Ameen Rihani:

Walt Whitman's Early Arab Reception

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Abstract

Walt Whitman's reception in Arabic language and literature is starting early, just a few years after the death of the author. This thesis investigates the fascinating story of Ameen Rihani's critical and creative reception of Walt Whitman's work. As such, this research finds its place in the fields of American studies, Arab-American studies, and comparative literature. Whitman's reception in different contexts and countries is an enormously well studied area of literary studies and specifically poetry studies. There have been many comprehensive studies of his international reception such as *Walt Whitman Abroad* (1955), *Walt Whitman and the World* (1995), *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman* (2002) as well as studies covering individual countries. So far, little research exists covering the Arab world. I intend in this thesis to prove otherwise that Whitman's early reception, and especially that by Ameen Rihani, changed the course of Arabic literature.

The Arab-American critic and poet Rihani, also considered the founding father of Arab-American literature, was the first Arab author to write English essays, poetry, novels, and art criticism in the English language. He perceived Whitman's important role for breaking both the 'chains' and 'conventions' of traditional poetics not just in English and European literatures but also in Arabic poetry. In response to Whitman, Rihani published many essays and poems criticizing themes, diction, style, and techniques used for the traditional Arabic poetry, "qaṣīdah". Rihani called for banishing these old poetic forms and themes which restricted the poet's creativity and freedom of thought, and ultimately his poetry

naturalized Whitman's poetics and thoughts. Rihani earned him the title as father of free verse in Arabic poetry. In this study, I will show how Whitman, through Rihani's mediation, influenced modern Arabic literature in general and its emerging free verse in particular.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Walt Whitman's poetry has had a great impact on world literatures. A critic pointed out that “the new poetic realm opened up by Whitman means similarly to the poetry in Asia, America and Europe [...]” (Yeguang, 1988: 381). Whitman’s formal and thematic innovations have changed Arabic literature through his reception in the English language and Arabic literary works of such early Arab-American writers as Ameen Rihani (1876-1940) or Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931). Nevertheless, Whitman’s Arabic reception has received little attention in critical studies, including investigation on Whitman.

For example, there is no reference to Arabic culture in *Walt Whitman and the World,* republished 1995, tracking many international responses and demonstrating how various cultures have received Whitman. *Walt Whitman and the World* is a comprehensive study comprised of 18 different chapters addressing Whitman’s reception abroad in 18 different cultures and languages, but the Arab World is not included among them.

The editors of this collection of essays, Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom, claim: “Today, complete translations of Leaves of Grass have been published in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan, and China, and selections of Whitman's poetry have appeared in every major language except Arabic” (1995: 2). But in fact, there are two Arabic translations of selections of Whitman's poetry published before 1995; the first one is Mohammed F. Alshunaiti’s *Walt Whitman: Shaeir 'Asil* (Walt Whitman: A Genuine Poet) in Cairo in 1961, and the second one is Saadi Youssef’s *Awraq Al-Ushb* (Leaves of the Grass) in Baghdad in 1976. Moreover, there are other major Arabic translations of

Whitman that appeared after the 1995 edition of *Walt Whitman and the World,* such as Abed Ismael's translation of Whitman's "Song of Myself" in Damascus in 2006, Maher Al-Batoti's translation *Diwan 'Awraq Al-Eashab: Dhikraa Al-Raiys Lincoln wa Qasayid 'Ukhraa* (Leaves of the Grass Collection: President Lincoln Memorial and Other Poems) in Cairo in 2006, Saadi Youssef' second Whitman's translation *New York Qasidas* in New York, USA, in 2007, and finally Rafaet Salam's *Awraq Al-Ushb* (Leaves of the Grass) in Cairo in 2017. Salam's translation is the first and only complete Arabic translation of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to date.

Before these translations, it was the Arab-American writers who came into contact with Whitman's literary works in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century. The pioneering Arab writer, Ameen Rihani, immigrated to New York in 1888 four years before Whitman's death. The pioneering Arab writers in the USA, Ameen Rihani and Gibran Khalil Gibran, established the *Mahjar School*. This name is given to Arab émigré writers to the Americas – who emigrated from the Arab countries in Middle East and North Africa. The majority of them came from the Levant, especially from Mount Lebanon. According to the 1990 census, there were 870,000 persons in the United States who identified themselves as descendants from the Arab World. In addition to the United States, Arabs also immigrated to other countries in the Americas. Recent studies show that 5% of the inhabitants of Latin America have Arab roots, which corresponds to roughly "25-30 million people" (Konrad: 2012).

Scholars have identified three major phases of Mahjar literature based on distinct waves of Arab immigration. The first wave was marked by the migration from Greater Syria, an Arab province of the Ottoman Empire from the late Eighteenth century until the end of the

First World War. The second wave of Arab immigration to the Americas arrived after the end of the Second World War, and the third wave started in the mid-1960s and continues into the present. Evelyn Shakir, a pioneer in Arab American literary studies, refers to these stages as “early”, “middle”, and “recent” and emphasizes that each one was responsive to political currents of its day (Shakir, 1996: 3). In this thesis, I will focus on the first wave.

After the dissolution of the Empire in 1922, Greater Syria was broken up into the separate political entities of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan. Most of these immigrants were members of Christian minorities. Many of the writers, such as Gibran Khalil Gibran, claimed that the reasons for this immigration were religious or political, but their biographies suggest that they were also drawn to the Americas by economic opportunities. The critic Albert Rihani, Ameen Rihani’s nephew, confirmed that the main interests of those Arab emigrants were commercial, social, and cultural in nature (2007: 17).

Although most of these immigrants were illiterate and unskilled single men, there were also small groups of Arab writers, poets, and artists who lived and worked in major urban areas such as New York City and Boston. The literary activities of their new environment greatly influenced these groups of literary men. American writers such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe and, of course, Walt Whitman were top on the list of writers who greatly influenced the Mahjar literary figures (see Adegboyega: 2010).

The Literary Movement of those Mahjar writers was one of the results of the new Arab renaissance or *Al-Nahda Al-Arabiyya*, which is often regarded as a period of intellectual modernization and reform. The critic Wail Hassan argued that *Al-Nahda* dates to the period after the French occupation of Egypt (1798-1801). After this occupation there was an awakening of the Western modern scientific knowledge in the Arab World. It started

when the Egyptian ruler Muhammad Ali (1769-1849) sent educational missions to France in the 1820s in an attempt to acquire that scientific knowledge and used these missions to open schools for translation to disseminate modern European science and ideas. “The core of *nahda* reformism was selective appropriation of those modern European ideas, science, and institutions that would strengthen Arab societies” (Hassan, 2016: 370). In turn the intellectuals who came to the United States in the late Nineteenth century established several of newspapers, which are considered as products of *Al-Nahda*.

Mahjar “émigré” literature comprises Arab emigrants’ literary works in Arabic as well as in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Geoffrey Nash points out the significance of the newspapers and periodicals founded by these writers for the emergence of Mahjar literature. The most popular of these American Arab newspapers were *Al-Mohajer* (The Immigrant), *Mir’at Al-Gharb* (Mirror of the West), and *Al-Hoda* (Guidance). Their writers wrote on many topics related to their backgrounds such as criticism of Ottomanic rule, social conditions in their home country, and the power of the clergy. Nevertheless, they also tried to accustom themselves to their new environment. Nash pointed out that the main concern of the immigrant writers “was how they were situated with respect to the strong assimilation pressures exerted by American society” (Nash, 2016: 261).

This literary movement had a great impact on Arabic literature as its representatives included some of the best-known and influential writers of the Twentieth century in the Arab world. The most significant Arab poets of the Mahjar Literary Movement are Ameen Rihani, Gibran Khalil Gibran, and Mikha'il Na'ima. The works of these writers shifted between English and Arabic, reflecting the tension between assimilation and multiculturalism.

Their major interest was how they were situated with regard to the pressure towards assimilation exerted by the American society. Each one of these immigrant writers would decide for themselves their place between their Arab heritage and American culture. Some of them gave priority to their Arab heritage by emphasizing their Arab identity in America, some viewed themselves as Arab American with an emphasis on their host American culture. Yet another group would look at these two entities as hybrid (see Nash, 2016: 262). For instance, when both Rihani and Gibran looked at the problems facing their country, "there was much of America in their views [… and their] infusion of a local liberalism lent a new and as yet untried quality to their style and approach to Middle Eastern affairs" (Gibran and Gibran, 1992: 193). Their writings were concerned with issues related to East *and* West, the Arabs *and* the Americans, the dialogue of cultures, the future of mankind, materialism, spiritual values, and other multi-cultural concerns.

Ameen Rihani, known as writer, philosopher, and political activist, was born on 24 November 1876 in Freike, Lebanon, which was part of the Ottoman Empire at that time. He was one of six children and the oldest son of Fares Rihani, a Lebanese Maronite raw-silk manufacturer. Ameen's father had commercial ambitions which brought him to America. In the summer of 1888, at the age of twelve, Ameen Rihani's father sent him with his uncle and his teacher – Naoum Mokarzel, the founder of *Al-Hoda* Newspaper, – to New York City and followed them a year later.

Rihani came from a large family and started his education in the U.S. a few months after his arrival in the United States at a school outside of New York City. He learned the basics of English there. He assisted his father and uncle in starting their trade business in a small cellar in Manhattan by making use of his capability to read and write in English. Eventually,

he was taken out of school to become a young merchant, interpreter, and bookkeeper for the family business. However, business did not interest young Rihani. Already at a young age, he showed great interest in literature and read European authors such as Victor Hugo and Thomas Carlyle as well as American Transcendentalist writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Walt Whitman was probably the most influential writer for Rihani both formally and thematically.

Rihani had a natural talent in eloquent speaking, and in 1895 he pursued a career as an actor and traveled with a Shakespearean theater group for months. When Rihani returned to his father, he insisted on receiving a regular education for a professional career, rather than rejoining the family business. To achieve that goal, Ameen attended night school for a year, passed the regents exams, and enrolled at New York Law School in 1897. While he was completing his first year, his health deteriorated. A case of pneumonia disrupted his study. At the doctor's advice, his father sent him back to Lebanon for two years to get better, which also gave Ameen an opportunity to learn formal Arabic and rediscover his roots. Upon his arrival in his homeland, he not only studied his native Arabic language but also taught English in a clerical school. In Lebanon, Rihani started reading Arab poetry, in particular that of Abu'l-Ala Al-Ma'arri. When he returned to New York City, he started working on several early translations, and his editorial work was published in the weekly newspaper, *Al-Hoda* as well as in two others daily publications in New York, *Al-Islah* and *Al-Ayyam*.

In subsequent years, Rihani published his first two of many books in the Arabic language. The first book was a historical and political analysis of the French Revolution under the title *Treatise of the French Revolution* (Nubtha Fith-Thowra l-Faranciya) in 1902. He

looked up to the French Revolution and wanted it to be a model for the Arab World. In 1903, Rihani published his second book, *The Trilateral Treaty in the Animal Kingdom (Al-Muhalafa Ath-Thulatiya fil Mamlaka-l Hayawaniya)* in the newspaper *Al-Hoda*. This book was fictional and brought back to life the allegorical Eastern story of Eighteenth century, *Kalila wa Dimna*, by Ibn al-Muqaffa and some Western writers to deliver a socio-political message. According to the critic Nijmeh Hajjar, Rihani used animal characters to criticize orthodox ecclesiastical thinking and to debate the role of religion and reason in society; it is considered to be the first book of its kind in modern Arabic literature (see Hajjar, 2010: 5). The critic Nathan Funk points out that these early works of Rihani all share "Western" aspects related to political freedom, religious reform, and freedom of thought (2004: 7).

In these early years of his literary career, Rihani actively got involved in literary and artistic societies of New York City, for instance in the Poetry Society of America and the Pleiades Club. In addition, he continued to regularly contribute to Arab-American publications. In these writings he dealt with questions of politics, religion, philosophy, and Arab traditions, thus contributing to the Arab American cultural scene. His newspaper articles and essays were written in both English and Arabic. Most significantly, he continued to translate poetry and started to write creatively himself.

1903 is the year which marked the publication of the first book of poetry in the English language written by an Arab writer, *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala.* Rihani's poetry collection is a translation of selected poems by the Arab author Abu'l-Ala al-Ma'arri (973-1057). Rihani was fascinated with Abu'l-Ala's poetry and the latter's ridiculing the rules of traditional Arabic poetry by using a double-consonant rhyme scheme in his poetry collection. I will show later how Abu'l-Ala's poetry reminded Rihani of Whitman not only

because it was the first poetic attempt to break out of the chains of rhyme in Arabic literature, but also for its revolutionary progressive diction and themes. Rihani's translation of Abu'l-Ala's poetry promotes Whitmanian notions such as equality and the divinity of mankind and can overall be called a Whitmanian project.

Two years after *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala,* Rihani published the first collection of his own poetry, *Myrtle and Myrrh* (1905). Rihani's *Myrtle and Myrrh* is the first book originally published by an Arab in English. The poems addressed topics like religiosity, freedom, and social justice. Albert Rihani explains that his uncle not only wanted to enter America by way of the port of New York, but also wanted to pass through the harbor of the English language, "to delve into the cultural core that leads to a membership in the new society" (2007: 26). The poet addressed the Western reader from the perspective of the "East," and sought to present Eastern spirituality and to give tribute to the old Eastern civilizations. In *Myrtle and Myrrh*, Rihani not only adopted the themes of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, but also, in the poem "The Brass Bed", his style of free verse. It is Rihani's first free-verse poetic experiment and prepared for his Arabic poetry later on. Rihani's "The Brass Bed" is very much a Whitmanesque poem, not only because it is written in free verse but also because it has explicit erotic imagery, and its idolization of the human body as I will show in chapter 2.

After publishing *Myrtle and Myrrh,* Rihani returned to Mount Lebanon for the second time and published his first poem in Arabic, "Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt" (Life and Death), also known as "Al-Kharif wa-Ghiyab al-Shams fi Lubnan" (Fall and Sunset in Lebanon). Rihani's "Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt" marked the first use of free verse in Arabic poetry. In the six years Rihani stayed with his family in his home country, he created the first Arab-

American play in English (*Wajdah*: 1908), edited and published a collection of his best-known essays and literary texts, including of free-verse poems in Arabic (*Ar-Rihaniyat*: 1910), and wrote the first English novel by an Arab author (*The Book of Khalid*: 1911), an expression of Rihani's revolutionary thoughts frequently referring to Walt Whitman.

Ar-Rihaniyat is a collection of Rihani's Arabic literary works, including poems, essays, and public speeches. In this collection, Rihani included essays criticizing themes, diction, and style used in the classical, conventional Arabic poetry, called for revolutionizing Arabic poetry and free it from the 'chains' of prosody. Following in Whitman's footsteps, Rihani asked Arab writers to look to nature as the source of divine and spiritual inspiration and to adopt a more 'natural' style and rhythm for their poetry. He further included a short preface introducing Whitman's free verse to the Arab reader as well as identifying him as heralding the latest epoch of artistic freedom by breaking the conventions of traditional poetics.

In 1916, Rihani married Bertha Case, an American artist acquainted with the Western art world. His marriage provided him with access to her – mostly Impressionist – social circle. However, their marriage did not last for long and they were eventually divorced. In 1921, Rihani composed his second English poetry collection *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems.*

In the second edition of his *Ar-Rihaniyat* (1922), Rihani added new poems including an Arabic translation of Whitman's poem "To Him That Was Crucified" – the first translation of a Whitman poem into Arabic. Whitman's translation blended easily with Rihani's poems; so much so, that when I read *Ar-Rihaniyat* for the first time I did not notice Rihani's footnote stating that he had included a translation of Whitman. Rather I thought the translation was a poem by Rihani himself. Rihani chose this poem of Whitman to translate, since the latter

identifies himself with the New Testament Christ and expresses his poetic, prophetic persona in this poem. In such a way, this translation expresses Rihani's intention to follow in Whitman's footsteps and assume the same prophetic literary role as I will demonstrate in chapter III.

Rihani spent the rest of the 1920s traveling throughout the Arab Peninsula. It was the post-World War I era and the mandate system of the French and British controlled Iraq and Syria. He met and became acquainted with some of the rulers of the Arab countries and acquired invaluable first-hand knowledge of the character, vision, and beliefs of these rulers. In 1924, he wrote various accounts of his travels in both Arabic and English under the collective title *Mulouk al Arab* (Kings of the Arabs).

Besides his writing, Rihani delivered various speeches throughout the Arab world, the United States, and Canada about social reform, politics, Pan-Arabism, the cooperation and dialog between East and West, as well as poetry and philosophy. In his last years, Rihani carried on writing books in both English and Arabic and was actively concerned with political, literary, and philosophical questions. He held close contact with many political leaders, poets, writers, scholars, and artists. In 1940, Ameen Rihani died at the age of 64 at his hometown of Freike, Lebanon.

After his death, 28 of Rihani's Arabic poems were collected and published posthumously under the title *Hutaf-ul Awdiya* (Hymns of the Valleys, 1955). One last major poetry collection (88 poems) of Rihani's English poetry was published recently as 2009 entitled *Waves of My Life and Other Poems*. Those Arabic and English poems were written and published in periodicals between 1905 and 1940. Some poems from Rihani previous collections were republished after being renamed; others were collected from newspapers

and periodicals where they had previously been published.

I will start chapter II by reviewing Whitman's biography with respect to the development of his poetics as far as this is relevant to Ameen Rihani. It will trace how Rihani reconstructed Whitman's poetics. While the first section of chapter II shows Whitman's reception in Rihani's English poetry, its second section deals with Rihani's Arabic poetry. It will cover the major works of Rihani in their chronological order and compare them to Whitman's poetry. I will demonstrate in which respects Rihani is a Whitmanite author and show how Rihani, who sought freedom from what he felt were artificial styles of expression and restricting forms of the past, introduced the practice of free verse to Arabic poetry and naturalized it.

The third chapter of my thesis will trace Whitman's innovative themes, style, and beliefs present in Rihani's work. It is divided into six thematic sub-chapters, namely "Sufism and Mysticism", "American Transcendentalism", "Life vs. Death", "New York", "Freedom and Democracy", and "The Orient". In the section on, Sufism and Mysticism, I will discuss Sufism and its reception in Western literature. Sufist mysticism and philosophy are prominent in Whitman's work including the desire for a complete fusion and unity with the Divine and Universe through intuition. I will present examples of Whitman's reconstruction of Sufism and Eastern mysticism and compare those themes and notions to Rihani's writings.

The second section of chapter III will deal with American Transcendentalism, which Rihani received not only by way of Whitman's texts but directly from the American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson. The critic Terri DeYoung described Rihani's connection to Emerson, who "was something of a mentor figure to Whitman, and, less directly, to Rihani" (2004: 4). I

will define American Transcendentalism and its main ideas and values such as how the Divine suffuses nature, learning as well as how humans gain spiritual cleansing from experiencing nature, and that all mankind is sacred and divine for being part of the universal spirit. I will trace and compare those notions in Whitman's and Rihani's writings and show how Whitman's exaltation of the poet as a prophet is echoed by Rihani.

The third section of chapter III also deals with American Transcendentalism, focusing on its concepts of life and death. I will explore those concepts in Whitman's and Rihani's writings. For Whitman, death must be accepted as a sort of salvation for our souls that returns them to the universe. I will give examples of Whitman's poetry representing this ideology, especially his "grass" imagery in "Song of Myself", which is reflected in Rihani's imagery of "leaves". In this sub-chapter, I will show how Rihani reconstructed Whitman's transcendental, mystical perspective of life and death.

The fourth section of Chapter III deals with New York City and its effects, as a modern metropolitan urban space, on Whitman's and Rihani's work. I will show how New York provided an ideal environment for Whitman and Rihani to establish their literary career. Both writers sang and celebrated the city and its crowd, they recognized its debts on their work and its leading role for shaping a new future worldwide. I will tackle some of Whitman's poems with explicit references to New York City, such as identifying New York as his city in "Starting from Paumanok", celebrating its inclusivity and welcoming the "East" to New York in "A Broadway Pageant", expressing his enjoyment for its activities and life style in "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun", and celebrating the sexuality of the city and its crowd in "City of Orgies". Rihani made use of those themes in his poems "New Year's Eve" and "New York". I will compare those poems and show the similarities between

Whitman and Rihani for expressing their love and criticism to New York City.

The fifth section of Chapter III shows the contribution of New York City to Whitman's and Rihani's vision of freedom and democracy. I will examine their democratic thoughts and the processes that shaped their democratic visions throughout their careers. Interestingly, both Whitman and Rihani witnessed a major war, the American Civil War and World War I respectively, which transformed their democratic visions. I will show how Whitman's activism and journalism during the American Civil War inspired and empowered the Arab-American writer, Rihani, to assume a similar role for Pan-Arabism and other political causes in the aftermath of the First World War.

The sixth and last sub-chapter is entitled "The Orient". It will bring chapter III full circle by returning to the Eastern themes in Whitman's and Rihani's writings. I will explore Whitman's images of the Orient in his "Passage to India" and "Salut au Monde!" and compare those images with Rihani's poetry. I will argue that Whitman's rhetorical construction of the Orient encouraged and empowered Rihani to write on his own heritage and birthplace. Ultimately, Rihani sought in his writings to overcome the barriers between Eastern and Western civilizations and backgrounds, build bridges between nations and people, and contribute to the cultural dialogue between the United States and the Arab World.

Chapter IV will summarize my interpretations and provide my concluding thoughts for this thesis. I will show where the Mahjar writers situated themselves between their Arab culture and their new one in the United States of America and demonstrate the presence of Rihani and Whitman in their works on both formal and thematic levels. I will investigate how Whitman's impact – through the Mahjar writers – establishes an intercultural dialogue and

resemblance between the American and the Arabic cultures. I will talk about the significance of the works of Mahjar writers for Arabic poetry and how they established what is known now as modern Arabic literature.

