must not intrude more of such remarks about mankind. Whether rightly suckled or not, we manage to live; but whether we do so marmot-like or Maronite-like, is not the question here to be considered.

'If they do not, no pabulum ever after, will their indurated tissues assimilate' is a particularly magnificently baroque sentence. This is a bit from Khalid himself:

> “Here, where my forebears deliquesced in sensuality, devotion, and grief, where the ardency of

> the women of Byblus flamed on the altar of Tammuz, on this knoll, whose trees and herbiage are fed perchance with their dust, I build my athafa (little kitchen), Arab-like, and cook my noonday meal. On the three stones, forming two right angles, I place my skillet, kindle under it a fire, pour into it a little sweet oil, and fry the few eggs I purchased in the village. I abominate the idea of frying eggs in water as the Americans do.1 I had as lief fry them in vinegar or syrup, where neither olive oil nor goat-butter is obtainable. But to fry eggs in water? O the barbarity of it! Why not, my friend, take them boiled and drink a little hot water after them? This savours of originality, at least, and is just as insipid, if not more. Withal, they who boil cabbage, and heap it in a plate over a slice of corn-beef, and call it a dish, can break a few boiled eggs in a cup of hot water and call them fried. Be this as it may. The Americans will be solesistically simple even in their kitchen.

Now surely it's an intentional bit of mock-heroic styling to counterpose the highflown stuff about 'women of Byblus' and 'altar of Tammuz' and the kvetching about American eggs. Especially since the passage is footnoted thus:

> 1. Khalid would speak here of poached eggs, we believe. And the Americans, to be fair, are not so totally ignorant of the art of frying. They have lard—much worse than water—in which they cook, or poach, or fry—but the change in the name does not change the taste. So, we let Khalid’s stricture on fried eggs and boiled cabbage stand.—Editor.

Apart from the tricksy book-within-a-book structure of it, the other modern echo is political. It is an account of a young Arab man visiting the West, becoming disenchanted with it, returning to Middle East and calling for a return to a purer, more spiritual form of Islam: he sees Wahhabism as the great hope, which slightly startled me. Not that Khalid shows any signs of becoming a terrorist or even, really, a religious extremist; but still, that parallel is there. Of course it's a pattern which has repeated many times over the centuries: responding to a decadent society by calling for a purer form of Islam to come out of the desert.

The most striking coincidence comes when he is advocating the overthrow of the oppressors and says "It is the beginning of Arabia’s Spring"?—?even if in this case the oppressors are the Ottoman Empire rather than Mubarak or Gaddafi or American imperialism.

It's an interesting book. I found it a little hard going in places?—?there are some long discussions of religio-politico-spiritual-cultural matters where the elaborate prose style really started to drag, and bits where the book loses forward momentum a bit?—?but there were also bits which were lively and clever and engaging. It was certainly worth reading.

World Literature Today says

This book was featured in the Nota Benes section of the Sept/Oct 2016 issue of World Literature Today Magazine.

http://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2...

Celeste says

I had to read some of it for one of my first semester classes. I remember I enjoyed the style of writing, but some things were very difficult for me to interpret or understand. Had the class not had the help of the professor guiding us along the storyline, I think I would have gotten too frustrated and tossed the book aside. I appreciate it for the historical sense of it, but it might not be for everyone to enjoy.

Andy says

I enjoyed this, but be warned - it's pretty opaque when it comes to some specific historic and religious/cultural references that run throughout (especially the latter half of the book). If you take time to read the afterword first, and then do some reading on Wahhabism and related topics, as well as early 20th century Arab nationalism, you'll get a lot more out of this than if you know nothing about those topics and just read to the end with brute force.