Arab-American literature is a previously neglected part of American literature that is only now receiving increasing attention from university departments with Middle Eastern concerns and intellectuals who are interested in Arabic culture. Because of the recent increase of interests in this field, most of the secondary literature I read and referred to were published in the Twenty-First century. *The Book of Khalid: A Critical Edition* (2016) is one of the most notable collections of essays among those recent publications. The editor, Todd Fine, included in this edition Rihani's novel *The Book of Khalid* of 1911, a substantial glossary, and supplemental essays by leading Rihani scholars. Demonstrating the reach and significance of the work, these essays address a variety of themes, including Rihani's creative influences, philosophical elements, and the historical context of the novel.

In his essay in this book, the critic Hani Bawardi spoke on the significance of doing studies on Rihani:

> Rihani's importance necessitates a call for more translations, historiographies and research to attain the continuity needed for more solid foundation on which to build an Arab American story. Rihani begins with transnationalist maxims, an admixture of modern humanism fused with ancient Arab traits extracted from the classical Arabic – that is, tropes of a complex Arab Americanism anchored in a deeper historical construct that is very much part of the modern world (2016: 307).

Studying Rihani as a pioneer and role model for Arab-American writers will provide an understanding of how Eastern and Western literatures meet. Nash explained one of the main reasons to study Rihani's pioneering role as early as in 1998:

> None of the other Mahjar authors had as wide an interest in their adopted country as Ameen Rihani. Confident enough of his own biculturality, he sets out to make an inventory of the impact upon himself exploring the wider implications of being a pioneer Arab-American (1998: 27-28).

Studying Whitman in Rihani's work helps recognize the basis on which Rihani constructed his work, and the Mahjar School at large. Albert Rihani also believed that "[a] comparison between *Leaves of Grass* and *Hymns of the Valleys* could have been a pioneering work in comparative literature" (2007: 99).

The fundamental goal of this study is to identify and interpret the patterns that characterized the process by which Whitman's works are received by Rihani's creative writings. I will investigate how through Whitman's reception, the Western and Eastern traditions were synthesized in Rihani's literary practices, what specific elements Rihani received from Whitman and American Transcendentalism at large, and how those artistic concepts and features were developed in Rihani's work. In this way, my thesis will fill a deplorable gap in the study of Whitman's reception in world literature.

Chapter II: Whitman in Rihani's English Poetry

No American author has provoked more studies of his or her reception than Whitman. The number of writings on Whitman's reception in different contexts and countries affirm him as America's most significant and influential writer. Whitman developed and mastered his new style of poetry in free verse as the poetic equivalent to the changes in and needs of the United States. Investigating the backgrounds of Whitman's free-verse poetry would help us understand why Rihani chose to adopt Whitman's style.

Whitman was born in 1819 in Long Island, New York and grew up in a large family of modest means. His parents were very proud and patriotic and named Walt's younger brothers after their favorite American figures George Washington Whitman, Thomas Jefferson Whitman, and Andrew Jackson Whitman. When Whitman was four years old, his family moved to Brooklyn to seek better economic opportunities and a better quality of life in the big city. At age eleven, Whitman was taken out of school by his father to help with the household income. He started to work as an office boy for an attorney and then in the printing business. At the age of sixteen, he moved to Manhattan to work as a compositor; after one year he moved back to Long Island to work as a schoolteacher for several years. In 1838, Whitman founded his own newspaper in Huntington, Long Island, *The Long-Islander*, then he moved to New York City to work for various newspapers.

The return to New York City marked the start of Whitman's career as a fiction writer. According to the eminent Whitman critic Ed Folsom, "[a]bout twenty different newspapers

and magazines printed Whitman's fiction and early poetry" (2005: 8). He was the editor of the *Aurora* in 1842, and later in that year he published a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans*, in the magazine *New World*. When Whitman was the editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle* from 1846 to 1848, he introduced literary reviews to the newspaper, and commented on writers such as Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Ibid*.). Being an editor provided Whitman a platform from which to watch and comment on various issues from politics to poetry. In 1848, Whitman moved south to New Orleans to become the editor of the *Crescent*, but later that year he returned to Brooklyn and established the *Brooklyn Freeman.* Whitman witnessed slavery during the time he spent in New Orleans, which resulted in his first free-verse lines found in his notebook:

> I am the poet of the body
> And I am the poet of the soul
> I go with the slaves of the earth equally with the masters
> And I will stand between the masters and the slaves,
> Entering into both so that both shall understand me alike (2005: 18).

In these lines Whitman expressed his frustration with the Democratic Party's compromising approaches to the slavery crisis. He hoped that his words would reach masses of average Americans to promote equality between the slaves and the masters. "I am the poet of the body/ And I am the poet of the soul": the "body" and the "soul" were always at the center of Whitman's poetry and they were inextricably linked for him. It is interesting how he defined himself as the poet of the body and the soul in his first attempt to write free-verse poetry.

These poetic lines, which marked a radical departure from established poetic norms, were a response to Emerson's call to American writers to abandon the conventions and

traditions of English poetry in his essay “The Poet” (1844):

> Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boats, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres (1844: 41).

During the first half of the Nineteenth century, Americans looked for signs of an emerging cultural style distinct from European precedents. Emerson asked the poets, whom he viewed as the literary equivalent of American frontiersmen and pioneers, to give this country the songs it deserved. He also asked them to abandon the traditional poetic meter for a direct and original apprehension of a new world. He urged the American poets to break with the past and with imitation in favor of what was uniquely American. Emerson dismissed concerns over poetic rules or form when he claimed: “For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem, – a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing” (*Ibid*.: 10).

Indeed, following Emerson’s call many American poets abandoned European subjects. However, these poets continued to follow European conventions of form. It was Whitman who first abandoned these conventions, opening the line of the poem to allow greater freedom of expression. Whitman stated in 1860: “I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil” (Trowbridge, 1902: 166). Trowbridge explains that Whitman “freely admitted he could never have written his poems if he had not first come to himself, and that Emerson helped him to find himself” (*Ibid*.). Consequently, Whitman’s innovative American voice came as an answer to Emerson’s call to create a unique

national literary culture independent of European models, especially of British traditions.

Emerson's influence on Whitman is clearly traceable since Whitman's first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855). The preface of this poetry collection is considered a celebration of America and her people: "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (1855: iii). Whitman, referring to himself as the bard of America, in these patriotic lines verifies Emerson's words by viewing America as poem, and even goes further to call it "the greatest poem".

In his democratic and egalitarian understanding, Whitman continues in his 1855 preface to define what it means to be an American: "The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people. To him the other continents arrive as contributions […] he gives them reception for their sake and his own sake. His spirit responds to his country's spirit" (1855: iv). In Whitman's sense, to be an American means not just having one characteristic, or coming from one race, but rather an American is a combination of all different races sharing their life experiences, which makes America the 'greatest poem', i.e. the greatest country. Whitman's American "race of races" is a salad bowl that includes all citizens regardless of the nation they originated in. Thus, 'American poets' symbolize the different races of people who are Americans, but each poet has had similar experiences that bring him together with all others to compose the American poem, in spite of their differences.

Whitman's inclusive America is a celebration of this new young country built upon the emigration from the Old World. Whitman's America welcomes the Arab-American poet, Ameen Rihani, among many other poets coming from all over the world, to bring their

voices to their new country, America, and to distinguish American literature as independent from the European and the Old World literature and poetry.

In the first, 1855, edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman seemed to record systematically every single thing that Emerson had called for (see Folsom, 2005: 22) with strong patriotic free-verse lines, such as: “Great is the greatest nation . . the nation of clusters of equal nations” (1855: 94). Whitman’s America offers unlimited boundaries and infinite promise, he imagined a universal hegemony for his nation:

> Great is the English brood . . . . What brood has so vast a destiny as the English?
> It is the mother of the brood that must rule the earth with the new rule,
> The new rule shall rule as the soul rules, and as the love and justice and equality that are in the soul rule (*Ibid*.).

These lines echo Whitman’s enthusiasm concerning the Mexican-American War of 1846-48 that he had already expressed in his editorials for the *Brooklyn Eagle*. He celebrated and welcomed the annexation of new territories to the United States after winning the war, including nearly all of present-day California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico. He saw in US-American expansion a way to spread liberty and democracy to those new frontiers.

Whitman sent a copy of his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* to Emerson, and Emerson wrote him a private letter that Whitman included in his second edition of *Leaves of Grass* a year later. Emerson recognized *Leaves of Grass’* special spirit and style: “I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed […] It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature […] I greet you at the beginning of a great career […] It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging” (1856: 345). This recognition by one of the best-known writers of his time

was very important to Whitman and he not only included it, without Emerson's permission, in his second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, but also included a long public letter back to Emerson in the same book, addressing him as "master".

What makes *Leaves of Grass* special and influential is its unique style and form, i.e. writing poetry in free verse. Free verse is a literary device known as poetry free from limitations of regular meter and rhyme scheme. Whitman used alternative poetic techniques, such as different lengths of lines, listing and cataloging, unconventional symbols and characters, adding organized irregularity such as anaphora, repetition, and parallelism.

The first edition ofWhitman's of *Leaves of Grass* starts with the following lines:

> I celebrate myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
>
> I loafe and invite my soul,
> I lean and loafe at my ease....observing a spear of summer grass (1855: 13).

With these verses he introduced himself and his poetry to the literary world of his day. In the second edition of 1856, this poem was named "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American"; in the 1860-61, 1867 and 1871 editions it was called "Walt Whitman"; and in the last two editions of 1881-82 and 1891-92, its title was "Song of Myself". We notice some of the obvious stylistic traits of Whitman's poetry in those lines, such as changing line lengths and repetition.

In his article, "Style and Technique(s)", the critic James Perrin Warren states that when Whitman abandons, almost completely, the metrical tradition of accentual syllabic verse, he embraces instead the prosody of the English Bible, combining some of his stylistic

innovations such as syntactic parallelism, repetition, and cataloguing to create an expansive, oracular, and often incantatory effect (see Warren: 1998).

When Whitman adopted free verse for *Leaves of Grass*, it was not the common style for poetry. His poetry is considered a landmark for introducing free verse into the Western literary canon, and Whitman is often called the Father of Free Verse in world literature. Whitman acknowledged that free verse originates in the Bible and praised the Bible as a poetic entity. As part of his last book, *November Boughs*, he wrote in the essay "The Bible as Poetry":

> I have said nothing yet of the cumulus of associations (perfectly legitimate parts of its influence, and finally in many respects the dominant parts) of the Bible as a poetic entity, and of every portion of it […] No true bard will ever contravene the Bible. If the time ever comes when iconoclasm does its extremest in one direction against the Books of the Bible in its present form, the collection must still survive in another, and dominate just as much as hitherto, or more than hitherto, through its divine and primal poetic structure. To me, that is the living and definite element-principle of the work, evolving everything else. Then the continuity; the oldest and newest Asiatic utterance and character, and all between, holding together, like the apparition of the sky, and coming to us the same. Even to our Nineteenth Century here are the fountain heads of song (1888: 45-46).

When Whitman enthusiastically praised the Bible as poetry, he justified his own style of writing free-verse poetry. He also defended his choice of style in his poem "Had I the Choice":

> Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,
> To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, and emulate at will,
> Homer with all his wars and warriors–Hector, Achilles, Ajax,
> Or Shakspere's woe-entangled Hamlet, Lear, Othello–Tennyson's fair ladies,

Metre or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect rhyme, delight of singers;
These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me transfer,
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
And leave its odor there (1891-92: 389).

The speaker in this poem expresses his desire to be able to imitate the natural rhythms of the sea – the wave motion – by employing free-verse rhythms. He says that even if he had the skill of the great poets of the world, he would trade it away if only he could capture the sea-rhythm. Thus, the speaker implies that even the greatest traditional poetry can be seen as pale and inferior compared to nature and invites the comparison between verse and the rhythm of the waves; the waves are naturally free whereas metered and rhymed verse can be seen as artificial. Free verse instead aspires to being as naturally free as the waves.

Later on, Whitman justifies the use of free verse as a poetic form which honors a truly democratic society. He defends his own practice by stating that American democracy requires an artistic revolution and that “there must imperatively come a readjustment of the whole theory and nature of poetry” (1891-92: 430). Free verse is the result of Whitman’s vision of a society where all humans are equal in fundamental worth and social status. This vision is reflected in Whitman’s diction, punctuation, syntax, and meter as well as his structure and themes. Angus Fletcher explains the need of such a new, democratic form of poetry: “a new poetic expressive language whose grammar would reflect the different basis of speech and communication in the new political climate – a new grammar of status relations. Grammar implies the concept of social mechanism. The American sentence will actually have to change” (2004: 101). Thus, Fletcher calls Whitman’s new

poetic form “a new language of equality” (*Ibid*.: 112).

Whitman has been called the first great innovator in American poetry. Persistent innovation marks Whitman's style in every phase of his long career until his death in 1892. Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* altered the course of world literature and introduced the free-verse style of writing to many authors considered to be a part of world literature.

Although Rihani’s wrote few poems in English in free verse; his first poetry book, *The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala,* was not written in free-verse style. Rihani acquainted himself with Arabic literature and read the literary works of Abu’l-Ala al-Ma’arri (973-1057) during the two years he spent in Lebanon recovering from sickness from 1897 until 99. Abu’l-Ala, a blind Arab philosopher, poet, and writer, wrote in many literary genres including poetry, commentary, criticism, and prose. Rihani admired Abu’l-Ala so much that he compared him to Christ, Prophet Muhammad, Paul the Apostle, Socrates, and Dante when he wrote:

> I shall tell you of examples of extreme despair that left a light which still gleams in the world. Was the despair of Christ in Gethsemane, of the prophet in the cave, of Paul the apostle in a boat tossed by waves, of Socrates in his prison, of the Arab poet Abu’l-Ala in his isolated room, or of Dante in his exile similar to that of their neighbors the farmers, the sailors or the collectors of tithes, or rather to that of their colleagues the poets and writers? (Oueijan, 1998: 33)

Rihani here explains how new hope and great changes in human history were born out of hardships and difficult times. “[P]rophet in the cave” refers to the hard times that the prophet Muhammad undergoes in his Hegira (migration) with his companion Abu Bakr from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) when they hide in the cave and escape their pursuers in the year 622.

An early collection of Abu’l-Ala’s poems appeared as *Saqṭ Al-Zand* (The Tinder Spark)

and a second one under the title *Luzum ma lam Yalzam* or *Luzumiyat* (Unnecessary Necessity or Necessities). The title *Unnecessary Necessity* refers to how Abu'l-Ala saw the business of living and alludes to the unnecessary complexity of the rhyme scheme used in Arabic literature. A'ishah Abd Al-Rahman, an Egyptian writer and professor of Arabic language and literature and Qur'anic studies, identifies *Unnecessary Necessity* as unprecedented in composing poetry for using the double-consonant rhyme scheme. It was an innovative and unprecedented way for composing poetry in Arabic literature (see Abd Al-Rahman, 1990: 336). Abu'l-Ala's use of this innovative scheme was the first major attempt to break out of the traditional rules of Arabic poetry. Abu'l-Ala's double-consonant rhyme scheme poetry challenged the necessity of rhyming in Arabic poetry traditions.

The critic Ahmad Hasan Al-Zayyat explains that Abu'l-Ala al-Ma'arri cared little about the grammatical aspects of the Arabic language. The artist also used unusual words and scientific terms in his poetry. Abu'l-Ala's poetry contains less exaggeration and more constraint than his predecessors among Arab poets. He established unparalleled poetic meters which carry similarities to the nomadic Bedouins' poetic style (see Al-Zayyat: 1999).

Abu'l-Ala reminded Rihani of Whitman and he felt the desire to share the work of this Whitmanesque writer with Western readers. In 1899, upon his return from Lebanon to his home in New York City, he started to translate some of the quatrains of Abu'l-Ala into English. Rihani compiled his translation in quatrain form instead of the complex tradition of Arabic poetry; this led to significant changes in the form and content of some of Abu'l-Ala poems. Rihani's choice made it impossible to follow the original word by word or line by line. As a translator he rather omits, displaces, expands, and merges ideas and lines

to suit his quatrain adaptation. Upon adopting the quatrain form, he has to follow their rules by arranging the poems in such a way that each quatrain can stand alone as a separate unit and function as an independent construct of meaning.

Most of Abu'l-Ala's poetry is written in form of the qaṣīdah, often translated as ode form. Qaṣīdah is a two-thousand-year old Eastern poetic tradition, the only form that existed in the classical period of Arabic literature. The qaṣīdah tradition has an intricate type of poetic prosody and it depends on *Al-Buhūr* (regular rhythms) and *Qafiyah* (rhyme scheme). Qaṣīdah poems usually consist of between twenty five and one hundred verses (*abyat*, singular *bayt*). The two halves of the first verse rhyme, and the same rhyme is used once in the following poetic lines. Nicholson notes that "[b]lank-verse is alien to the Arabs, who regarded rhyme not as pleasing ornament or 'troublesome bondage,' but as a vital organ of poetry" (2018: 62).

Rihani translated 126 quatrains from the three volumes of Abu'l-Ala's poems collected in *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala* published in 1903 in the U.S. He arranged them in an order which seemed logical to him. The quatrain is a poetic form in Persian, not in Arabic poetry. Rihani, influenced by Whitman, argued against classical Arabic poetry, which can be seen as one of the main reasons why he would not comply with the techniques of conventional poetry – although the quatrain form is hardly one that Whitman would have considered a vehicle for his revolution in poetry.

The critic David Connolly points out how translating Arabic poetry in general and Abu'l-Ala's in particular is a practice of exoticism (see Connolly, 2001: 170-176). Rihani's rendition has been influenced by several ideologies and theories, most notably by Orientalism; such as the exotic and mystic themes in the following quatrain:

Life’s mystic curtain, held by Destiny,
Its darkest shadow now casts over me;
    It rises – and behold, I act my part;
It falls – and who knows what and where I’ll be? (1903: 37).

In *The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala*, Rihani’s strategy was to conform closely to the culture of the language being translated to rather than to stay close to its source text Abu’l-Ala’s original Arabic poetry. Rihani’s translation can be considered a domesticating translation when comparing the original Arabic text to Rihani’s English renditions as I will demonstrate below. Rihani wrote:

A church, a temple, or a Kaba Stone,
Koran or Bible or a martyr's bone –
    All these and more my heart can tolerate
Since my religion now is Love alone (1903: 42).

This quatrain was inserted and has no equivalent in Abu’l-Ala’s poetry. The literal translation of the Arabic lines is:

Religion and impiety, and stories told;
A Qur‘an, and a Testament, New and Old.
Each generation has its convictions,
Has any generation acquired true faith?

دينٌ وكُفرٌ، وأنباءٌ تُقَصُّ، وفُرْقانٌ يَنُصُّ، وتَوْراةٌ، وإنجيلُ
في كلّ جيلٍ أباطيلٌ يُدانُ بها، فهلْ تَفَرّدَ يَوماً بالهدى جِيل؟

Rihani added his lines to push Abu’l-Ala’s ideas even further and promote the central Western ideas in general, and those of Whitman in particular, such as his reference to equality and the essential divinity of all people. I will provide an in-depth analysis of how Rihani was influenced by Whitman’s thoughts concerning mysticism in Chapter III.

Rihani's work thus qualifies as an adaptation; the authorship of the translated poems should rather be attributed to Rihani than to Abu'l-Ala. This can be seen in the paraphrasing of the text or in rendering the original lines to suit their new form, which also resulted in differences in word choice and associations. *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala* is a fine example demonstrating Rihani's program to bridge the cultural gap between East and West and to promote Western poetic themes, especially those he received from Whitman, such as his reference to social equality and the essential divinity of all people.

In the preface to *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*, Rihani complains that sometimes it was almost impossible to adhere to the letter and convey the exact meaning of a text without diminishing its aesthetic dimension. He attributes that to the lack of affinity between the Arabic and English languages and the difference of their standards of art and beauty. Although Rihani claims that he preserved the imagery of the Arabic source text, we can easily see how Rihani, the poet, used an intuitive and paraphrastic translational practice and not a literal one as he claims in his preface.

Rihani received his education in New York and was familiar with the writing of Whitman and many other Western writers. Thus, "his interest in Arabic literature unfolded against a familiarity with American and Western literature – not vice versa" (Schumann, 2016: 278). Rihani's abandonment of the traditional verse of Arabic poetry and his choice of the quatrain along with its cultural connotations is an evidence of his Orientalist ideology. Thus, his translation asserts the Orientalist view of Eastern languages and the judgment that they are partially inaccessible, which results in his reducing the mysticism and exoticism of the Arabic text. Nash describes Rihani's writings as being influenced by Western culture and literature as "diluting or acculturating oriental idioms to suit occidental

pre-dispositions and expectations" (1998, 18).

When Rihani domesticated the work of Abu'l-Ala, he grasped this opportunity to develop his own thoughts and frame his own work that he carried out alongside reading works for Whitman and other modern Western writers. Rihani was careful not to challenge Western knowledge explicitly:

> The English-reading public, here and abroad, has already formed its opinion of Khayyam, and let it not, therefore, be supposed that in making this claim [Omar Khayyam being an imitator or a disciple of Abu'l-Ala] I aim to shake or undermine its great faith. Nor am I so presumptuous as to think that one could succeed in such a hazardous undertaking. My desire is to confirm and not to convulse, to expand and not to contract the Oriental influence on Occidental minds (1903: XIX).

Rihani's translation of his favorite Arabic author was his first experience with writing poetry. He wanted to draw the attention of Western readers to the greatness of his Arabic heritage, and to transmit the Eastern spiritual message and values to the West. Rihani's endeavor to make Western readers accept Abu'l-Ala is most visible when he describes Abu'l-Ala as "the Lucretius of Al-Islam, the Diogenes of Arabia and the Voltaire of the East" (*Ibid*.: VI).

Rihani revised his *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*, and he republished it in 1918 under the title *The Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala*. This edition featured 121 quatrains; some quatrains were removed, some revised, and some merged. Rihani's new edition and its changes to his rendition of Abu'l-Ala's poetry parallels Whitman's frequent changes of *Leaves of Grass*. In *The Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala,* Rihani also translated new poetry selections from Abu'l-Ala's second poetry collection *Luzumiyat* which lent Rihani's book its title. Rihani also mentions how *Luzumiyat* "refers to the special system of rhyming which the poet [Abu'l-

Ala] adopted" (1918: 15).

In his 1918 preface, Rihani praises Abu'l-Ala and his impact on Arabic literature: "[H]e might have found a palliative in human society… his fame spread from the sequestered village of Ma'arrah to the utmost confines of the Arabic speaking world… the death of a noted person among the Arabs, is always an occasion for the display of much eloquence and tears, both in prose and verse" (*Ibid*.: 13-14). He calls Abu'l-Ala "free", "candid", "downright", "independent", "skeptical", and "liberal thinker". In his later Arabic essay "Rwh Al-Lugha" (The Spirit of Language), Rihani also mentions how Abu'l-Ala's poetry has a unique and unconventional style, and praised his "exquisite poetry, profound wisdom and sublime philosophy" (Oueijan, 1998: 56). These labels clearly place Abu'l-Ala into the category of transcendental poets such as Whitman and Rihani himself.

Stefan Sperl points out that Abu'l-Ala "re-defines every element of tradition in the light of what he considers morality and reason". This was not the only reason for Rihani's interest in Abu'l-Ala's poetry. Sperl further argues that Abu'l-Ala assigned to classical Arabic poetry "a new function in a new poetic form" (1989: 100). As is the case with Whitman's poetry, Abu'l-Ala's texts were considered sophisticated in his own time. His style contains complex linguistic constructions, such as *badī* in Arabic – which is the recurrence of words and sounds – and figurative language that is rooted in the expression of Arabic. His unique style which differentiates Abu'l-Ala from all other poets of the Arabic literary canon, his mastery of the Arabic language which can be seen in his diction and imagery, as well as his philosophical views all can be seen as reasons for Rihani to see the spirit of Walt Whitman in Abu'l-Ala al-Ma'arri.

After his first book, *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*, had been published, Rihani gained more

confidence in using English in his literary texts. His first book, a translation, can be considered his entrance ticket to the Western literary sphere. It took him only two years to compose and publish his first poetry in the English language under the title *Myrtle and Myrrh* in 1905. Rihani spoke about his writings at that time in a letter to the poet Jamil Maalouf: “My Arabic writings are scarce these days, and I am mostly writing English poetry. And, soon, my poetical *diwan* [collection of poetry] will be published and you will be receiving a copy” (Albert Rihani, 2007: 30).

Rihani was a bilingual speaker of Arabic and English; Arabic was his mother tongue and English the language he had acquired by migration. He understood the significance of the new language of communication for his life. English was the language of dealing with Americans and the various ethnic groups emigrating to the United States of America. For example, New York “enclosed different ethnic or racial groups from Chinese in Chinatown to the Italians in Little Italy, Lebanese in Brooklyn, white Americans in Greenwich Village, and African Americans in Harlem. Moreover, it was exactly this human kaleidoscope that facilitated the process of absorption in the new social crucible” (*Ibid*.: 22). Rihani commented on this aim of addressing the West, represented here by the United States, at the end of his writing career:

> […] among the wondrous things that occurred to me in my intellectual transcendence and my patriotic evolution – since I had to be an American heart and soul, pulp and crest, one hundred percent as they say – was that I woke up one night at the break of dawn imagining myself bigger than America! [...] I am the only Lebanese Arab thinker – by God! – between one hundred and twenty million non-thinkers mixed turbidly together and all boasting of their Americanism […] generated in me, the Lebanese, the Arab, the lone thinker, some compassion towards the people cramped in the jungles of cities, between mountains of

> skyscrapers and of ignorance. And, this compassion begot a duty for saving those humans from that ignorance. How not to do so when I realized that they ignore all that I know and I do not ignore what they know, despite its scarcity (Rihani, 1975: 8).

Rihani's claim that he is "bigger than America" might at first seem to be a hyperbole driven by the (rather Whitmanesque) ego of an arrogant writer. However, his justification for having a different view of the world is his origin from a different culture that was unknown to most of the nation. Rihani justified his poetic ego later on when he mentioned his aim was to contribute and be part of the Western "knowledge": "to convey to the American nation a modest amount of knowledge that hurts neither its pride nor its affluence" (*Ibid*.: 8).

When we look at Whitman's writings, we see a similar poetic ego. In his poem "Song of Myself", the speaker, a persona calling himself Walt Whitman, keeps speaking in the first person – I, me, mine, my, myself – which demonstrates the poetic ego of the speaker Whitman. However, "Song of Myself" and *Leaves of Grass* at large are also full of "you". The second-person pronoun is used to emphasize the part of the reader. Thus, Whitman emphasizes the interdependent relationship between author and reader:

> I know perfectly well my own egotism,
> Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less,
> And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself (1891-92: 69).

In this passage, Whitman acknowledges his "egotism" and gives the reason for establishing a bond with the reader in this poem by using both first-person and second-person pronouns. The aim of this apparent self-absorption is Whitman's identification and real concern with the reader as prominently asserted in the very first stanza of "Song of

Myself": "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (*Ibid*.: 29). Like Rihani, Whitman declares here that the aim of his poetic ego is to share his knowledge with the reader.

Rihani's *Myrtle and Myrrh* is a poetry collection comprised of 50 poems. The poems in this book vary in themes; they range from the tragedy of death, nature as beauty, or losing hope to more specifically American topics such as self-reliance or change versus tradition. Most of the themes Rihani engages with developed from personal experience or were at least witnessed from a close distance, such as, in Schumann's words, religiosity, sectarianism, deracination and estrangement, social injustice, and political oppression (Schumann, 2016: 273).

The title page of Rihani's book reads: "*Myrtle and Myrrh* by Ameen Rihani translator of *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*". Rihani – or his publisher – tried to make use of Rihani's first translation of poetry to build his literary fame. Rihani started the preface of his book by addressing the Western reader from the perspective of the "East", "from Syria to America. The stranger at thy gate, hailing from the Orient" (1905: 5). This line can be read as a response to Whitman's "To a Stranger":

> Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you,
> You must be he I was seeking, or she I was seeking, (it comes to me as of a dream,)
> I have somewhere surely lived a life of joy with you,
> All is recall'd as we flit by each other, fluid, affectionate, chaste, matured,
> You grew up with me, were a boy with me or a girl with me,
> I ate with you and slept with you, your body has become not yours only nor left my body mine only,
> You give me the pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as we pass, you take of my

beard, breast, hands, in return,
I am not to speak to you, I am to think of you when I sit alone or wake at night alone,
I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again,
I am to see to it that I do not lose you (1891-92: 106).

Here Whitman addresses a stranger suggesting that they know each other from another (or different phase of) life, and he pledges in the last line to keep their spiritual connection alive. When Whitman leaves the stranger's gender indeterminate in his poem, he calls upon the idea of the democratic self. Thus, the term stranger can represent anyone and everyone. The connection between Whitman and strangers (humanity in general) extends far beyond the boundaries of the speaker's own life – to later include Rihani as well, or so at least the Arab-American felt. Whitman used the term “stranger” quite often in his poetry for the same purpose, e.g. in “A Song for Occupations”: “If you meet some stranger in the streets and love him or her, why/ I often meet strangers in the street and love them” (1891-92: 170). In turn, Rihani internationalizes the notion of stranger, more specifically to that of being a foreigner in America. He felt welcomed and invited by Whitman’s poetry. By identifying himself as a stranger, Rihani was able to continue the dialogue that Whitman had started earlier.

On the first page of his preface to *Myrtle and Myrrh*, we get the type of cataloging techniques for which Whitman is famous:

> This hand has often made mud-pies from earth that might have once mapped out the stars; or, in a drunken vision, heard the grumblings of a god and made of them a captivating creed: the brain of an ancient Assyrian astronomer; the spine of a Semitic sage; the cheeks of a Jezebel or a St. Takla; the heart of a slave that added beauty and horror to the chariot of a Babylonian king or a Roman conqueror: – any

or all of these might have besmeared this hand (1905: 5).

In this catalog, Rihani enumerates various exotic, ancient Oriental images and claims that they shaped his own style and themes of writing. These exotic images are used to appeal to a wide range of readers. Then Rihani explains the purpose of his book:

> He [Rihani] comes not to preach Buddhism to thee; nor Mohammedanism; nor Babyism; nor any other ism made picturesque and alluring by red caftans, white turbans, blue sashes and ambergris-scented lies.
>
> The only message he brings from his vine-crowned and pine-girdled Mother to bewitching and enriching America is that of love and longing and lacrimal. He came from the Mountains of Lebanon, from under the shadow of the Acropolis of Baalbak, to learn from the Yankees the way to do things – the way to rise and flourish and expand; or, as they put it, the way to get there and be it – from a mundane point of view, of course. It has been observed, however, that the spots of a leopard are irremovable; and so is the lethargy of an Oriental (*Ibid.*).

Clearly, a global vista is created here which is also characteristic of many of Whitman's poems. Rihani's strategy is his frequent use of basic Arabic terms such as Salaam or names of Arabic places and famous figures not only in *Myrtle and Myrrh's* preface, but also throughout his book. This helps distinguish himself as an Arab-American author and establish the transatlantic arc of his poetry. It is surprising that he uses the term "Mohammedanism" instead of "Islam". Although most authors would have used the term "Mohammedanism" in both English and American literature before the 1950s, Rihani is an Arab poet and he should have been aware that this term is considered to be offensive for the majority of Muslims since it suggests that a human being, "Prophet Mohammed" – rather than God Himself – is central to Muslims' dogma. Rihani may have used the term following what his American readership was familiar with, an assimilation we have

observed earlier in *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala.*

The frequent use of Arabic words and names adds a multilingual quality to Rihani's writings. This multilingual quality is commonly used by Whitman too as shown in his use of languages other than English such as French, Spanish, and others. It is a means of expressing the cultural diversity of the still new American nation and an attempt to distinguish American English from its British counterpart as a more global variant. Betsy Erkkila in her essay "Walt Whitman: The Politics of Language" argues that Whitman uses foreign words to write a multilingual poetry that celebrates the plurality of linguistic registers brought to North America by different groups of settlers. This distinguished American' writing and helped to get out of the shadow of English models (see Erkkila, 1983: 21-34).

A look into Whitman's preface of his first *Leaves of Grass* edition (1855) demonstrates the parallels to Rihani's notion of a multicultural society in his preface. Rihani being an Arab-American fits Whitman's idea of America as a multilingual poem and a "nation of nations":

> The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night. Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations (1855: 3).

When Whitman describes America as a "nation of nations", he refers to how America has acted as a salad bowl of many influences and in turn been able to create out of them peculiarly American art forms. Thus, in Whitman's sense America is the central poem and the Americans are all poets that create this collective poem, implicitly the greatest country

on earth. This metaphor indicates that each individual living in America, by coming from diverse nations, shapes the different cultures and races in United States.

A characteristic feature of Whitman's 1855 preface, and one it shares with Rihani's preface is that the poet learns from the common people. Ultimately, for Whitman the common people define the United States: "the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors . . . but always most in the common people" (*Ibid*.: 3). Rihani shares Whitman's thoughts regarding the significance of the common American people when he states the reason for his coming to the United States: "to learn from the Yankees the way to do things – the way to rise and flourish and expand… the way to get there and be it – from a mundane point of view" (1905: 5).

In the fall term of 2016, I taught a class on Walt Whitman and his reception in the Arab World. Rihani served as a very good example to demonstrate how Whitman is present in the poetry of Arab Writers. Rihani's diverse literary works were helpful to introduce the connection between Whitman and Arab writers to first- and second-year students at TU Dortmund University. Students read and compared Rihani's "Repentance" to Whitman's style of writing, for example:

> When tears wash tears and soul upon soul leaps,
> When clasped in arms of anguish and of pain.
> When love beneath the feet of passion creeps,
> Ah me, what do we gain?
>
> When we our rosy bower to demons lease,
> When Life's most tender strains by shrieks are slain,
> When strife invades our quietude and peace,

Ah me, what do we gain?

When we allow the herbs of hate to sprout,
When weeds of jealousy the lily stain.
When pearls of faith are crushed by stones of doubt.
Ah me, what do we gain?

When night creeps on us in the light of day.
When we nepenthes of good cheer disdain,
When on the throne of courage sits dismay,
Ah me, what do we gain?

When sweetness, goodness, kindness all have died,
When naught but broken, bleeding hearts remain.
When rough-shod o'er our better self we ride.
Ah me, what do we gain? (1905: 50).

The students referred to how this poem is full of natural metaphor such as “herbs of hate, weeds of jealousy, stones of doubt”. They compared them to Whitman’s lines of “Song of Myself”:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,

And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven (1891-92: 53-54).

In these lines, Whitman uses a leaf of grass metaphor as a manifestation of the infinite cosmos. For Whitman, even the tiny insignificant blade of grass possesses complexity and beauty equal to the whole expanse of heaven. Thus, my students commented on how Rihani’s “Repentance” can be compared to Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* with respect to the use of symbolism. Even “myrtle” and “myrrh” of Rihani’s book title are plants, which are common in the Middle East, parallel to Whitman’s ubiquitous “grass” symbolism in his

book. Like for Whitman, nature is divine for Rihani and everything in this universe is full of life and meaning. Rihani's images "When rough-shod o'er our better self we ride" and "When pearls of faith are crushed by stones of doubt" refer to when someone abandons his morals and values. The students pointed to the use of the anaphora "When". The repetition of the last verse of every quatrain "Ah me, what do we gain?" creates the impression that the speaker perceives life as "dull" and "meaningless". They commented on how Rihani used Whitmanian poetic techniques such as anaphora, repetition, and poetic images. The main difference or distinctness is how the speaker in "Repentance" contemplates the meaning of life and human existence. While Whitman's poetry is full of optimism, the speaker in Rihani's "Repentance" repeats the verse "Ah me, what do we gain?", reflecting upon our existence in a seemingly pessimistic way.

The melancholic tune of "Repentance" is present in most of the poems of *Myrtle and Myrrh*. The tendency toward pessimism goes back to the Abu'l-Ala. Rihani, upon composing his first book of poetry, had not forgotten about Abu'l-Ala, and he dedicated a short poem to him called "To Abu'l-Ala":

> In thy melancholy's pensive Fancy
> Wisdom rolled its beauteous stars and moons,
> Just as in my riotings of pleasure
> Thy lone midnights roll into my noons.
>
> Abu'l-Ala, in thy glorious darkness
> Didst thou not remember unborn me?
> In thy journey to the farthest planets
> Didst thou not a burdened shadow see?
>
> Ay, behind the portals of Saturnus
> Secretly the cup to thee I passed;

Long, long after this cup thou returnest
Filled with gems of fancy and recast.

In thy Prison a thousand Yamen weapons
Thou didst forge for the oppressed and weak:
In my attic a thousand Beauty roses
I pluck for thee from a Yankee cheek (1905: 59).

Rihani addresses Abu'l-Ala and has this dialogue with him earlier to justify and defend his poetry; he exalts the poet's literary legacy, whose "[w]isdom rolled its beauteous stars and moons". Rihani states that Abu'l-Ala's "lone midnights roll into my noons" to show how he received Abu'l-Ala's legacy. This idea is repeated when Rihani gave "secretly the cup to thee" and it was returned "with gems of fancy and recast". The dialog is full of positive images such as "wisdom", "pleasure", "glorious", and "thousand beauty roses". Rihani concludes the dialog by giving Abu'l-Ala roses from "a Yankee cheek"; Rihani has brought back Abu'l-Ala both spatially and temporarily to the United States to have this dialog with him.

Rihani's poem "To Abu'l-Ala" does justice to the earlier poet, an obligation Whitman started in his poem "Poets to Come". Whitman asked to be justified by future generations:

Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!
Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known,
Arouse! for you must justify me.

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,
I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in the darkness.

I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a casual look upon you and then averts his face,
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,

Expecting the main things from you (1891-92: 18).

"Poets to Come" calls on "poets", "orators", "singers", and "musicians" succeeding Whitman to "arouse" and "justify" him by creating the imaginative works that will "prove" and "define" what Whitman has begun. He gladly leaves them the interpretation of his thoughts: "leaving it to you to prove and define it/ expecting the main things from you". Whitman's expectation that future writers would pass on his work to posterity shows how he considers the poet as a builder of the bridge spanning time. He also expresses his wish to shift the focus from the form of the poem to its theme in his poem "Song of the Open Road": "I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes,/ We convince by our presence" (1891-92: 126).

In his poem "Ever to Be", Rihani expresses his desire to be included in the Western literary canon. The poem depicts Rihani's struggle at the beginning of his writing career, and how he was received and inspired by the Western writers:

My Far Cry, though no one should echo,–
Though no one to listen should stand,
I shall dare with my burden the darkness
And I shall not retreat from this land (1905: 9).

The speaker defies the burdens and hardships that he faces because he moved away from his homeland. Migrating from the "Mount of Lebanon" to the United States or to the West at means a difficult migration for Rihani to go through. These obstacles did not break Rihani's will to embrace his new country: "I shall not retreat from this land". The speaker goes on in the first and second stanza to describe his struggle as he becomes "crushed, cast away and forgotten". Rihani ends "Ever to Be" with the following stanza:

I can draw on the clouds for their water

And behold! I've of water a sea:
And though rootless, and friendless, and hopeless,
And loveless, and godless I stand,
The waves of my Life shall continue
To murmur and laugh on the Strand (*Ibid*.).

The word "clouds" could refer here to Western writers such as "Whitman" from whom Rihani is drawing (reading, learning, and borrowing) "their water" (writings). Rihani is acknowledging that he also has a large amount of "water", a capacity to produce works equal to those of these great figures. Afterwards, he lists his misfortune responsible for feeling "rootless" in his new emigrant home, being "friendless", "hopeless", "loveless", and "godless". In the last two lines, Rihani describes his own contribution as waves which will go on to contribute to the already existing literature. Being "godless" means that Rihani believes that God has forsaken him upon leaving behind his Eastern culture. This poem presents the hardships that Rihani has to endure as a result of his emigration to the West.

"The Brass Bed" is the most important poem in *Myrtle and Myrrh* for being the only one written in free-verse style:

I love thy color and thy symmetry;
I love the art that wrought thy glittering arms.
Thy canopy, thy satin portieres too;
I love the silks and feathers on thy breast –
The cushions and the pillows and the quilts:
I love thine every part.
Yet still more do I love to rest in thee –
To dream of art's perfection in thy frame;
Of paths as smooth, as shining as thy limbs;
Of scenes as exquisite as thy coils;
Of nooks as warm as thine hospitable bosom,

As cool and as refreshing as thy veinless naked arms,
I dream of all beneath thy soothing mantle (1905: 34).

In this first section, Rihani uses the brass bed as a symbol for the woman as a bed. When he describes the bed in detail and expresses his love for the color and every part of the bed, it is an expression of love for his beloved and every part of her body: “Of scenes as exquisite as thy coils”. We can find explicit, although more conventional erotic Whitmanian imagery here such as “glittering arms”, “I love the silks and feathers on thy breast”, “I love thine every part”, “art's perfection in thy frame”, “as smooth, as shining as thy limbs”, “as warm as thine hospitable bosom”, “[a]s cool and as refreshing as thy veinless naked arms”, “I dream of all beneath thy soothing mantle,” etc. There is indirect eroticism in the image “I love to rest in thee”. Physical erotic imagery is not commonly used in Arab-American literature and is considered to be a taboo at the beginning of the Twentieth century. Thus, Rihani uses indirect erotic images such as “I love to rest in thee” to refer to intercourse. In the third stanza, Rihani expresses:

If thou hadst but an eve to see.
To look upon the guest that lay upon thy floor
Beneath thy silken ceiling!
O, hadst thou but an ear to hear
The plaintive chirpings of this swallow-soul.
Couldst thou but feel her forehead
Moistened with the sweat of hope and pain.
For forty moons she lay within thine arms,
Rubbing her erstwhile rosy cheeks
Against the ulcers of Ayoub of yore.
Couldst thou but see, O Bed of Brass,
Couldst thou but hear, couldst thou but feel (*Ibid*.).

The speaker addresses the brass bed directly in the third stanza to say how lucky it is for having seen, heard, felt, and been with the speaker's beloved. Describing her as a guest "[t]o look upon the guest that lay upon thy floor" shows similarity to the role that Rihani ascribes to himself in his preface "an Oriental who makes himself thy guest". Rihani finishes the poem with the lines:

> Of what use all thy showy stuff –
> Thy glittering brass, the filigree of art.
> Thy floor of down and feather cushions all,
> Thy snow-white mantles, satin tapestries?
>
> Beauty and Pain!
> Death will not come with thee, O Pain!
> Life will not come with thee, O Beauty!
> The fires of hell are but a taper's flame compared to this.
>
> Thy guest, O Bed of Brass,
> Looks on thee with a yearning glance.
> And yet her soul, bearing the torch of Pain,
> Is searching all the worlds for Death (*Ibid*.: 34-35).

The last stanzas evoke Rihani's pessimistic view of life. The speaker wonders whether having such a fancy extravagant beautiful bed is ever justified. The bed here is a symbol of his beloved or just any woman. Rihani asserts that death will come without pain, bringing liberation from this sad life, and beauty does not really matter, because it will not last for long until death pays a visit. Nevertheless, the speaker declares in the last lines that his beloved looks eagerly at life, yet is impatient for her life to come to an end and be relieved from this pain.

The way that Rihani is listing and describing the female body in "The Brass Bed" is

reminiscent of Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric". Whitman celebrates and even glorifies the human body in all its forms in the nine numbered sections of his poem. Each one of those nine sections focuses on different observations and aspects of the human body. Whitman starts this poem charging the body with the soul:

> I sing the body electric,
> The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
> They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
> And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.
> Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal themselves?
> And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?
> And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?
> And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul? (1891-92: 81).

Whitman is asking these rhetorical questions to argue that the body is not different from the soul and that the two are identical. He wants to defend the body against the traditional Christian notion in his time which suggested that the body is different from – and below – the soul, and is the seat of the soul's corruption. Thus, "I Sing the Body Electric" is not a poem of doubt but a response to those who doubt the body. It is a paean of praise to the wonders of the sensual body (see J.R. LeMaster, Donald D. Kummings: 1998).

"I Sing the Body Electric" has many explicit images admiring the human body. In section two, Whitman idealizes the erotic attraction of the female body when he describes it with "a divine nimbus exhal[ing] from it from head to foot", and having a "fierce undeniable attraction" (*Ibid*.: 83). Whitman lists in this section the attractive parts of the female body, namely: "[h]air, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands all diffused". Women are presented as exceedingly sexual when "mad filaments, ungovernable shoots" of erotic attraction come out of their bodies. The speaker describes himself as "ungovernable" and

reaches the heights of sexual climax in the lines:

> Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb, love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching,
> Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous, quivering jelly of love, white-blow and delirious juice (*Ibid*.: 84).

The “delirious juice” refers to the happy ending, and many passionate and arousing words are used to describe this erotic love scene.

There are interesting similarities between Rihani’s “The Brass Bed” and Whitman’s “I Sing the Body Electric”. Rihani’s symbolism of the bed, “of nooks as warm as thine hospitable bosom” parallels Whitman’s reference to the female’s breast line, “the bosoms and heads of women”. The reference to the sexual act in Whitman’s poem “delirious juice” is slightly more explicit than Rihani’s symbolic sentence “I love to rest in thee”. While Rihani celebrates and speaks of only the female body in his passionate description, Whitman also provides description of the male body:

> The male is not less the soul nor more, he too is in his place,
> He too is all qualities, he is action and power (*Ibid*.).

Whitman equates the male body with that of the female. The male is described as possessing “action”, “power”, “defiance”, “passion”, “sorrow”, and “pride” in this poem. Rihani however uses symbolism to express the sexual act and sings only of the female body because it is not common to sing the male body in Arabic literature and culture, as Arab culture is generally more conservative than its Western counterpart. I will provide a more in-depth comparison between the two poets’ sexual imagery in Chapter III and discuss how living in New York City contributed to shape their sexual themes.

Rihani uses many Eastern images and settings in his *Myrtle and Myrrh* to appeal to his

target readership, i.e. the Arab-Americans who were often feeling nostalgic about their former home overseas and the Americans who are intrigued by the exotic Arabic setting. As a result, most of the English poems in his *Myrtle and Myrrh*, as well as his second English poetry collection, *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems* (1921), and his posthumous English poetry collection, *Waves of My Life and Other Poems* (2009), have different parts of the Arab world as their settings.

Rihani's English poetry celebrates the East and introduces it to the West in English, its own language. This strategy is evident in his domesticated rendition of Abu'l-Ala's Arabic poetry in quatrains following the success of Edward FitzGerald's English translation of Omar Khayyam's *Ruba'iyyat*. Rihani uses the same orientalist ideology in his *Myrtle and Myrrh*. I will show in chapter III how even Whitman's reception and reference to the Orient in his poems "Song of Myself", "A Persian Lesson", "Passage to India", and "Salut au Monde!" shaped Rihani's Oriental poetry. As for his Arabic poetry, Rihani utilizes Whitman's free verse and his Western themes as I will show in the second section of this chapter.

Whitman in Rihani's Arabic Poetry

Rihani's Arabic language was not fully developed at the beginning of literary career, writing and editing articles for *Al-Hoda*. Hajjar comments that "at this time, his Arabic was still weak and very often he restored to English to express himself more clearly, leaving the editor of *Al-Hoda* to finalise his articles in Arabic" (2010: 23). Rihani's decision to write in Arabic in addition to English was a conscious one that had implications for the future of Arab-American literature.

In the following years, Rihani made himself more familiar with Arabic literature and language through his translation work and Arabic articles in Arab-American newspapers. In publishing his first book of translation, *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*, Rihani gained enough confidence to start composing Arabic free-verse experiments for periodicals. Rihani's first Arabic poem, "Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt" (Life and Death), is the first published free-verse poem in Arabic. It appeared in 1905 in the leading Egyptian periodical of the day, *Al-Hilal*. Rihani starts his poem with the lines:

عادت أيام الأمطار والعواصف والأعصار
أيام الأنزواء في البيت حول النار
أيام جلود الصوف والموقد وما يصحبهما من القصص والأخبار
قد تصاعدت الرياح العجاجة الى قمة صنين
فاسمع صدى هبوبها في الأودية
اسمع حفيف الأوراق البالية التي تتقاذفها الأهواء
اسمع نقر الهواء على الزجاج وهبوبه فوق القرميد
وتنصت لدويه بين الأشجار وحول البيوت
مما يشير الى حادث هائل حدث في الطبيعة.

It was translated into English by Naji Oueijan:

The whirlwind and rainy, stormy days are back!
Those are the days when people on wool carpets
And around their home-fires retire
To tell tales and tidings,
While on the peak of Mount Sannin the wind blows,
And its roaring echo in the valleys below howls.
I can hear the rustling of the whirling dry leaves.
I can also hear the wind tapping on the glass of windows
And blowing the brick tiles off the roofs.
I can hear among the trees and around the houses its roar
Telling of a gigantic hap in Nature (2002: 4).

Rihani's "Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt" provides natural images from his home country in fall. We can see how it is Whitmanesque not only in style but in theme as well. The persona who "can hear" the sound of nature oversees echoes Whitman's line in "Salut au Monde!": "I hear the locusts in Syria as they strike the grain and grass with the showers of their terrible clouds" (1891-92: 113). Rihani's use of catalogues and anaphora "I can hear" in this poem, parallels Whitman's cataloguing and the anaphora "I hear" in his poem "Salut au Monde!". Rihani follows up these natural images with the themes of time and death: "Yes! This is fall! […] The wailing of time around the deathbed of its daughter?" Rihani further describes his experience:

Come with me, reader!
Enjoy this sensational sight,
Which calls for serenity, reverence, and joy!
Look how the news of death spreads among the trees
And through the rocks (2002: 5).

Echoing Whitman's "Song of Myself", Rihani is inviting the reader to join him in this experience or journey to reflect upon and enjoy nature. He elevates this scenery

describing it with words like “serenity”, “reverence”, and “joy”. Upon speaking of fall, time, and death, he invokes the image the leaves of trees here as well:

> Look how their leaves spread from side to side;
> And how they are carried by the angels of the wind
> to crown the dying year!
> Look how a dry leaf from a bewildered tree
> Is blown by the storm to nowhere
> Is this Life?
> Is it death?
> Listen!
> The Bulbul sings merrily in his cage (*Ibid*.).

There is a mix of sad and cheerful tones concerning death. A reference to the cycle of life can be found as these dry leaves will die and out of that death new life will sprout, and after each dying year (fall) a new year will follow (spring). There is a striking similarity to Whitman’s “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” for tackling with the themes of nature, time, and the cycle of life. The wind, which represents fate in Rihani’s poem, holds a similar role in Whitman’s lines: “Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore/ I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me” (1891-92: 198). The “Bulbul” singing in “Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt” parallels the mockingbirds singing their love in Whitman’s poem. Bulbul is the Persian and Arabic name for “nightingale” and it is considered a symbol of love, its melodious voice being a love message in the Orient. The bulbul is introduced in the last lines of section one: “graciously sings in his cage”, and this image is repeated in the last lines of the sections two, three and four as it is singing “merrily” and “joyfully”. Section five uses an Islamic image as “the Bulbul is exalted/ As he worships God”. In Islam, it is believed that all animals worship God, and Rihani uses this notion to make the poem appeal to the Arab readers. He uses the repetition of the lines referring to the image of

the bird singing in its cage as a leitmotif that neatly divides the poem into unequal segments. Rihani ends his poem describing the bird:

> In the sky the messengers of eternity appeared;
> Thy hold lamps to brighten the night of life.
> And the Bulbul leaves his cage;
> He sings joyfully
> As he soars into the sky (2002: 10).

The bird manages to get its freedom and leaves the cage. However, it is not clear how it escaped the cage, did it fly away, or it is dead and taken to the sky (heaven) by "the messengers of eternity"? Freedom is one of the main focal points of Rihani's Arabic poetry, and I will investigate in chapter III how Rihani focuses on Whitman's messages of democracy and freedom in his Arabic poetry to push his political ideology in the Arab World. Rihani goes on in his first Arabic free-verse poem borrowing from Whitman the themes of time, life, and death through bodily contact and passionate attraction:

> This day approaches its death-bed […]
> While this day dies dragging the sun
> Which dives with all its beauty into the sea to bathe
> With the naked day,
> Which joyfully sinks with the sun
> And dies on its breast like lovers do (*Ibid*.: 8).

Rihani describes the sunset scene in a passionate way with the sun diving into the sea to joyfully "bathe with the naked day", then it "dies on its breast". The word "joyfully" suggests an acceptance of death. Rihani uses catalogues of colorful exotic Oriental images to appeal to the Arab reader:

> […] the day is like this god [a Roman god],

Whose crown of flowers and jewels
Has been given to it before the sun.
This amazing crown is decorated with
The most beautiful and colorful jewels:
The blue emerald,
The red ruby,
The white pearl,
The yellow turquoise,
The brilliant diamond,
And the colors of onyx and coral.
All these noble colors fuse and dissolve
In a strange and wonderful aura around its head;
And the flowers of the earth fall in its love
And spread their scents around its deathbed (2002: 4-10).

The speaker portrays the deathbed of a Roman god filled with flowers. The crown of this god is decorated with many colorful precious stones. The Whitmanesque list of exotic images in this English translation is very close to the form of its original Arabic poem from 1905. “Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt” tackles themes of love, nature, spirituality, death, and freedom. It introduced the free-verse poetry practice to Rihani’s Arabic poetry, to the Arab-American writers who followed Rihani’s example, and the Arab writers inside and outside the Arab World as I will show later. “Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt” is experimental in its use of everyday language and slang words for the first time in Arabic poetry, in a way similar to Whitman’s.

In Arabic literature, Rihani’s poem “Al-Hayah wa Al-Mawt” and his book *Ar-Rihaniyat* marked the first attempt to free poetry from the qaṣīdah, the old Eastern poetic diction, theme, and style. In regard to style, the book did not follow the qaṣīdah poetic prosody, it neither had *Qafiyah* (rhyme scheme) nor *Al-Buhūr* (regular rhythms). In Arabic literature,

both rhyme scheme and regular rhythms were considered vital for verse. Though there had been some practices and attempts to write poetry in prose before, *Hutaf-ul Awdiya* is the first book of poetry written in free verse in the Arabic language.

There has always been a clear-cut differentiation between prose and verse in Arabic literature. However, the revelation of Qur'an in a highly rhetorical, rhythmical, and rhyming prose which slips into metrical rhythm from time to time had resulted in attempts to write in rhymed prose in the 'Abbasid period 750-1258. Shmuel Moreh in his article "Poetry in Prose (al-Shi'r al-Manthūr) in Modern Arabic Literature Middle Eastern Studies" writes that rhymed prose was called "Al-Nathr Al-Shi'ri" (poetic prose) because there was no meter and the intention was to write poetry. Moreh defines "Al-Nathr Al-Shi'ri" style, which rooted in the Qur'an, as "intellectual and clear, rhythmical and rhymed, highly polished, garnished with archaic expressions, rare and rich words, loaded with allusions to the rich heritage of Arabic literature and history, with proverbs, and poetry" (1988: 5).

These rhetorical and rhythmical prose writings – which used some poetic techniques – were important to deconstruct and dismantle the clear distinction between verse and prose and anticipate Rihani's free verse in Arabic literature. Whitman's free verse was inspired by the verset of the Bible; this in turn enabled Ameen Rihani and the other Christian Arab American poets to take up this practice "not only because they were acquainted with the verset through the Protestant and Catholic translations of the Bible but also because in their liturgies written in Arabic there was a deliberate effort to write lyrically in prose to develop an artistic style midway between prose and verse" (*Ibid*.: 3). Moreh identifies Rihani's "Al-Shi'r Al-Manthūr" (prose poetry or free verse) style which is rooted in the translation of the Bible to Arabic as "simple, plain, direct and precise. It is imaginative,

sentimental, lyrical and compact" (*Ibid*.: 5). Moreh concludes that Rihani used "the Whitmanian 'free verse' which dispenses with the conventional meters and rhyme and applies a new and free rhythm which sometimes slips into conventional meter" (*Ibid*.: 9).

Adopting the verset of the Bible for prose poetry in Arabic completes the full circle of the Bible connection to free verse. Clearly, the Bible was the common ground to inspire and adopt free-verse techniques; Whitman was inspired by the Bible as a poetic entity as I showed earlier. The critic Layla Al Maleh recognized the Western effect on the choice of Arab American writers: "Technically, the more flexible verse forms that they came to know in the West could, if emulated, liberate them from the weight of conventional Arab versification" (2016: 314).

In 1998, Naji Oueijan translated selected essays from Rihani's *Ar-Rihaniyat* in his book *Ar-Rihaniyat – Excerpts from Ar-Rihaniyat.* In those essays, Rihani criticizes themes, diction, style, metaphor, and techniques used for the qaṣīdah. For example, in his "Min Ealaa Jisr Brooklyn" (From Brooklyn Bridge), Rihani suggests that he acquired his poetic divine inspiration from nature:

> If you reader, were a poet, a photographer or a writer or if you were a dyer, a tanner or a shoemaker, look at nature. First you'll acquire the divine inspiration and quote the amazing colors, beautiful sights, gracious forms and celestial rhythms […] Nature, art and perseverance are the basis of the intellectual work and the fundamentals of spiritual life (Oueijan, 1998: 12).

It is interesting how similar Rihani's vision is to Whitman's, especially in his "Had I the Choice". In his Arabic essay, Rihani guides the Arab poets, writers among other common people to look to nature as a source of divine and spiritual inspiration. Like Whitman in "Had I the Choice", Rihani argues that the poetic imagery, forms, and rhythm should be

inspired by nature.

In his article “Altaeziat fi Almusibat walmusibat fi Altaezia” (The Calamity of Condolence), Rihani borrows from Whitman the image of free-verse correspondence to natural ocean-tides. He starts his article with the lines “Mother Nature, which is my source, my identity and finality, is also the source of my calamity. My calamity is the consequence of hidden factors manifested in the crop of the fields as they do in my own soul” (*Ibid*.: 41). Rihani begins the article by acknowledging that nature is his identity, resolution, and literary source. Furthermore, he states that nature is the source of his “calamity” (tragedy) source that is rooted deep in by his soul.

Following Whitman’s celebration of America and her people with the words “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem”, Rihani describes his calamity as a “verse in a comprehensive and endless divine poem. It is a verse in a poem composed by the Creator; in its oceans the tides of disasters clash with skies, from its rhyme the silver rivulets of love flow, and at the sounds of its words the fires of passion, sorrow and despair rage” (*Ibid*.).

Rihani identifies himself with nature and describes both as a divine poem composed by the “Creator”. He is part of a “comprehensive and endless” divine poem representing humanity. The tides of the oceans refer here to the length of the lines of this divine poem. The image echoes Whitman’s images of imitating the rhythms of the sea in his “Had I the Choice” or “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”. The lines are not the only natural phenomena of this poem but also the rhyme “the silver rivulets of love flow” and the meter and the words’ sound “the fires of passion, sorrow and despair rage”. Rihani reaffirms their transcendental perfection and holiness in the following lines:

> It is the poem of life composed by the poet of heaven and earth; a poem whose valleys, plains, mountains and oceans knit its words, whose stars and moons punctuate it, whose winds and storms mold its rhymes, whose national and individual events generate its paragraphs and where life and death interrupted by silence, tears, and smiles found its center […] Yes, my calamity is one verse of this poem, but this verse is composed especially for me (*Ibid*.: 41).

By describing the Creator as "the poet of heaven and earth", Rihani goes further than Whitman with this image of describing the creation as a poem but also to describe the Creator as a Poet. It suggests that this Poet creates everything in harmony, balance, consistency, and unity. Rihani asserts that he is "one verse of this poem" equal to the other common people who are also included in this poem. "[T]his verse is composed especially for me" is Rihani's justification for using and selecting this 'natural' verse – the free verse – for the Arabic poems which were included in the book *Ar-Rihaniyat*. Thus, Rihani attempts to justify and explain his "natural" free-verse poetry and to introduce it to the Arab readers for the first time in those critical essays. He also criticizes the old traditions in his "The Calamity of Condolence": "we should remove the old peel if we want to preserve our emotions sound, pure, and flowering" (Oueijan, 1998: 42).

Those essays anticipate Rihani's second chapter of his *Ar-Rihaniyat* from 1910, which is entitled "Free Verse". Rihani starts this "Free Verse" chapter with two paragraphs to naturalize and justify the practice of writing free-verse poetry in Arabic. Oueijan translated and included them as Rihani's preface for his *Hymns of the Valleys* which came out in 2002, the English translation of Rihani's posthumous poetry collection *Hutaf-ul Awdiya* from 1955. Rihani writes:

> This kind of poetry is called in French "Vers Libres," and in English "Free Verse" i.e. poetry which is free from regular prosody. This kind of poetry has recently

> become popular among American and British poets. Shakespeare was the first to liberate English poetry from traditional rhymes, and later Walt Whitman liberated it from regular rhythms. However, free verse has its own original rhythm; and indeed, it may have several rhythms (Oueijan, 2002: xvii).

Thus, Rihani states the acceptance and prominence of the practice of free verse in English poetic writings. He attributes the merits of creating and adopting free verse to Whitman, recognizing Whitman as the liberator of English poetry from regular rhythms. Rihani's use of the verb "liberated" suggests that "regular rhythm" restricts the poet's creativity and freedom of thought, and that Whitman liberated English poetry from the chains of prosody, such as conventional measures and common meters. Thus, this article is considered an invitation by Rihani to the Arab poets to follow Whitman's footsteps and liberate Arabic poetry of the techniques of conventional poetry as well.

The second paragraph of Rihani's preface reads:

> Walt Whitman was the creator and leader of free verse. After his death, his poetry influenced several modern poets in America and Europe. Nowadays in America there exist several Whitman societies, which include literary men who are genuinely saturated with his poetry, his democratic thought, and his philosophy. Whitman's poetry not only represents this original and peculiar form, but it also carries more original and peculiar philosophy and imagination than its form (*Ibid*.).

In his preface, Rihani gives all the credit to Whitman for being "the creator and leader of free verse". His appreciation for Whitman, however, went beyond form. Rihani recognized Whitman's national and international significance and his innovative thinking: "[his poetry] carries more original and peculiar philosophy and imagination than its form". When Rihani speaks of the existence of Whitman societies, this foreshows the Arab American writers creating The Pen League in New York that parallels these Whitman societies.

Rihani's preface for *Hutaf-ul Awdiya* is important for demonstrating how he identified his own practice with Whitman's. Besides, it also shows how Rihani admired the content and the form in his reading of Whitman. Thus, there is much Whitman in Rihani's Arabic poetry in form and themes.

In defense of his free verse and structure, Rihani wrote in one of his Arabic letters:

> The structure alone is vacant and fruitless; it wastes the poet's and his readers' time; however, the meaning of a poem, though it may be implied in a simple and naïve structure, is of great value if it's original and useful […] I hate vacant wordiness, claims, traditions, and linguistic utterances; I hate rhymes ever repeated until they sound like the hoot of the owl in dark winter nights or like the croak of the frogs in summer nights (Oueijan, 2002: x-xi).

Indeed, the structure of Rihani's Arabic poetry is very similar to Whitman's. In his English translation, Oueijan preserved the original form of Rihani's Arabic poems. For example, Oueijan's "New Year's Eve" is a close literary translation of Rihani's original text "Eashia Ras Alsana":

Rise up, you idle and miserable!	قُمْ أيها الناعسُ المتقاعس، اليائس من الحياة
Rise up, you miser, who sleeps on deeds and papers!	قم أيها البخيل النائم على الصكوك والأوراق
Rise up, you sad and frowning gambler!	قم أيها المقامر العبوس المكتئب
Rise up, you cheerful, joyful, and rejoicing fellow!	قم أنتَ أيها المسرور المحبور المبتهج
Rise up, you sarcastic of the people's humble joys!	قم أيها الساخر بأفراح الشعب
Wake up from your sleep!	انهضوا من رقادكم، اخرجوا من سجونكم
Leave your prison cells!	
Liberate your souls!	أطلقوا النفسَ من قيودها

Oueijan, who is a member of the Academic Council – The Ameen Rihani Institute, is very familiar with Rihani works and has written many articles and reviews on it. In "New Year's Eve", Oueijan follows the same style as Rihani's "Eashia Ras Alsana", albeit splitting some

Arabic lines into two because of the sentence structure of English. It is clear how Rihani is creatively appropriating Whitman's poetry in his own, such as the use of the line length, the anaphora, the transcendental notion of going out and live life. Rihani is inviting the reader to have physical contact with him: "Gather around my thin body/ Give me your hands" and join him on his journey to enjoy life. It brings back to mind Whitman's invitation "0 take my hand Walt Whitman!" to join him in his journeys in "Salut Au Monde!" or in his "Song of Myself". Rihani includes everyone, namely the "idle", "miserable", "miser", "cheerful", "joyful", "sarcastic" etc. in his invitation to celebrate life. Rihani sets up the out-of-doors as a utopian, democratic space, in which all men can come together. Thus, there is a sense of democracy, equality, and freedom – freedom from the worries of everyday life to "liberate" our "souls". Rihani's "Eashia Ras Alsana" shares similarities with Whitman's "Song of the Open Road":

> Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
> Healthy, free, the world before me,
> The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.
>
> Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune, […]
>
> Here the profound lesson of reception, nor preference nor denial,
> The black with his woolly head, the felon, the diseas'd, the illiterate person, are not denied;
> The birth, the hasting after the physician, the beggar's tramp, the drunkard's stagger, the laughing party of mechanics,
> The escaped youth, the rich person's carriage, the fop, the eloping couple,
> The early market-man, the hearse, the moving of furniture into the town, the return back from the town,
> They pass, I also pass, any thing passes, none can be interdicted,
> None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to me (1891-92: 120-129).

Whitman celebrates the out-of-doors as a space where status does not matter. The journey itself is what matter here not the destination: “The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose”. This also suggests that the speaker is in control of his journey and he can choose his own destiny: “I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune”. The speaker celebrates and invites everyone to this journey, “the black”, “the felon”, “the diseas'd”, “the illiterate” etc. It is an open invitation to experience freedom and expansiveness. Whitman is happily invited everyone to accompany him in his journey because “whoever you are come travel with me/ Traveling with me you find what never tires” (*Ibid*.).

Rihani’s poem “Eashia Ras Alsana” shares the same use of idiomatic slang expressions with Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road”. Whitman is known for being a language theorist, and his poetry is considered an illustration of his theories on diction subsequently elaborated in his linguistic essays “Slang in America” (1885) and in *An American Primer* (1904). In “Slang in America”, Whitman advocates the use of all slang and dialect terms; language should come from the daily speech of the Americans. He claims that slang is an important factor in the development of a language, referring to slang as a “lawless germinal element” (1885: 431). Whitman also starts his *An American Primer* explaining: “All words are spiritual” and “nothing is more spiritual than words […] those eluding, fluid, beautiful, fleshless, realities” (1904: 1).

When Rihani follows Whitman’s poetic style and introduced his free verse to Arabic poetry, he made use of slang and dialect terms as well to free the traditional Arabic poetry, *qaṣīdah*, of the archaic poetic diction. Oueijan argued for example that the archaic poetic diction used in the *qaṣīdah* makes it hard to read these poems even for the educated Arab

reader without consulting an Arabic-Arabic dictionary (2002: x). Criticizing the old diction used in traditional Arabic poetry and defending the new innovative poetic slang and dialectic terms in his Arabic poetry, Rihani wrote the essay “Rwh Al-Lugha” (The Spirit of Language); even the title of the essay reflects Whitman’s notion that language is spiritual, “nothing is more spiritual than words”.

Rihani’s “Rwh Al-Lugha” is probably the most prominent essay of *Ar-Rihaniyat* and it had a great impact on refreshing and revolutionizing the Arabic language. Rihani starts his essay by emphasizing the significant role of language in literature: “language is a body that cannot grow without new nourishment. It is a spirit which no literature can transcend, and no literature can live without” (Oueijan, 1998: 47). Rihani expresses that similar to any other body, language can get old and sick over time and it needs a medicine-man, “its poet, its doctor, [and] its great writer” to rejuvenate and revitalize it. He explains: “in Syria and Egypt there are no doubt people who are trying to rejuvenate the Arabic language in both poetry and prose, even if their good intentions are but little esteemed, and to extend the range of its expression and diction” (*Ibid*.).

Rihani also emphasizes the need of a radical change and advancement of Arabic language expressions and diction to better suit his time. He insists upon the importance of breaking free from old linguistic forms: “The ascension of a language depends on its breaking free of futile and repulsive conventions while at the same time retaining its spirits” (*Ibid*.: 48). Rihani acknowledges that there are timid attempts by some Arabic writers to break away from both old “conventions” and “spirit”, but he describes those attempts as weak for sounding as “a foreign language with Arabic pronunciation”. Although Rihani describes this new kind of writing as having “oddities” and “weakness”, he expresses his

preference of these attempts over a “flawless Arabic artistry” (*Ibid*.: 49).

In this essay, Rihani accuses some of the best-known works in old Arabic literature, such as *Al-Faraiid Al-Dourriah,* of being books of fossilized language concerning their meaning and style. He emphasizes that the progress of a language lies in its continuing growth, and encourages Arab writers to turn to the real world and adapt the present state of the nation in its daily life as material for their style. Rihani argues that everyday language is a better source for Arab writers’ style, thoughts, figures of speech, and imagination. Although Rihani banishes the language of old literary works, he acknowledges and gives tribute to some of the key figures in the Arabic literature cannon, namely: Emrou’ El-Kaiis, Al-Moutanabby, Ibn Khaldoun, and Al-Ghazali. Rihani states that reading texts by those key figures “[I] made up my mind to stop learning about rhetoric and style” (*Ibid*.: 50).

Rihani invites the Arab poets to familiarize themselves with the material aspects of language: “For words have more than resonance and tone; they have color, odors, transparency, rhythm and fragrance in their meaning” (*Ibid*.: 50-51). This essay can be considered as a prelude to Rihani’s Arabic free-verse poetry that he introduced in the same book. Rihani’s poetry focuses on the words rather than on tone, rhythm etc. to justify his own poetry. For Rihani, language is the center of attraction and appeal of Arabic poetry:

> The Arabic language enables the writer who loves it passionately, and tries hard to understand some of its secrets, to extract much of its beauty. There is much evidence in the language itself, which was embodied in poets and writers to whom its spirit had been revealed (*Ibid*.: 51).

Rihani elaborates giving the example of Abu’l-Ala: “his poetic philosophy […] included sagacity, meticulousness, sensitivity, foresight and liberty of thought” and that “the spirit

of language lies in its development. For example, the style of Abu'l-Ala is different from that of the writers of *Al-Mu'alakkat* before him and from the writers of *Al-Muwashahat* after him" (*Ibid*.: 51-53).

Rihani concludes "Rwh Al-Lugha" by expressing his wish of "the re-establishment of an Academy that would examine the need of the language for new scientific and technical terms" (*Ibid*.: 55). He explains that this Academy would be in charge of approving those new terms after their Arabization and then publishing them. His second wish is the publication "of a modern dictionary purged of barbaric words, nomadic synonyms, vulgar words, proverbs that do not apply to our daily life, and outmoded expressions". Following in Whitman's footsteps, Rihani endeavors to refresh and modernize Arabic language. He also asks not to drop "the sexual synonyms that might come in mind" (*Ibid*.), as he did in his first English free verse poem "The Brass Bed" (1905).

Rihani not only defended Whitman's free verse in his Arabic writings, but he also called for "a revolutionary change in style and reproached his fellow contemporary Arab writers for their undue concern with antiquated diction and pretentious rhetoric" (Al Maleh, 2016: 15). *Hutaf-ul Awdiya* made Rihani the pioneer poet of free verse in Arabic poetry which played a prominent role in the Arabic poetic reform, helping Arab poets to move away from the weight of traditional rules and conventions and adopting the free-verse style. He endeavored to free Arabic from the redundant and repulsive conventions while at the same time retaining its spirit.

Chapter III: Whitmanian Themes in Rihani's Writings

Sufism and Mysticism

American Transcendentalists and especially Ralph Waldo Emerson were fascinated by Sufism and Eastern mysticism. Although not part of the group, Walt Whitman shared that interest. An Arab-American writer like Rihani obviously had his own resources with regard to the Eastern mystical tradition, but the curious American interest in it would obviously represent a point of connection with the transcendentalists – and especially Whitman. In this chapter I will provide a brief history of Sufi literary works and its reception by the leading American literary figures in connection with Rihani's Sufi writings because it will help to put the two authors into a shared, but also differently realized context.

Sufism is neither a religion nor a philosophy, but it stands between the two and fills the gap. The critic Inayat Khan affirms Sufism to be mystical because it contains all branches of mysticism, such as psychology, occultism, spiritualism, clairvoyance, clairaudience, intuition, inspiration, etc. (1914: 39). Sufism, often referred to as "Islamic mysticism", is a mystical trend in Islam characterized by practices, ritual, doctrines, and institutions, which began early in Islamic history (see Knysh: 2008). The term is taken from the Arabic root word "wool". Sufism denoted the ones who renounced the world, chose a mystic way of life, and wore coarse woolen clothes.

Sufism originated in the Abbasid Caliphate in the Eighth century with its center located in modern South Iraq, namely Baghdad and Basra. The early Sufi poets shared their

absorption with God, other-worldliness and a life removed from everyday reality, and these concerns were reflected in their poetry. The first poets categorized as Sufi are Hasan Basri (642-728), Rabia Basri (d. 801), Junayd of Baghdad (830-910), and most importantly Mansur Hallaj (d. 922). “Mansur Hallaj is perhaps the first major Sufi whose poetry is highly sophisticated and developed” (Jamal, 2009: 17).

These Arab and Persian poets and philosophers endeavored through their writings to defend and justify the Sufi Path – a mystic path of divine love, where God and man merge. Later on, those mystical Sufi ideas were infused into Islamic culture by Al-Qushayri (986-1072) and Al-Ghazali (1058-1111). Their poems were written mainly in Arabic and Persian for private devotional reading and as lyrics for music played during Sufi worship meetings. These “dhikr” are short phrases or prayers that are repeatedly recited silently or aloud.

The central idea of Sufism is to take the Sufi Path or the Path of Love where the human soul searches out God, and if the grace of God falls upon the searcher, then he or she finds annihilation in God and, ultimately, eternal existence in the consciousness of God (Jamal, 2009: 18). Thus, the main messages of Sufis are to love God and His creation, to fill the hearts with divine love, and to realize the highest truth and wisdom. For them, the only way to salvation is love. Khan defines Sufism as a

> religious philosophy of love, harmony and beauty, [which] aims to expand the soul of man until the beauty of all creation enables him to become as perfect an expression of Divine harmony as possible, it is therefore natural that the Sufic Order should stand foremost as a spiritual power in the East, and is rapidly becoming recognised in the West (1914: 37).

The history of the reception of Sufi literature in the West precedes Emerson and Whitman. Sufi literary works reached the West centuries earlier. The great Sufi figures such as Hafiz,

Sa'di, Jami and Rumi had a place in the corpus of English translations long before Oriental themes and settings became popular in the Nineteenth century. Mehdi Aminrazavi claims that "Sufi poetry was available to a European audience as early as the sixteenth century" (2014: 1). The first translation of Sufi poetry into English occurred in 1589, when George Puttenham translated four anonymous "Oriental poems" in his book *The Arte of English Poesie*. Consecutively, many Sufi poems were translated or versified adopted such as Sa'di's *Gulistan*, Hafiz's *Divan*, and Omar Khayyam's *Ruba'iyyat*.

The most important intellectual result of the reception of Sufism in the West is American Transcendentalism. The Sufi path was echoed by the Transcendentalist writers who believe that individuals can transcend the physical world, achieve a deeper spiritual experience, and be united with the Divine and the Universe through intuition. R. A. Vaughan discusses the link between Sufism and American Transcendentalism. He writes:

> Oriental mysticism has become famous for its poets; and into poetry it has thrown all its force and fire. The mysticism of the West has produced prophecies and interpretations of prophecy, soliloquies, sermons, and treatises of divinity; – it has found solace in autobiography, and breathed out its sorrow in hymns; – it has essayed, in earnest prose, to revive and to reform the sleeping Church; – but it has never elaborated great poems. In none of the languages of Europe has mysticism achieved the success which crowned it in Persia, and prevailed to raise and rule the poetic culture of a nation. Yet the occidental mysticism has not been wholly lacking in poets of its own order. The seventeenth century can furnish one, and the nineteenth another, –Angelus Silesius and Ralph Waldo Emerson (cited in Farhang: 2007).

The interest of Emerson – a father-figure in American literature – in Islamic mysticism has been broadly studied in American and comparative literature. Emerson's writings are full of references to the Orient and Sufism. Aminrazavi states that Emerson between the age

of 40 and 55 read and was strongly inspired by the work of the Persian poet Sa‘di Shirazi, and Emerson translated over 700 lines of Persian verses into English, mostly from the German (2014: 6). In 1842, Emerson wrote “Saadi” in *The Dial* magazine in memory of Sa’di, the Sufi Persian poet who lived in the Thirteenth century:

> God, who gave to him the lyre,
> Of all mortals the desire,
> For all men’s behoof,
> Straitly charged him, ‘Sit aloof;’

This poem includes a fascinating portrait of Sa’di, one of the greatest ancient Sufi poets and thinkers of the Orient. Emerson suggests that God has chosen Sa’di as the embodiment of the ideal poetic spirit. “Sit aloof” presents Sa’di as an extraordinary poet, unlike any other. In this four-page poem, Emerson celebrates Sa’di and his legacy:

> Be thou ware where Saadi dwells.
> Wisdom of the gods is he;
> Entertain it reverently.
> Gladly round that golden lamp
> Sylvan deities encamp,
> And simple maids and noble youth
> Are welcome to the man of truth.
> Most welcome they, who need him most,
> They feed the spring which they exhaust (1842: 265-269).

Emerson highly exalts Sa’di and his moral teachings when he writes “wisdom of the gods is he”. Other words are used to express Sa’di’s mastermind and his great influence: “reverently”, “golden lamp”, “Sylvan deities”, and “man of truth”. In Emerson’s text, Sa’di is a man who leads a very contemplative life, yet he offers his teachings, lessons, and wisdom to the public. According to Emerson, Sa’di welcomed all “simple maids and noble

youth” who needed his words of wisdom; as he expresses that Sa’di is the source, “spring”.

The Sufi poet Hafiz was also well received by Emerson, who translated many of his poems and fragments into English (see Kane, 2009: 111-112). Emerson writes in his journal that Hafiz is “characterized by a perfect intellectual emancipation which also he provokes in the reader. Nothing stops him. He is not to be scared by a name, or a religion. He fears nothing. He sees too far... such is the only man I wish to see and to be” (1913: 328). In this description, Emerson characterizes Hafiz as liberal, free thinking, self-reliant, and a rebel.

Emerson did not only celebrate these Sufi poets in his writings, but also borrowed from their philosophies and themes in his poetry, such as extending love to everything. Emerson’s thoughts and feelings, which were expressed in his writings, make the reader feel empowered and uplifted. For example, Emerson wrote in his first stanza of “Give All to Love”:

> Give all to love;
> Obey thy heart;
> Friends, kindred, days,
> Estate, good fame,
> Plans, credit and the muse;
> Nothing refuse (1847: 141).

Emerson speaks directly to the reader encouraging him/her to extend love to all things and to follow the heart and do things accordingly. Like Sufis, Emerson affirms that we should give up all our life possessions, such as “plans”, “credit” and “muse” for the sake of love. He adds that one who gives all to love “is wise and is becoming wiser”. In his

essay titled “Love”, Emerson speaks highly of the benefits of being affectionate towards others. He asserts that love makes “a new man with new perceptions, new and keener purposes and a religious solemnity of character and aims” (2010: 57). Hence, Emerson confirms the Sufi idea that salvation is only attainable through love.

Emerson is considered the main conduit of Sufi poetry into the Transcendentalist literary community, and Whitman was in the same cultural milieu when Emerson embraced Sufi poetry to justify and advocate his cultural, mystical, political, and philosophical ideologies. Given Emerson’s role as mentor in Whitman’s poetic development, Whitman was certainly familiar with Emerson’s Sufi poetry translation and his article “Persian Poetry” (1858), where he introduced Persian poetry to his readers in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

The following famous lines of “Song of Myself” suggest how Sufism and Oriental mysticism hold a prominent position in shaping Whitman’s writings:

> How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
> And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart,
> And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.
>
> Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and knowledge that pass all the art and argument of the earth;
> And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
> And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
> And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
> And that a kelson of the creation is love,
> And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
> And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
> And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-

weed (1891-92: 32).

Whitman uses sexual imagery representing a mystical experience to achieve the Sufi idea of complete fusion and oneness with the Universe and God. This sudden mystical experience of “peace”, “joy” and “knowledge” transcends for the speaker “all the art and argument of the earth”. Thus, the speaker is able to experience a mystical moment of oneness with both the Creator and creation (men, women, ants, poke-weed etc.). The speaker realizes that his body and spirit are part of God and that all the creation are built and rest upon “love”. There is a sense of equality in these mystical notions; all men and women are Whitman’s brothers, sisters, and lovers, and they are part of God and their connection is built upon love. Besides including all of creation from the vastest to the smallest and insignificant – “ants”, “scabs”, and “Poke-weed” – that they are vibrating with “love” suggests a democratic, anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian notion. Love for Whitman abolishes all kinds of hierarchies or classification among Americans and worldwide. Hence, Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” exhibits the profound Sufi character of his creative consciousness.

“Song of Myself” is one of many of Whitman’s poems that borrows from Sufi mysticism philosophy and thoughts. However, Whitman’s late “A Persian Lesson” (1891, originally titled “A Sufi Lesson”) is his only poem that explicitly addresses and recognizes the philosophy of the Orient. It is a compact poem that represents a direct tribute to Sufism. “A Persian Lesson” starts with the lines:

> For his o'erarching and last lesson the greybeard sufi,
> In the fresh scent of the morning in the open air,
> On the slope of a teeming Persian rose-garden,
> Under an ancient chestnut-tree wide spreading its branches,

Spoke to the young priests and students (1891-92: 418).

Whitman describes and recounts the greybeard Sufi's lesson in "A Persian Lesson", who – as the critic Massud Farzan suggests – may be Whitman's persona himself (see 1976: 582). In light of this reading, Whitman puts a greybeard Sufi sheikh persona into this poem. He uses "greybeard" here to represent the characteristic Sufi scholar and to suggest that he obtains this Sufi wisdom. It is common, especially in the orient, to look up to old bearded men for having better judgment, experience, knowledge, and understanding of life. In his article "'Something Foreign in It': A Study of an Iranian Translation of Whitman's image", Behnam M. Fomeshi, focusing on the front cover of a book-length translation of Whitman into Persian, studies how Whitman's image is visually translated for an Iranian audience. Among literary discourses of contemporary Iran, the one that associates poetry with mysticism plays a significant role in depicting Whitman as an old grey-bearded sage on the front covers to represent his wisdom (see Fomeshi, 2019). Whitman describes this poem as "last lesson" since it was written in 1891 when he was 71 years old, only one year before his death. It was published in *Leaves of Grass* 1891-92, commonly called "the Deathbed Edition".

Its title "The Last Lesson" may implicitly suggest that Whitman's earlier poems are also lessons following Sufi ideology. Thus, in this first part of the poem, Whitman takes the persona of the Sufi scholar giving his last lesson in the open air of a typical Sufi rose-garden under the branches of chestnut tree. In this natural setting – which signifies unity with nature in this lesson – this Whitman *persona* will give a lesson to his students or even public crowds. Whitman's speech is similar to khutbah, the address delivered on Friday midday prayer by the khatib in mosques. The setting, the rose-garden, is the usual mosque courtyard where Muslims sit and give lessons to the khutbah preceding the

prayer. The Sufi scholar addresses his students saying:

> “Finally my children, to envelop each word, each part of the rest,
> Allah is all, all, all–is immanent in every life and object,
> May-be at many and many-a-more removes–yet Allah, Allah, Allah is there.
>
> “Has the estray wander'd far? Is the reason-why strangely hidden?
> Would you sound below the restless ocean of the entire world?
> Would you know the dissatisfaction? the urge and spur of every life;
> The something never still'd–never entirely gone? the invisible need of every seed? (1891-92: 418-419).

The speech starts with “Allah is all, all, all” which is parallel to adhan – the Islamic call to prayer – which precedes the prayer. The Sufi’s address itself is similar to Khutbah and parallels Sufi philosophy: “Allah … is immanent in every life and object”. That statement represents the core idea of the Sufism, the repetition of “Allah, Allah, Allah” is common for Sufi dhikr, and “the invisible need of every seed” is also a recognizable Sufi mystical notion. In the second and final part of the poem, the Speaker reflects upon our existence and origin in a Sufi manner:

> “It is the central urge in every atom,
> (Often unconscious, often evil, downfallen,)
> To return to its divine source and origin, however distant,
> Latent the same in subject and in object, without one exception" (*Ibid*.: 419).

Whitman’s interest in Sufi poetry is also demonstrated through his ownership of a copy of William Rounseville Alger’s 1856 *The Poetry of the East*. Supposedly, he read this collection of poetry by Arabs, Hindus, and Persians "over and over" (see Ford, 1987: 12). Whitman’s lesson in “A Persian Lesson” fits with what he read in Alger’s *The Poetry of the East*, namely that Sufism “is a union with God so intimate that it becomes identity, wherein

thought is an involuntary intuitive grasp and function of universal truth" (1856: 65). In fact, the *persona*'s address fits American Transcendentalism just as much as Oriental Sufism, which shows a similarity between the two. Thus, these lines verify that Oriental Sufism is an essential part of Whitman's writings.

The critic Arthur Ford claims that "A Persian Lesson" "reveals Whitman's understanding of Sufism […] the Sufi's lesson is pure Sufism, but also pure Whitman, particularly when the Sufi tells his disciples that Allah is everywhere and in all things" (1987: 17-18). Ford justifies his statement by referring to how Sufism mirrors Whitman's philosophy as well as that of other American Romantics. Farzan states it is possible to read "A Persian Lesson" as "a fitting coda for *Leaves of Grass*, not only because it presents a synthesis and recapitulation of the rest of the book, but also because of the marvelous sense of tranquility and wholeness it conveys. It is here finally that we see the serenity of a man who has said goodbye to his Fancy" (Farzan, 1976: 582). Much as Emerson and Whitman's writings, I will demonstrate how Rihani's poetry has Eastern Mysticism as a "fitting coda", and how Whitman's perception of Sufism is present in his poetry.

Sufi poetry, the Islamic mystic poetry which flourished throughout the Islamic world between the 8th and 16th centuries, can be traced in most of Rihani's literary works starting with his first published poetry translation *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala* in 1903. As I mentioned earlier in chapter II, Abu'l-Ala Al-Ma'arri's unique style of poetry was not the only quality that attracted Rihani. He was also fond of Abu'l-Ala's philosophical, social, and religious views. Rihani describes Abu'l-Ala as a "Sufi writer" in his *Ar-Rihaniyat* (1910: 325).

Abu'l-Ala influenced Rihani's strain of skepticism and agnosticism in poetry. Rihani writes

in his preface of *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala* that

> [Abu'l-Ala] was waging his silent and bloodless war on the follies and evils of his age. He attacked the superstitions and the false traditions of religions, and proclaimed the supremacy of the mind; he hurled his trenchant invectives at the tyranny and despotism of rulers, and asserted the supremacy of the human soul; he stood for perfect equality, and fought against the fallacies, the shams and the lies of the ruling class of his time, in its social, religious and political aspects (1903: V).

In his preface, he defends Abu'l-Ala and praises his philosophical and religious views as liberal. Through his translation, Rihani wanted to show Western readers how liberal Arabic culture could be. In his defense of Abu'l-Ala's religious and social views, Rihani mentions how Abu'l-Ala was regarded as an enemy by some religious figures at his time. Rihani's emphasis on Abu'l-Ala's liberalism was Whitmanesque; Whitman not only was called liberal by critics at his time but he also referred to himself as one: "I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature" (1891-92: 259). Furthermore, Abu'l-Ala's accusation of being a heretic parallels criticism of Whitman in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries; for example his poem "Chanting the Square Deific" was characterized as having a heretical, anti-Trinitarian view of God (see Eiselein, 1998).

Seeing Abu'l-Ala as the classical Arab writer anticipating the Whitmanian mode, Rihani says that his enemies try to damage his reputation by naming him a heretic, atheist, and renegade. Rihani claims that this judgment of Abu'l-Ala was not justified. He defends Abu'l-Ala in his preface when he declares that "I fail to find, in the three volumes of his poems, one acrimonious line that savours of personality" (1903: XIII). This suggests how Rihani shared a similar view of philosophy and religion with Abu'l-Ala.

These views were also verified by other translators of Abu'l-Ala's poetry. In his translation of Abu'l-Ala's poetry, *Specimens of Arabian Poetry* (1796), British Orientalist Joseph Dacre Carlyle said about Abu'l-Ala that "his compositions seem evidently intended to turn religion into ridicule". Besides, he argued that the result of Abu'l-Ala writings "gave rise to a report among his contemporaries that he had abjured Mohammedanism, and became a follower of the Bramins" (Carlyle, 1810: 98). Carlyle concluded that Abu'l-Ala "was as little attached to one sect of religion as to another, or rather that he was equally an enemy to all" (*Ibid*.). This shows how Abu'l-Ala's philosophical, social and religious views were considered to be in contrast to religions to the extent that he was referred to as an "enemy" to all of them.

Austrian Orientalist Alfred von Kremer, who published an early translation of Abu'l-Ala's poetry into German (*Über die philosophischen Gedichte des Abul 'Ala Ma'arry* 1888), elaborates on Abu'l-Ala's philosophical views. He says that Abu'l-Ala was more of a Brahmin than an "Arab", which supposedly became evident not only from his poetry and writings but also from the poet's style of life and practices, such as his fasting and meditation, which resembled more the Brahmin (mystic) mode (see Kremer, 1888: 2). Carlyle's and von Kremer's descriptions of Abu'l-Ala's Brahmin practices can help to explain the reason for finding Abu'l-Ala's poetry quoted by several Indian mystics and yogi books.

In his rendition of *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*, Rihani selected verses of Abu'l-Ala's poetry which fit his own religious and philosophical views, the translations of the other Sufi writers at his time and the writings of Whitman and Emerson which defined his own poetry and writing. For example:

A-fearing whom I trust I gain my end,
But trusting, without fear, I lose, my friend;
Much better is the Doubt that gives me peace,
Than all the Faiths which in hell-fire may end (1903: 21).

These lines are examples of the skeptical irony and religious tolerance of Abul-Ala. The critic Wail Hassan argues that Abu'l-Ala was a skeptic and a rationalist whose example represented "an implicit challenge to the idea of an exclusively spiritual East. Yet this skeptical rationalism was tempered by a mystical, nonsectarian, anticlerical religiosity that centered on a nonpartisan God, whose love embraces all humanity regardless of creed" (Hassan, 2016: 381). Thus, it promotes equality and democracy among all mankind. This notion is also expressed in the following quatrains:

Another prophet will, they say, soon rise;
But will he profit by his tricks, likewise?
My prophet is my reason, aye, my self –
From me to me there is no room for lies […]

These Superstitions, Sacred Books and Creeds,
These Cults and Myths and other noxious Weeds –
So many Lies are crowned, in every age,
While Truth beneath the tyrant's heel still bleeds (1903: 57-59).

Rihani's work qualifies as an adaptation and the authorship should be more attributed to Rihani rather than Abu'l-Ala. It can be seen through rendering of the original lines to suit their new form, which also resulted in differences in its word choice, and word-associations. Therefore, *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala* is a fine example to show Rihani's thoughts and ideas to bridge the cultural gap between East and West and to promote the central Western ideas in general, and those of Whitman in particular, such as his reference to equality and the essential divinity of all people. As a matter of fact, Rihani went even

further to introduce and campaign for these acquired themes in the lines that he inserted which have no equivalent in Abu'l-Ala:

> A church, a temple, or a Kaba Stone,
> Koran or Bible or a martyr's bone –
> All these and more my heart can tolerate
> Since my religion now is Love alone (*Ibid*.: 42).

Rihani embraces here all the three monotheistic religions in an equal way as an answer to the human spiritual quest, and then declares that love is the end of those religions and it is what we should concentrate on for being superior to spirituality. Thus, he accepts these religions because he has the religion of love. Schumann explains that religion remains an important theme in his writing, and he sees it ideally as a source of morality rather than as a barrier to mutual understanding (see Schumann, 2016: 276). Rihani continues with this notion in the following quatrain:

> To all humanity, O consecrate
> Thy heart, and shun the thousand Sects that prate
> About the things they little know about –
> Let all receive thy pity, love, or hate (*Ibid*.: 43).

Rihani expresses his dissatisfaction with having too many sects which means too many institutionalized religions. As a democratic and anti-authoritarian thinker, he considers them as a barrier to true equality of all humans, and that mankind possess powers of revelation equal to any god's. Those notions of deconstructing any organized institutionalized religion can be easily compared to those of Whitman's section 41 of "Song of Myself":

> Magnifying and applying come I,
> Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters,

Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,
In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the crucifix engraved,
With Odin and the hideous-faced Mexitli and every idol and image,
Taking them all for what they are worth and not a cent more,
Admitting they were alive and did the work of their days,
(They bore mites as for unfledg'd birds who have now to rise and fly and sing for themselves,)
Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself,
bestowing them freely on each man and woman I see (1891-92: 67).

The speaker in these lines deconstructs all religions as human-made and goes further to indicate that their cast of characters is no more than ordinary people to him. He is "outbidding" religions, calling them old and having been created by "hucksters". Whitman's catalog refers to some of the main religions of the world: Judaism, Hellenic polytheism, ancient Egyptian polytheism, ancient Mesopotamian, Hinduism, Buddhism, Algonquian, Islam, Christianity, old Nordic, and Mesoamerican. Whitman believes in the true equality of all humans from all religious backgrounds which was rooted in his belief in democracy, and he thinks that all the human beings are divine and possess powers of revelation equal to any god's. He encompasses those religions in himself and expresses that those deities are not better than him or the ordinary people: "lads ahold of fire-engines and hook-and-ladder ropes no less to me than the gods of the antique wars" (*Ibid*.: 67). He asserts the divinity to himself in the following lines:

The supernatural of no account, myself waiting my time to be one of the supremes,
The day getting ready for me when I shall do as much good as the best, and be as prodigious;

By my life-lumps! becoming already a creator (*Ibid*.: 67-68).

He claims divinity for himself as a "creator" just like the antique "supremes". By linking all those religions and religious figures with himself and stating that they are no better than the ordinary people, Whitman denies the superiority of the Divine figures (gods, goddess, deity etc.).

That is related also to the basic assumption of Sufism and American transcendentalism that everything and everyone is divine. Thus, for him, love should rule over any religion or deity. Whitman's transcendental idealization of love, "a kelson of the creation is love", is considered the core of Sufi philosophy and it is echoed in this quatrain that Rihani adds in his book:

How oft, when young, my friends I would defame,
If our religious faiths were not the same;
But now my Soul has travelled high and low –
Now all save Love, to me, is but a name (1903: 41).

Abu'l-Ala already mentioned the importance of love and how it should rule over religion but Rihani with this added quatrain takes that idea even further, and makes it resemble Whitman's.

In his revised edition of Abu'l-Ala poetry rendition, *The Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala* 1918, Rihani carries on the same ideology and views on religion and spirituality. He further emphasizes the significance of the religious dimensions of this book: "we can not [sic] explain away his [Abu'l Ala] supposed heresies, we find in the Luzumiyat themselves his dominant ideas on religion, for instance, being a superstition …. doubt, a way to truth; reason, the only prophet and guide; – we find these ideas clothed in various images and expressed in varied forms, but unmistakable in whatever guise we find them" (1918: 20). Rihani here

confirms the picture of Abu'l Ala as skeptical about religious truth. We can find the same themes in the following quatrain that Rihani adds in his *Luzumiyat of Abu'l-Ala* edition:

> Muhammad or Messiah! Hear thou me,
> The truth entire nor here nor there can be;
> How can our God who made the sun and moon
> Give all his light to one Sect, I can not see (1918: 35).

In his book, Rihani continues selecting verses from the Arab Sufi Abu'l-Ala that are similar to his own views and philosophy such as questioning the notion that one religion can hold the entire truth. Al Maleh explains how Rihani's social and political criticism is also nondiscriminatory, though religion remains an important theme in his own writings. She points out how Rihani in his novel *The Book of Khalid*: "voices his criticism of religious establishments, both Christian and Muslim, and the clergy by and large comes under severe and sarcastic attack in Khalid" (2016: 316). This is evident in translating Abu'l-Ala attacking sheikhs (priests):

> The snivelling sheikh says he's without a garb,
> When in the tap-house he had pawned his cloak.
>
> Or in the house of lust [t]he priestly name
> And priestly turban once were those of [s]hame –
> And Shame is preaching in the pulpit now –
> If pulpits tumble down, I'm not to blame (1918: 65).

When Abu'l-Ala mentions how the sheikh went to the tavern and brothel, he implies that it is an act of hypocrisy as these priests act differently from what they preach on the pulpit, and this act would bring shame upon them. "Pulpits tumble down" is an indication that these priests or the institutionalized religion at large might fall because of such acts. Abu'l-Ala attacks institutionalized religion (orthodox Islam) by accusing the Muslim priests of

being hypocrites, and vice-versa “among religionists, Sufis are considered free-thinkers [liberals]” (Khan, 1914: 38). In these lines, Rihani is connecting religion and sexuality in a Whitmanian way. While the priests must hide their sexuality, Whitman finds divinity in the self who remains erotically faithful to the holy, individuated, human body:

> Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from,
> The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer,
> This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.
>
> If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body, or any part of it (1891-92: 49).

Whitman always celebrates and sings the body and the spirit in a metaphysical way. The speaker here is elevating the body and sexuality not only over institutionalized religion, but also over anything related to it, such as prayer, churches, and holy books. Thus, Whitman rejects traditional Christian religious beliefs and institutionalized religion as being the main way to reach the Divine being: “The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer”.

Though most of Rihani’s poetry is full of mysticism, it is his second poetry collection, *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems,* which tackles these mystic and Sufi themes directly. “A Chant of Mystics” is the title poem of this book and it is the longest and most celebrated poem of this collection. Rihani deals with the categories “East” and “West” in this poem, where he subverts or limits the differences between the two parts of the world. The mystic’s chant is an expression of tolerance, stressing the message of democracy, equality, and divinity:

> Nor Crescent nor Cross we adore;
> Nor Budha [sic] nor Christ we implore;

Nor Muslem [sic] nor Jew we abhor:
We are free.

We are not of Iran or of Ind,
We are not of Arabia or of Sind:
We are free.

We are not of the East or the West;
Nor boundaries exist in our breast:
We are free.

We are not made of dust or of dew;
We are not of the earth or the blue:
We are free.

We are not wrought of fire or of foam;
Nor the sun nor the sea is our home;
Nor the angel our kin nor the gnome:
We are free (1921: 84).

These verses demonstrate Rihani's endeavors to reconstruct a human society free from religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. It is a message of freedom to the world. Rihani is calling on the readers to remove any religious, ethnic, and cultural barriers. "A Chant of Mystics" echoes Khalid's calls, in Rihani's *The Book of Khalid,* for "Love and faith, free from all sectarianism and all earthly authority" (2016: 248). The terms "East" and "West" correspond here at least to some degree with different patterns of behavior, different worldviews, and different prioritizations of human values as a basis for defining human identity (see Funk, 2016: 413). Geographical differences have very limited value since everyone has the chance to free himself/herself by discarding these above-mentioned boundaries. "A Chant of Mystics" is a celebration of the Sufi philosophy and its leading figures:

Hail, Sana'i the Moon of the Soul, […]
Hail, Attar the Vezier of Birds, […]
Hail, Arabi, the Tongue of the Truth,
The Eye of the Prophet, in sooth.
Hail, Rabi'a, the Heart of the Sphere,
Beloved of the bard and the seer; […]
Hail, Gazzali, the Weaver of Light, […]
Hail, Hallaj, the Diver divine, […]
To Jelal'ud-Din Rumi, all hail!
The Master who flung every veil
To the wind, who ne'er sober was seen,
Though ne'er to the tavern had been:
But ever– and often alone–
Was dancing before Allah's throne.
Hail, Tabrizi, who nourished the Bard (1921: 80-81).

In a very Whitmanesque manner, Rihani catalogues the best-known Arab and Persian Sufi figures. He divides them into two categories: Firstly, "famous Sufi poets of Persia": Hakim Sana'I, Attar of Nishapur, Rabia Basri, Rumi and Homam Al-Din Tabrizi. Secondly, "Sufi philosophers and poets of Arabia": Ibn Arabi, Al-Ghazali, Mansur Al-Hallaj and Ibn al-Farid. Rihani finishes his list with Ibn al-Farid, whom he describes as "the foremost Sufi poet of Arabia":

Hail, Fared, the love-stricken one, […]
The host of the Tavern divine –
The Saki, the Cup, and the Wine (*Ibid*.: 81).

Being the foremost Arab Sufi, Ibn al-Farid is described here as being "the host of the Tavern divine", the "Saki" (bartender), the "Cup" and the "Wine". Rihani attributes the merit of Sufism to Ibn al-Farid for being an early Arabic poet, writer and philosopher who

belongs to the Sufi school of thought. This section is full of images holding appreciation, recognition, and exaltation towards those leading figures in Sufism: “Moon of the Soul”, “Tongue of the Truth”, “the Weaver of Light” etc. There is a reference to Sufis dancing in the line “was dancing before Allah’s throne”, and the poem ends with the lines:

> Whirl, whirl, whirl,
> Till the world is the size of a pearl.
> Dance, dance, dance,
> Till the world’s like the point of a lance.
> Soar, soar, soar,
> Till the world is no more (*Ibid*.: 96).

There is a clear reference to Sufis whirling here, a physically active meditation which originated among Sufis. Dervishes – the ones who do the whirling/ dancing – spin their body in repetitive circles during the Sufi worship ceremony. They aim to reach the source of all perfection by abandoning their egos and personal desires through listening to the Sufi music and spinning around. The spinning is a symbolic imitation of planets orbiting the sun. Parvaneh Chehrehsay Jangi explains this ritual as expressing “the source of all religions and spiritual paths – the Way of Love – uniting those of many cultures and traditions […] the semazens [dervishes] first turn to dissolve their doubts into belief in God's unifying presence. Then belief deepens, becoming faith, and the semazens [dervishes] scale the heights, to the abode of absolute existence, of Unity” (Jangi, 2011: 35). Like Whitman in his “A Persian Lesson”, Rihani explicitly uses in “A Chant of Mystics” images taken from Sufi *dhikr* (lesson) to suggest that his poem has as much value as one of those lessons.

Rihani’s *“*A Sufi Song” is another example of his celebration of Sufism. It is a direct tribute

to Sufism, and it demonstrates his strategy of portraying the Orient as an exotic place to appeal to the Western reader:

> My heart's the field I sow for thee,
> For thee to water and to reap;
> My heart's the house I ope for thee,
> For thee to air and dust and sweep;
> My heart's the rug I spread for thee,
> For thee to dance or pray or sleep;
> My heart's the pearls I thread for thee,
> For thee to wear or break or keep;
> My heart's a sack of magic things –
> Magic carpets, caps and rings –
> To bring thee treasures from afar
> And from the deep (1921: 61).

*"*A Sufi Song" is a relatively short (twelve-line) poem, the anaphora "my heart's" is repeated five times. Rihani is offering his heart (his Sufi conviction) to the reader to nourish, learn from and add to. Rihani is presenting his thoughts as precious "pearls" and leaves them to the reader to decide whether to "wear", "break" or "keep" them or whether to "dance", "pray" or "sleep" on his "rug" etc. Rihani here places stress on the idea of giving readers the freedom to read poetry the way they want to. The last four lines contain exotic mystical images to intrigue and arouse the reader's curiosity about Oriental mysticism: "Magic carpets, caps and rings", and "To bring thee treasures from afar".

"The Two Brothers" is another poem with a direct reference to Sufism. Rihani writes on this poem explaining: "I have tried to embody in these stanzas the idea, shared partly by the Sufi, that God and the Universe are one" (1921: 62). He refers their sharing the same origin "in the cave of the mind/ We were born and our cradle is one". The second stanza

has more details on God/Universe work:

> We are brothers: together we dwelt
> Unknown and unheard and unseen
> For aeons; together we felt
> The urge of the forces that melt
> The rocks into willowy, green (*Ibid*.).

God and the Universe were unknown for millions of years, they were there although no one witnessed them. This image is reflected in the first stanza upon stating that they were born “in the cave of the mind”. They have the power of creating “the forces that melt the rocks into willowy, green”. In the fourth stanza, the Universe not only merges with God but with man/self as well:

> I am God: thou art Man: but the light
> That mothers the planets, the sea
> Of star-dust that roofs every height
> Of the Universe, the gulfs of the night,–
> They are surging in thee as in me (*Ibid*.).

Merging with God and the Universe and containing them is a recurring Whitmanian theme. The imagery parallels Whitman’s self-description in “Song of Myself”, “Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son” (1891-92: 48). When Whitman refers to his universal self as universe, he is projecting the universe into the human self.

This idea is also mentioned in his poem “Kosmos”, in which Whitman describes a person at one with the universe. The poem starts with the lines:

> Who includes diversity and is Nature,
> Who is the amplitude of the earth, and the coarseness and sexuality of the earth,
> and the great charity of the earth, and the equilibrium also,

Who has not look'd forth from the windows the eyes for nothing,
or whose brain held audience with messengers for nothing,
Who contains believers and disbelievers, who is the most majestic lover,
Who holds duly his or her triune proportion of realism, spiritualism, and of the aesthetic or intellectual,
Who having consider'd the body finds all its organs and parts good,
Who, out of the theory of the earth and of his or her body understands by subtle analogies all other theories,
The theory of a city, a poem, and of the large politics of these States;
Who believes not only in our globe with its sun and moon, but in other globes with their suns and moons,
Who, constructing the house of himself or herself, not for a day but for all time, sees races, eras, dates, generations,
The past, the future, dwelling there, like space, inseparable together (1891-92: 303-304).

The answer to these "Who" questions is obviously Whitman (kosmos). The speaker (Whitman himself) is suggesting to be united with the universe that he contains within himself: diversity, believers, disbelievers, nature, realism, spirituality, time, space etc., because he is "large" and can "contain multitudes". Thus, both Whitman and Rihani emphasize being united with God and the universe. However, while Whitman states in "Kosmos" that he contains them within himself, Rihani identifies God in "The Two Brothers" as a separate being who are surging together. Rihani also gives an active voice to God in his poem "Allah wa Ana" (God and I) 1905:

Though I'm God, thou art man, we are one,
We are all and we shall ever be;
Though the light of my sky thou didst shun,
Thou shalt love me ere thy course is run,
As forever I live loving thee.

Thou art mine, I am thine and the fire
Of my breath all thy regions shall warm (1905: 56).

In his fusion with God, Rihani still recognizes God as a separate being. He follows Whitman's footsteps of being united with God, but he keeps God's voice and consciousness separated. Like in "The Two Brothers", the speaker in Rihani's "Allah wa Ana" is God. He identifies himself as a separate entity and at the same time he is united with man: "Though I'm God, thou art man, we are one". Moreover, while Rihani places this unity on the equality between man and God as "brothers", Whitman elevates the individual self over the position of God: "And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is" (Whitman, 1891-92: 76). And above the universe when he says: "And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes" (*Ibid*.). Rihani emphasizes in "Allah wa Ana" again that the basis of this unity and equality between God (the Universe) and mankind is love: "thou shalt love me ere thy course is run/ As forever I live loving thee". However, Like Whitman's, Rihani's divine being is inclusive to every religion and everyone, uses a Whitmanesque style in "Allah wa Ana" to declare:

In the yogi's pagoda I am;
In the fire of the magi I was;
To the sons of Abraheem and Sham
And their foes and to thee I undam
All the banks of my veins on the cross (1905: 56).

Rihani is cataloguing some of the religions by referring to yogi (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism), magi (Zoroastrian religion), Abraham (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and the cross (Christianity). Thus, Rihani's God encompasses all religions and everyone in the world in a mystical way.

Rihani refers to Sufism not only in poetry, but also in his articles. He identifies himself as one in his article “The Spirit of Language”: “Even in my love for [the Arabic] language I am a Sufi student” (Oueijan, 1998: 52). However, the predominant publication of Rihani on Sufism was *The Path of Vision.* In this critical essays collection dedicated to Oriental mysticism, he summarizes and identifies the Sufi spiritual path as:

> The highest, noblest form of spirituality; the divine essence, which can be attained only by those who follow devotedly the path of vision, those who seek the light that bridges the darkness between eye and soul, and without which there can be no vision. But there is what might be called a workaday spirituality, which is within the reach of all. And we need not be afraid to yield in this to the practical spirit of the times to discover the light within us. For the path of vision, which isolates for a time the individual, brings him in the end, if his patience and devotion do not give way, to complete union, like the Sufi, with humanity and God (1921: 17).

Hence, like the Sufis, Whitman and Rihani advocate embracing the Divine presence in this life, including all religions and everyone, adornment of virtues and good characters, being unified with God, and most importantly that our connection and unity with the Divine being are built and rest upon “love”. Like Whitman, Rihani is against any religious hierarchy; he “was never satisfied by traditional doctrine or clerical authority” (Funk, 2016: 409) and he pushed for true equality of all humans from all religious backgrounds. This notion was rooted in both poets’ belief in democracy, and that all the human beings are divine and possess powers of revelation equal to any god's.

Whitman’s and Emerson’s fascination with Eastern mysticism, which was well known, added to Rihani’s interest in these American authors. As I showed above, Rihani borrows from Whitman’s writings the poetic imagery of unification with the Divine being and Universe, founding and basing this unity on love and including everyone and every creed

in these writings. Thus, the democratic, anti-hierarchical, and anti-authoritarian implications of mysticism, which the American demonstrated, must have been particularly interesting for a writer and thinker like Rihani, who attempted to bring together his culture of origin and the ideology of his adopted land.

American Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism is an American literary, political, and philosophical movement of the early Nineteenth century, with Ralph Waldo Emerson in its center. Emerson was born in 1803 to a conservative Unitarian minister, and he studied theology and began a ministry at a Unitarian Church later. Emerson published his first seminal work, *Nature*, in 1836, which provided the foundation of transcendentalism. In this small book, he sketches out most of the transcendentalist ideas and values such as the suggestion that the Divine, or God, suffuses nature, and that reality can be understood by studying nature.

In the same year, he – along with other intellectuals, namely Frederic Henry Hedge and George Putnam – founded the Transcendental Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which marked the birth of Transcendentalism as a coherent movement. From 1840, this group of scholars and clergymen published their journal *The Dial*, along with other venues.

In its first form, from 1840 to 1844, *The Dial* served as the chief publication of the Transcendentalists. The first issue was published with an introduction by Emerson calling it a "Journal in a new spirit" in July 1840. Emerson was very enthusiastic about this platform to spread his idea. He wrote to the editor, his friend Margaret Fuller, expressing his enthusiasm after the publication of the first issue:

> [I]t should lead the opinion of this generation on every great interest & read the law on property, government, education, as well as on art, letters, & religion. […] So I wish we might court some of the good fanatics and publish chapters on every head in the whole Art of Living (1997: 219).

Emerson used this journal to push his Transcendentalist ideas, and to promote new

talented writers such as William Ellery Channing and Henry David Thoreau. In 1841, he published his first series of essays said to express the essence of Transcendentalist thinking, which consists of twelve essays including his famous texts “Self-Reliance” and “The Over-Soul”. Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” deals with the themes of individualism and personal responsibility. He argues for the need for each individual to avoid conformity and false consistency, and follow their own instincts and ideas. Human beings must have faith in their intuition, for no church or creed can communicate truth.

“The Over-Soul” is considered one of Emerson’s most important texts. In it he dealt with the existence and nature of the human soul, and the relationship between the human soul to another and to (a non-denominational) God. He also argues that the human soul is part of this Over-soul and universal spirit, to which it and other souls return at death. Thus, every human being is sacred and divine because each has a portion of that Over-soul, God. Emerson emphasizes following one’s own heart and instinct rather than an intermediary's, such as the church, in this essay:

> The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great nature in which we rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart (1979: 160).

In 1844, Emerson published his second collection, *Essays: Second Series*. It consists of nine different essays including his famous essay “The Poet”, which played an instrumental role in the first edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* of 1855. As I mentioned in chapter II, Emerson calls on American writers and intellectuals to abandon literary conventions and traditions in favor of what is uniquely American. For Emerson, “America

is a poem in our eyes", and Whitman wrote his poetry that seemed to record systematically everything that Emerson called for (Folsom, 2005: 22).

Emerson also published two major poetry collections, *Poems* (1847) and *May-day and other pieces* (1867). These collections express Transcendentalism and Eastern mysticism and philosophy. Emerson's "Each in All" shows how he learns by experiencing nature to promote his nature-as-resource ideology and he celebrates being part of the Over-Soul:

> All are needed by each one;
> Nothing is fair or good alone.
> I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
> Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
> I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
> He sings the song, but it cheers not now,
> For I did not bring home the river and sky; –
> He sang to my ear, – they sang to my eye […]
> Over me soared the eternal sky,
> Full of light and of deity;
> Again I saw, again I heard,
> The rolling river, the morning bird; –
> Beauty through my senses stole;
> I yielded myself to the perfect whole (1839: 229-230).

The speaker is learning here from nature, he realizes that the beauty of this bird becomes apparent in its surroundings, i.e. nature. Thus, everything influences everything, and everything is part of the whole and does not exist alone. This reflects the Transcendental concepts that the unity of life and universe must be realized, and there is a relationship between all things. This relationship is due to the fact that the Oversoul, God, can be found everywhere and the Divine suffuses nature.

Perry Miller illustrates how the Emersonian influence is present in other writers' work: "the brilliant genius of Emerson rose in the winter nights, and hung over Boston, drawing the eyes of ingenuous young people to look up to that great new star, a beauty and a mystery, which charmed for the moment, while it gave also perennial inspiration, as it led them forward along new paths, and towards new hopes" (2001: 487). One of the writers who were inspired by Emerson was Whitman, although he was not a Bostonian. As I have emphasized in Chapter II, Whitman included Emerson's recognition letter of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in the second edition of his work without Emerson's permission and also responded in a long public letter addressing Emerson as "master". In addition to the public-relations effect, calling Emerson "master" also suggests that Whitman has incorporated Emerson's Transcendental ideas in his writings.

Whitman's best-known poem "Song of Myself' is a good example to demonstrate some of the Transcendental ideas in his poetry. Carmine Sarracino points out that the very first line of this poem projects an image of consciousness looping back on itself. "I" is the first word of this poem of the Self, "Celebrate" seems to draw consciousness outward in a linear way, but the final word bends the arc of consciousness back to its starting point: "myself". Thus, we have the three components of ordinary waking-state awareness: experiencer (I), act of experiencing (celebrate) and object of experience (myself). The circle, however, fuses these separate components into a transcendent unity (see Sarracino, 1987: 5). This first line also embodies the ideal of Emerson's ideas of "self-reliance" and "individualism". Besides, it can be argued that this poem is based on Emerson's Transcendentalist idea published in the "Over-Soul": "And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own/ And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own" (1891-92: 32). Whitman is celebrating the union of his body and his soul as a part of

the divine and universal “Over-Soul”.

Emerson’s main element of Transcendentalism, of gaining insight and spiritually cleansing from experiencing nature is traceable in many of Whitman’s poems. Whitman’s “To the Sun-set Breeze” is another example of Whitman identifying himself with nature and how “elements” of nature would refresh and awaken his soul:

> Ah, whispering, something again, unseen,
> Where late this heated day thou enterest at my window, door,
> Thou, laving, tempering all, cool-freshing, gently vitalizing
> Me, old, alone, sick, weak-down, melted-worn with sweat;
> Thou, nestling, folding close and firm yet soft, companion better than talk, book, art,
> (Thou hast, O Nature! elements! utterance to my heart beyond the rest–and this is of them,)
> So sweet thy primitive taste to breathe within-thy soothing fingers on my face and hands,
> Thou, messenger-magical strange bringer to body and spirit of me, […]
> Thou blown from lips so loved, now gone-haply from endless store, God-sent, (For thou art spiritual, Godly, most of all known to my sense,) (1891-92: 414).

Whitman published his “To the Sun-set Breeze” in 1890, two years before his death, and it was included in his deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*. He describes himself here: “old, alone, sick, weak-down, melted-worn with sweat”, then in that hot day he is relieved by a cool and gently vitalizing evening breeze. Whitman addresses the breeze as if it were alive and divine: “For thou art spiritual, Godly, most of all known to my sense”. The breeze “messenger-magical” has been sent by God to lift Whitman’s failing spirit: “blown from lips so loved, now gone–haply from endless store, God-sent”. Thus, the breeze – as a symbol representing nature – is divine, and it has awakened Whitman’s soul in a Transcendental

way.

In his poem “I Saw in Louisiana a Live Oak Growing”, Whitman goes on appreciating and learning from nature:

> I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,
> All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches,
> Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green,
> And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself,
> But I wonder'd how it could utter joyous leaves standing alone there without its friend near, for I knew I could not,
> And I broke off a twig with a certain number of leaves upon it, and twined around it a little moss,
> And brought it away, and I have placed it in sight in my room, […]
> Yet it remains to me a curious token, it makes me think of manly love (1891-92: 105-106).

The speaker, no more than Whitman himself, is telling a story of an oak tree that he has come upon in Louisiana and that reminds him of himself. The tree stands by itself and is covered with drooping moss. The tree thrives without help from anyone and it is “uttering joyous leaves”. He is concerned for its well-being and impressed by its resilience: “rude, unbending, [and] lusty”. These are all traits that reminded Whitman of himself. Whitman confesses that he is not able to live this way given his need for companionship. Whitman approaches the tree and breaks off a small “twig” and brings it back home to observe and reflect upon it. The twig, which reminds him of “manly love”, is a phallic symbol is meant to represent male generative powers. The intense physicality in this poem what distanced Whitman from Emerson. Whitman embraced physical metaphysics, while Emerson “could not abide the formulaic salvation it promised” (Colbert, 1997:23).

Whitman elaborates on how to develop his Transcendental consciousness by reflection, self-reliance, and solitude, rather than following any church or creed in his *Democratic Vistas*:

> I should say, indeed, that only in the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality may the spirituality of religion positively come forth at all. Only here, and on such terms, the meditation, the devout ecstasy, the soaring flight. Only here, communion with the mysteries, the eternal problems, whence? whither? Alone, and identity, and the mood-and the soul emerges, and all statements, churches, sermons, melt away like vapors. Alone, and silent thought and awe, and aspiration – and then the interior consciousness, like a hitherto unseen inscription, in magic ink, beams out its wondrous lines to the sense. Bibles may convey, and priests expound, but it is exclusively for the noiseless operation of one's isolated Self, to enter the pure ether of veneration, reach the divine levels, and commune with the unutterable (1892: 233-234).

In his poetry, Whitman urges the reader to judge for himself, to be self-reliant in digesting the meanings of the text. Kerry Larson explains that “the self-reliant reader is constantly called out and challenged to strive for and work through those meanings until they are made his or her own” (Kummings, 2006: 473). Whitman calls out to and challenges the self-reliant reader in the following lines of “Song of Myself”:

> Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth much?
> Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?
> Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?
>
> Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
> You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)
> You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self (1891-92: 30).

Whitman suggests here that to “take things at second or third hand” is to read aristocratically while to “filter them from your self” is to read democratically. It emancipates the reader. He wants to abandon the role of the reader as merely a decoder of the messages of texts that a writer transmits. Larson explains that Whitman enlists the reader “as a collaborator in the creation of meaning at the same time that the poet presents himself as another interpreter, scanning the natural world for tokens of a divine wholeness” (Kummings, 2006: 474). A reader’s focus on author-intended meanings of the text suggests a sense of hierarchy and closure while the indeterminate reading encourages equality and openness. Larson concludes that “the aristocratic poet stipulates; the democratic bard suggests” (*Ibid*.: 475).

Transcendental consciousness, nature, spirituality, self-reliance are ideas which are present in Whitman’s writings. Some critics go further to argue that “[Whitman] is not only influenced but created by Emerson” (Hamscha, 2013: 153). Even the challenge to rational consistency in Emerson's “Suppose you should contradict yourself, what then?” (1899: 60), is echoed in Whitman’s famous lines of “Song of Myself”: “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself” (1891-92: 78). Nevertheless, Emerson's work not only influenced his contemporaries, such as Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, but continues to influence thinkers and writers inside and outside the United States, including the Arab-American writer Ameen Rihani.

In addition to mysticism, spirituality, democracy, individuality, and his attack on institutionalized religion as I showed in the Sufism chapter, Rihani’s writings tackle other Transcendental ideas such as reflecting upon and learning from nature:

I walked along the countryside
At eventide,
And everywhere
The road was fair
With moons of water here and there,
Into whose heart the grasses spied.
And suddenly upon them shone
The light of the City's eye,
Reflected from a bulb on high,
Which made them and their shadow one.
Nay, made each moon
A mirror seem
To serve the dream
Of tender blades in bending grace a-swoon. […]

And I thought of the Eye Unseen
Which sheds its charitable sheen,
Not on our goal,
But on the by-ways of the Soul (1921: 19).

Rihani's "Reflection" presents how nature and the countryside provide a sense of freedom to the speaker, the line-length also provides a sense of freedom for not being regular. The setting is a small village in the countryside which helps the speaker with his reflection and meditation upon simple living in natural surroundings. The speaker is wandering around the countryside recording nature and country life, and the poem itself is a voyage of spiritual discovery to promote self-reliance and find meaning of life. Accounting of moonlight on the water and the light of a street bulb suggests an admiration of both nature and the rural life in this small town. The speaker recognizes their importance "on the by-ways of the Soul", so he rises above the usual impulses of life and moves to a realm that has to do with his soul. He recognizes his soul in nature by experiencing and reflecting

upon this natural setting, which is again one of the essential ideas of Transcendentalism.

Rihani's wandering and appreciating nature and learning from it in "Reflection" echoes Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live Oak Growing". Moreover, having the soul refreshed and awakened upon experiencing nature in "Reflection" parallels Whitman's "To the Sun-set Breeze". Like Whitman, Rihani looks to nature through American Transcendental eyes, and expressed that in his poetry. Rihani also speaks about this Transcendental concept explicitly in his novel *The Book of Khalid*:

> There is an infinite possibility of soul-power in every one of us, if it can be developed freely, spontaneously, without discipline or restraint. There is, too, an infinite possibility of beauty in every soul, if it can be evoked at an auspicious moment by the proper word, the proper voice, the proper touch. That is why I say; Go thy way, O my brother. Be simple, natural, spontaneous, courageous, and free […] let nature be thy guide; acquainted thyself with one or two of her laws ere thou runnest wild (2016: 67-68).

The Book of Khalid is an expression of Rihani's revolutionary thoughts, "*The Book of Khalid* was not simply a novel but a novelistic framework designed to enclose a set of ideas and analytical tools" (Choueiri, 2016: 348). Thus, Rihani's writings shares with Whitman's the "mystical outlook on life, an intensive approach to knowledge, and a perception of the infusion of nature with the divine" (Al Maleh, 2016: 319).

To achieve this enlightenment, Transcendentalists emphasized the importance of following the examples of literary and political figures and consider them as "prophets". This notion, which is already referred to in Sufis texts, is considered one of the main pillars of Transcendentalism. It is vital for Transcendentalism to have poets or politicians set examples for the individual through their work. Whitman is probably the best example of

assuming the role of prophet, his writings are full of references to this notion. For example, he wrote in the preface of his *Leaves of Grass* 1855: “the new breed of poets [shall] be interpreters of men and women and of all events and things” (1855: XI), and the poets should be “possess'd of the religious fire and abandon of Isaiah” (1892: 253). Whitman was more direct in assuming this role for himself in his autobiographical poem “Starting from Paumanok”: “I too, following many and follow'd by many, inaugurate a religion, I descend into the arena” (1891-92: 22). Thus, Whitman with his prophetic vision, “I am afoot with my vision” (“Song of Myself”, 1891-92: 33), is the prophet of a new religion which he describes: “In a very profound sense religion is the poetry of humanity” (1892: 422). While it is a “poetry of humanity”, Whitman’s new religion will illuminate and shape not only the future culture of the United States, but the whole world.

In his later poem “Passage to India”, Whitman takes the persona of the “Poet-Prophet with a vision of world unity” (Ahluwalia, 1983: 9). In this poem, Whitman sings of “the great achievements of the present” of laying of the transatlantic undersea cable (1866), the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), and the building of the great American railroad (1869). These three engineering achievements improved communication and travel to India and to the East at large. It is not only a celebration of the present, but also of history. Whitman suggests that these present achievements have grown out of the past, “the dark unfathom'd retrospect” (1891-92: 315). If the present is great, the past is also great because the present is “impell'd by the past” (*Ibid*.: 316). Whitman envisions the passage to India in the following section:

> Passage O soul to India!
> Eclaircise the myths Asiatic, the primitive fables.

Not you alone proud truths of the world,
Nor you alone ye facts of modern science,
But myths and fables of eld, Asia's, Africa's fables,
The far-darting beams of the spirit, the unloos'd dreams,
The deep diving bibles and legends,
The daring plots of the poets, the elder religions (*Ibid*.: 316).

This passage is illuminated by “Asiatic” and “primitive” fables. The fables of Asia and Africa are “the far-darting beams of the spirit,” and the poet sings of the “deep diving bibles and legends.” These new engineering wonders resulting in geographical unity not only provide easier movement through space but also through time. Whitman celebrates and welcomes Indian heritage – representing the East – historically, spiritually, religiously, and literarily.

Passage to India!
Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
The lands to be welded together.

A worship new I sing, (1891-92: 316).

Whitman merges time with space in the realm of the spirit. Modern miracles of science are all part of a divine plan, of “God's purpose from the first”. The spanning of the earth by science and technology is only part of the Divine scheme to have “the races, neighbors”. The marriage has resulted from merging East and West by these advance scientific achievements, and the combination of these Western scientific achievements of the present and Eastern spiritual attainments of the past is “a worship new [Whitman] sing[s]”. In Section 5, Whitman continues to announce the coming of the Poet “Trinitas

divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by/ the true son of God, the poet, …/ Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,/ The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them". Ahluwalia describes Whitman's vision of the poet in "Passage to India":

> [The poet] is both a prophet and a visionary. By his accomplishments on the spiritual plane, he will justify the deeds of the scientists and inventors on the material plane. With Christ-like healing power, he will soothe the hearts of mankind. By fusing Nature and Man, he will fill the gap between the material and the spiritual. His most glorious performance would indeed be to accomplish "Trinitas divine," consisting of God, Man and Nature (1983: 12-13).

Whitman links his prophet figure to Christian religion many times, and wants *Leaves of Grass* to be compared with the Bible; he wrote in an 1857 notebook entry: "The Great Construction of the New Bible/ Not to be diverted from the principal object – the main life work" (1984: 1:353). In his new religion, Whitman has replaced the priests – who represent institutionalized religion – with the poets: "The priest departs, the divine literatus comes" (1892: 206). Whitman even makes himself equal to Christ, when he, like Jesus, walks "the old hills of Judaea with the beautiful gentle God by my side" in his "Song of Myself" (1891-92: 58), and in his "To Him That Was Crucified" that deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

> My spirit to yours dear brother,
> Do not mind because many sounding your name do not understand you,
> I do not sound your name, but I understand you,
> I specify you with joy O my comrade to salute you, and to salute those who are with you, before and since, and those to come also,
> That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and succession,
> We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,
> We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,

> Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,
> We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers nor any thing that is asserted,
> We hear the bawling and din, we are reach'd at by divisions, jealousies, recriminations on every side,
> They close peremptorily upon us to surround us, my comrade,
> Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,
> Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are (1891-92: 298).

Whitman is addressing Christ as an equal when he calls him “brother”, “comrade”, and “lover”. They, Christ and Whitman, have boundless healing powers of sympathy and friendship as conveyed through their breath and touch, which accounts for their purported ability to cheer up and heal: “Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men”. Whitman suggests that he as a superior individual has surfaced in all ages and places just like Christ did, and links himself to Christ in their common purpose: “Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races,/ ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are”.

Rihani, as a Whitmanian poet, also seeks to be the same prophetic figure, and translating Whitman’s “To Him That Was Crucified” (“Ila Al-Maslub”) into Arabic was the perfect opportunity for him to claim this position. Rihani’s choice of translating this poem, in his second edition of *Ar-Rihaniyat*, expresses a similar exaltation of the poet as a prophet. Rihani was more direct in identifying himself as a messenger and prophet, in his article “In the Spring of Desperation”: “Dear reader, I would not be your messenger of truth and goodness if I did not strive for honesty and truth in what I said. That is why you find me opening the diary of my soul to show you one of my private personal pages” (Oueijan,

1998: 36).

No doubt, Rihani's poetry is based on the Transcendental ideas that he borrows from Whitman, Emerson, and even the classic Arab writers as I showed earlier. His book *The Book of Khalid* is perhaps the best example to demonstrate the thinker as a prophet. It is Rihani's first novel, and it is the first novel written in English by an Arab author. Rihani describes his book as "a book of chart and history of one little kingdom of the soul" (Rihani, 2016: 18).

It is the intellectual and spiritual experience of Khalid, the protagonist, who is in many respects a fictionalized version of the author. The story starts when Khalid arrives on Ellis Island and becomes caught up with the cultural and commercial life of New York. Khalid soon occupies himself with the pursuit of both money and sexual pleasure. However, he manages to maintain and promote ethical and moral values. Consecutively, Khalid realizes his prophethood and begins to talk about the spiritual values of the East. He explicitly declares his prophethood to bring to his home country a "chosen voice": "For our country is just beginning to speak, and I am her chosen voice. I feel that if I do not come to her, she will be dumb forever" (2016: 105).

After spending three years in the United States, he returns to Mount Lebanon. With his new knowledge and experience in the West, Khalid continues to take on the prophet figure upon returning to his homeland, and speaks with a tone borrowed from the Messiah and the prophets of the Old Testament:

> Light, Love and Will – with corals and pearls from their seas would I crown thee, O my city. In these streams would I baptise thy children, O my City. The mind, and the heart, and the soul of man I would baptise in this mountain lake, this high Jordan

> of Truth, on the flourishing and odoriferous banks of Science and Religion, under the sacred *sidr* of Reason and Faith (2016:183).

Khalid will emancipate the people by fusing both “Reason and Faith” representing “Science and Religion”. He is the prophet that will save his nation: “[f]rom his transcendental height, the Superman of America shall ray forth in every direction the divine light, which shall mellow and purify the spirit of Nations and strengthen and sweeten the spirit of men” (2016: 95). The “Superman” term refers to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) by Friedrich Nietzsche, himself an ardent disciple of Emerson. When Rihani describes his protagonist, Khalid, as “Superman”, he is comparing him to Nietzsche’s character, Zarathustra, who is described as being “Superman” (*Übermensch*). The German prefix (*über*) refers to superiority, transcendence, excessiveness, or intensity. Rihani describes Khalid as “Superman”, a term can be seen equal to prophet, who is – in Nietzsche’s sense – a man with superior potential who completely masters himself and strikes off conventional religion to create his own values, which are rooted in life on this earth (see Stone: 2002).

Khalid had a confrontation with the Maronite Church upon his return from his voyage to Mount Lebanon. He was shunned by the church and accused of being as apostate for translating a heretic pamphlet by the Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle who seems far removed from the church. Like his fictional protagonist, Khalid, Rihani had an unfulfilled love story with a girl called Yasmin and his critical essays and poetry collections attracted the wrath of the church and the sultan’s secret service (see Albert Rihani, 1987: 34-45). Schumann argues that for this very reason “Rihani remained a universalist religious seeker while keeping substantial distance from any institutionalized form of religion” (2016: 276).

The Transcendental concept that God suffuses nature is dominant throughout the novel: when Khalid a large building devoted to organized religion, the Mosques of Cairo, he sees nature in them: “when I was visiting the great Mosques of Cairo I was reminded of them. Yes, the pine forests are the great mosques of Nature” (2016: 147). Rihani is inviting us, in a Whitmanesque way, to go out and enjoy nature because reality can be understood by studying nature: “I carry no note-book with me when I go down the wadi or out into the fields. I am content if I bring back a few impressions of some reassuring instance or faith, a few pictures, and an armful of wild flowers and odoriferous shrubs” (*Ibid*.: 145). He explains the significance of learning from nature in his article “Who Am I?”: “Knowledge that embodies the revelation of the secrets of nature and the intellectual enticements and divine manifestations is higher, sounder, more stable and more beautiful than all the money, fame or political power” (Oueijan, 1998: 7).

Rihani shares with Whitman the identification of man with all other creatures, high or low and experiencing nature. We can clearly see that when Khalid says “To me, the discovery of a woodman in the wadi were as pleasing as the discovery of a woodchuck or a woodswallow or a woodbine. For in the soul of a woodman is a song, I muse, as sweet as the rhythmic strains of the goldfinch, if it could be evoked” (2016: 146). Rihani also shares Whitman’s belief to be in union with the omnipresent, and having confidence in “Man”, in whom they see the forceful glow of life. It is most clear when Khalid declares “my faith in Man.... is as strong as my faith in God” (*Ibid*.: 95), and “No matter how good thou art, O my brother, or how bad thou art, no matter how high or low in the scale of being thou art, I still would believe in thee, and have faith in thee, and love thee” (*Ibid*.: 21). Rihani here declares his belief in all human beings whether they are good or bad. As a Transcendental writer, he believes in the self and the capacity of everyone. Rihani also shows his belief

in individuality when he says: “Never before in the history of man did it seem as necessary as it does now that each individual should think for himself, will for himself, and aspire incessantly for realization of his ideals and dreams” (2016: 115).

Like Whitman, Rihani adopts some of the American Transcendentalist ideology to his writings, such as the ideas that knowledge is self-generated, and that understanding is the result of direct experience. For example, Khalid summarizes the main concepts of Emerson’s essay “The Over-soul” in the following speech:

> Whether one devours the knowledge of the world in four years or four nights, the process of assimilation is equally hindered, if the mind is sealed at the start with the seal of authority. Ay, we cannot be too careful of dogmatic science in our youth; for dogmas often dam certain channels of the soul through which we might have reached greater treasures and ascended to purer heights. A young man, therefore, ought to be let alone. There is an infinite possibility of soul-power in everyone of us, if it can be developed freely, spontaneously, without discipline or restraint (2016: 68).

Rihani believes in the power and potential of the soul. He states here that for spirituality to become fuller, the soul must be free from social order and restrictions. Rihani’s *The Book of Khalid* shows similarities to Whitman’s *Franklin Evans* or *The Inebriate* (1842) not only in the rhetorical style and narrative techniques but also in themes and motifs. According to Alex Wulff, the motifs in *Franklin Evans* are speculative economics and social reform, gender, and sexualized transmission of capital, and racial nationalism (see Wulff, 2007: 143). Al Maleh describes *The Book of Khalid* as “a philosophical dissertation and a work of moral didacticism, mystical imagination, and satirical and political understatement” (2016: 315). However, the sense of didacticism does not exist in *The Book of Khalid* in a direct way as the author does not wish to be taken too seriously he does not want to force

the reader to categorically accept or reject his teachings. Rihani's points are presented in such a way that they provoke his views in a way that emphatically validates the reader's freedom.

The Book of Khalid contains central Transcendental ideas which Rihani acquired from Emerson and Whitman: the prophet figure, the universal soul and divinity, self-reliance and fierce individualism, perfection in and learning from nature, criticism of institutionalized religion, and even the glorification of the power of "love" and raising it to a divine level. "Everything in life must always resolve itself into love… Love is the divine solvent. Love is the splendor of God" (2016: 215). Which again echoes Whitman's famous line: "a kelson of the creation is love" (1891-92: 32).

Rihani did not only build his novel on American Transcendentalism, but he also explicitly refers to it many times in his book. For example, Khalid takes on an Emersonian/ Whitmanian *persona* in the following lines:

> Khalid, though always invoking the distant luminary of transcendentalism for light, can not [sic] arrogate to himself this high title. The expansion of all the faculties, and the reduction of the demands of society and the individual to the lowest term; – this, as we understand it, is the aim of transcendentalism (2016: 181).

Emerson – whom "Rihani frequently quoted in a spirit of high approval and appreciation" (Choueiri, 2016: 349) – shaped the writings of contemporary and subsequent generations of American writers and thinkers, and Whitman was undoubtedly the best example of a poet who spread the Transcendental ideology inside and outside of America. Subsequently, it is "Rihani's acquaintance [of] the free verse of Walt Whitman and the Transcendentalist essays of Emerson and Thoreau made him discover that part of himself that he was always looking for, the critical, dialectic, free, transcendental part" (Albert

Rihani, 2007: 64). By expressing the Western Transcendental ideas in his writing, Rihani turned himself into the prophetic figure that Transcendentalism dearly cherishes and requires from its thinkers and writers, and to become an example, to show what an individual can become.

Life vs. Death

Life and death are two central concepts that shaped the poetry of Whitman and Rihani. They both looked at life and death through a Transcendentalist mystical perspective. Emerson's thoughts inspired them to represent death as a part of the cycle of life; the cycle of life and death continuously work within nature and death must be accepted as a version of the salvation for our souls that return them to the Over-Soul.

Emerson was deeply affected by the death of his two brothers, Edward and Charles, which he was working on his first Transcendentalist book, *Nature*, in 1836. This book deals with the concepts of the meaning of life and divinity of humanity. He writes: "The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (1836: 3). In this book, he sets up the foundations of Transcendentalism including the idea of being part of a universal spirit or God, of nature being universal and the human souls returning to nature upon death.

Thus, there is a bond between an individual and nature, or, as Emerson describes it: "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population" (*Ibid*.: 4). Death is presented here as a natural process, which suggests that we should deal with it as a part of life. He uses the idea that death is part of the cycle of life that blends life with the "infinite" superlife or eternity in the following lines of "Threnody" from his first poetry collection *Poems* (1847):

My servant Death, with solving rite,

Pours finite into infinite (1914: 167).

"Threnody" has an autobiographical significance for being composed upon the death of Emerson's five-year-old son, Waldo, of scarlet fever in 1842. Emerson also quoted lines of the English philosopher and poet Henry More in his "The Over-Soul" to support his arguments:

> But souls that of his own good life partake,
> He loves as his own self; dear as his eye
> They are to Him: He'll never them forsake:
> When they shall die, then God himself shall die:
> They live, they live in blest eternity (1979: 157).

Since death is just part of life, he demands in his essay "The American Scholar" to enjoy and focus on this life rather than think of death or have concerns over the afterlife: "the one thing in the world of value is the active soul" (1893: 27).

Emerson's Transcendentalist thoughts of life and death are the foundation on which Whitman builds his visions of life and death. Life and death are the main themes which define Whitman's poetry represented by the image of grass throughout his poetry. Whitman uses this natural imagery, the grass which represents life, to celebrate being part of nature in his "Song of Myself". The entire section 6 of "Song of Myself" deals with this grass imagery. It starts with the following lines:

> A child said *What is the grass*? fetching it to me with full hands;
> How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.
>
> I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.
>
> Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord
> A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt, […]

> Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation (1891-92: 33).

Upon being asked by the child what the grass is, the speaker starts reflecting upon it and figuring out its purpose. He sees it as a gift from God or the Universe. Then, Whitman makes the link to the cycle of life: “the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation”. The grass is compared to children who are being born from the ground. Whitman goes on in section 6 with connecting nature to human beings:

> And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.
>
> Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
> It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
> It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
> It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of their mothers' laps,
> And here you are the mothers' laps (*Ibid*.).

The grass is used as a metaphor, it is compared to “the beautiful uncut hair of graves”. Whitman refers to the earth as a grave suggesting that the soil is made up of dead bodies. He celebrates all the dead who are buried underneath the grass, whether they are “old people” or “taken soon out of their mothers' laps”. He is grateful for the dead to be back to their “the mothers' laps”, which results in the “mother”, earth, giving birth to the grass. Whitman makes the connection between death and nature parallel to the connection between life and nature. Earlier “the grass is itself a child”. Nature serves as a universal final destination for the dead, because the people will never completely disappear and they will always remain on earth providing their resources to produce healthy grass.

In section 49, Whitman elaborates on the cycle of life imagery suggesting that the dead support new life. He addresses death saying:

And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to alarm me.

To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes,
I see the elder-hand pressing receiving supporting,
I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,
And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape (*Ibid*.: 49).

Whitman starts this section by taunting death by saying that he is not afraid of it. He uses the French word “accoucheur”, which means midwife, to portray a birth scene; it starts when the midwife takes the baby from the “flexible doors” of the womb and into this life. After this image, the speaker starts immediately addressing the “corpse” which refers to death:

And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me,
I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.

And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

I hear you whispering there O stars of heaven,
O suns–O grass of graves–O perpetual transfers and promotions,
If you do not say any thing how can I say any thing?

Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,
Of the moon that descends the steeps of the soughing twilight,
Toss, sparkles of day and dusk–toss on the black stems that decay in the muck,
Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs.

I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night,
I perceive that the ghastly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected,
And debouch to the steady and central from the offspring great or small (*Ibid*.).

The sudden shift from the scene of birth to death invokes the cycle of life idea; the newly born person exits the womb only to enter the grave in the course of time. Whitman

declares that this corpse later turns into “manure”, which grows into new life: “white roses”, plants, “melon” etc. He explains that these new plants are composed of death and growing out of death, and how the dead bodies are providing resources to produce grass serving as fertilizer. Whitman reveals that our bodies are the “leavings of many deaths”; we come to life as a result of those deaths and because life is constantly transferred. The word “promotions” refers to the fact that life is moving forward. There are several erotic images in this section of “Song of Myself”, e.g. Whitman imagining himself being the corpse, as his dispersed atoms occupy new life forms as they reach to “the leafy lips” and “the polish’d breasts of melons” (*Ibid*.). Death is presented in an erotic way when the decaying body interpenetrates with the fertile landscape. Thus, we have a sexual act between death and life.

Whitman associates the night, cold, and moon with death in the last lines of the section. He also declares that we can see the moon only because it reflects daylight, warmth, and life. The everlasting relationship between moon and sun, darkness and day, death and life are the reflected cycling of a unitary reality. We have another scene of birth in the image where we hear the “moaning gibberish” of the “turbid pool” that breaks down old forms and generates new ones in the dark swamp. These newborns ascend from the moon and night to the daylight of identity. Thus, we exit the darkness to go to the openness of existence, gaining our identity “from the offspring great or small”. Whitman ends the section concluding that the new birth, “debouch”, comes from previous “offspring”, and they complete the cycle of life when they come into existence from the one who died before to occupy the “steady and central” realm of consciousness. Whitman concludes “Song of Myself” with the lines:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you (*Ibid*.: 78-79).

The speaker here is welcoming and looking forward to his death whenever it may happen, and he has accepted that his corpse will be absorbed in earth, nature: “I shall be good health to you nevertheless,/ And filter and fibre your blood”. He is not afraid to become one with nature because he believes that we already belong to nature. Whitman is content to have his corpse mixed with the soil and to be a part of the cycle of life and become part of our own bodies as it will “filter and fibre your blood”. For him, his death will continue his journey with nature allowing him to travel and explore the world in further detail. He will get to experience things that he may have missed when he was alive, and he believes that it would enable his consciousness to shift to the newborn, us, in the last line of the poem: “I stop somewhere waiting for you”.

Whitman repeats his thoughts of the cycle of life in other poems. “This Compost”, as its title suggest, is also about how life is created out of death, and death is merely another word for forms of life that have now sprung into other forms of life and without the process of death, nothing can live or come into existence. He personifies nature as a compost, breaking down all things diseased and reconstructing new life, he expresses that with the same grass imagery: “Though probably every spear of grass rises out of what was once a catching disease” (1891-92: 286).

Whitman includes “This Compost” in his “Autumn Rivulets” cluster of *Leaves of Grass*. Both autumn and leaves are recurrent settings and themes for Rihani’s poetry as well. Rihani, who echoes Whitman’s ideology on death, substitutes Whitman’s grass imagery with leaves as it is commonly used in his homeland’s (Arabic) poetry, for example a yellow leaf in Arabic poetry “may be used to describe an elderly person who, due to illness, is expected to die soon. This is because when leaves turn yellow in autumn, they start to fall off the trees, and yellowness is seen in this context as an indication of the end of their life cycle” (Al-Adaileh, 2012: 10).

In his “The Fruits of Death”, Rihani echoes Whitman’s Transcendentalist thoughts on death using his own autumn and leaves imagery:

> Said golden leaves upon the ground
> To new born leaves upon the tree:
> “Soon homeward autumn winds will blow
> And carry us away to sea,
> Just as it shook the night before
> The branches all and set us free;
> No longer do we envy bird or dew,
> Nor do we want again to be like you.”
>
> The sweet and tender leaves replied:
> “Still we rejoice that we are here;
> We rise from the eternal source
> Of life to crown the dying year;
> The wind that freed you we can see.
> The sea you love we always hear.
> You are the booty of the storm and we,
> We are the fruits of Death upon Life's tree” (1905: 48).

The golden (fallen) leaves representing the dead are not sad but instead are looking

forward to being carried away by the wind to set them free. Rihani implicitly uses the color gold instead of yellow to describe the states of these fallen leaves in autumn in a positive manner; they are glad to leave behind every day's worries and problems of the living such as envy, hope etc. But the leaves on the tree (standing for the living one) are happy to be yet alive. The cycle of life and life coming from the dead concepts are presented here in these two images "We rise from the eternal source" and "We are the fruits of Death upon Life's tree". Thus, Rihani echoes Whitman's optimistic view on death and accepts it as part of life in his "The Fruits of Death". However, in his elegies, Rihani expresses a sad and depressing mood. For example, his "Gone with the Swallows" is mourning someone whom he calls "love":

> Must I convey at last the news to thee?
> Must I now mourn the love that lived in me?
> Gone with the autumn, with the dying year.
> Gone with the kisses that are yet so near!
> Gone with the swallows somewhere o'er the sea!
> But with the Spring will he again
> Return, will he with me remain?
> Must I till then, remembering naught,
> Forgetting all that love had brought,
> Grope in the shadows of the slain?
> Must I forget the day
> That took my love away,
> And all the happy hours
> That reared for him their towers
> And crowned him with the flowers
> Of all the queens of May?
> Must I alone
> My once my own,

In my retreat
The new year greet,
And winter meet.
And winds hear moan?
Not yet/ Can I/ Forget;
But why/ One clings/ And sings/ To things/ That die? (*Ibid*.: 44).

The form and line length of “Gone with the Swallows” are unusual*;* it is thirty-line stanza with very short lines towards the end and it is full of rhetorical questions. Rihani is mourning his love who died in the fall of the previous year, but the memories are still so fresh that the images of the kisses are still in his head. He says that his love has gone with the fall migration of the swallows to “somewhere over the sea”.

The speaker wonders whether spring will bring back his love and he will find another love upon the coming of spring. He decides not to get concerned with love for now and wait patiently “till then” – spring to search love again. He is wondering and answering his rhetorical question whether he should forget about the tragedy of losing his love, and how his love was nourished and celebrated before. Then the speaker wonders if he will end up by himself, welcoming winter alone, whine to the wind and not be able to find love again with the many delightful ladies in May (spring). The speaker concludes the poem by asking the rhetorical question “One clings/ And sings/ To things/ That die?”, where he wonders why somebody would be attached to someone who is already gone. By this question, Rihani suggests the need of moving on and accepting death as a natural process and looking forward to the future instead of clinging to the past. Rihani accepts death because he sees it as a way to return to the “Universal Soul”. He writes in his elegy “A Spring Dirge”:

Sad, sad, sad –
In vain thou comest, Spring;
Sad, sad, sad –
In vain thy birds all sing:
Perfumeless is thy rose;
Thy breeze, which softly blows,
Disturbs my sea of woes,
Ay, Death is on the wing.

Gone, gone, gone –
Go seek her, mocking Spring;
Gone, gone, gone –
Aside thy garlands fling;
Destroy thy laughing bower;
Call back an April shower
To weep with me this hour:
He came, not reckoning (*Ibid*.: 14).

Rihani is addressing spring telling it that its coming will not cheer him up because of the death that took place recently. “In vain thou comest” and it is now a time of sadness “sad, sad, sad”. Everything pleasant that is associated with springtime such as the singing of the birds, the smell of roses, and the softly blowing breeze bothers and disturbs the speaker. The speaker accuses spring of mocking “her” death for being pleasant and not respecting the speaker’s mourning. He desperately asks spring to bring her back “Go seek her”. Then he requests spring to seize to exist by throwing away its garlands and flowers, crashing its bower, and bring back rain instead of the clear blue sky. The speaker explains that the rainy weather will be suitable for his mourning “To weep with me”. However, spring comes, ignoring the speaker’s requests and pleas. In the third stanza, he wonders rhetorically whether love really comes with spring:

Love, love, love –
What sendest thou with Spring?
Love, love, love –
What tidings these birds bring!
They tell me they can hear
Thee, in a higher sphere;
But can that dry a tear,
Or give my wish a wing? (*Ibid*.: 14).

The birds tell him that they heard that dead woman in the sky "higher sphere", which suggest the return of her soul to the "Universal Soul". However, he wonders whether this good news will solace his grief.

Rithā, elegy or lament, is a very common genre of Arabic poetry, which seems to resonate in Rihani's poetry. While Rihani have many elegies in his books, Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" is one of the best-known elegies of Whitman's. It starts with the speaker, the persona of Whitman, recalling a memory when he was a little child:

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,
Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child leaving his bed
wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,
Down from the shower'd halo,
Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were alive,
Out from the patches of briers and blackberries,
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me (1891-92: 196).

The opening lines begin with the setting, describing an old memory in "Paumanok" (Long Island) which is one of the main reasons considering "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" an autobiographical poem. The memory invoked by the bird chanting as the

speaker was a “bareheaded” and “barefoot” child. Then the speaker starts narrating a story of two birds. The two birds exist in a seemingly timeless landscape of love, where the speaker – when he was a child – discovered their nesting nearby. He stood there observing them and learning from their union without disturbing their harmony. The two birds celebrate their love union in the following lines:

> Shine! shine! shine!
> Pour down your warmth, great sun!
> While we bask, we two together (*Ibid*.: 197).

Whitman celebrates the birds’ love, happiness, and unity in this natural setting. Unfortunately, their happiness and love did not last for long:

> One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,
> Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next,
> Nor ever appear'd again.
>
> Blow! blow! blow!
> Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore;
> I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me
>
> Yes, when the stars glisten'd,
> All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,
> Down almost amid the slapping waves,
> Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears.
>
> He call'd on his mate,
> He pour'd forth the meanings which I of all men know (*Ibid*.: 197-198).

Unknown to her mate – perhaps she is dead – the she-bird disappears one day. The he-bird who used to sing with his mate and chant of harmony and joy, has been transformed into a solitary singer of loss and separation. The bird goes on mourning his mate calling her “loved”:

O past! O happy life! O songs of joy!
In the air, in the woods, over fields,
Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved!
But my mate no more, no more with me!
We two together no more.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me,
O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you (1891-92: 200-201).

This story and the bird's sad experience had a great impact on the speaker. It is the bird's singing for his deceased mate that made the child feel sad and the bird's loss that made the child understand what death truly is. The mature poet will transfer what he learned from the bird and his sorrowful experience into the work of art.

Lisp'd to the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death (*Ibid*.: 201).

The fivefold repetition of Death responds to the bird's plaint – Loved! Loved! Loved! Loved! Loved! – seeming to convey a life-affirming message of continuity and process (see Erkkila, 1989: 175). Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endless Rocking" is an elegy considered one of Whitman's great poems and an excellent example of his free-verse poems because of the many images and symbols used. The title itself is a symbol of birth. Furthermore, this poem is very melodious and rhythmic which corresponds to the cheerful setting at the beginning and the sad tone after the she-bird is missing.

Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", shows a strong similarity to Rihani's elegies, especially his "A Spring Dirge". Rihani borrows from "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" the language of dealing with love and loss, and the repetition of words. For example, in "A Spring Dirge": "sad", "gone", and "love" echo the repetition of words in "Out

of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking": "blow!", "shine!", "soothe!", "loud!", and "death".

In his "To Think of Time", Whitman recounts what he thinks will happen when someone dies:

> The soreness of lying so much in bed goes over,
> The physician after long putting off gives the silent and terrible look for an answer,
> The children come hurried and weeping, and the brothers and sisters are sent for,
> Medicines stand unused on the shelf, (the camphor-smell has long pervaded the rooms,)
> The faithful hand of the living does not desert the hand of the dying,
> The twitching lips press lightly on the forehead of the dying,
> The breath ceases and the pulse of the heart ceases,
> The corpse stretches on the bed and the living look upon it,
> It is palpable as the living are palpable (1891-92: 333).

Whitman recounts this story of death in a very direct, explicit, detailed, and physical way: "The breath ceases and the pulse of the heart ceases", and argues that there is no big difference between the living and dead when the speaker explains that the corpse (representing death) "is palpable as the living [representing life] are palpable". Thus, death is as real as life. Whitman gives an account of how death takes place in detail regarding the setting, the dying process, and others' reactions "the living look upon it". This story shows how death happens in a natural way and how others accept it simply for being part of life. Whitman asserts that we should enjoy life rather than be concerned with when we will die in the following lines:

> To think how much pleasure there is,
> Do you enjoy yourself in the city? or engaged in business? or planning a nomination and election? or with your wife and family?
> Or with your mother and sisters? or in womanly housework? Or the beautiful

maternal cares?
These also flow onward to others, you and I flow onward,
But in due time you and I shall take less interest in them (*Ibid*.: 335).

Whitman provides a list of what life can offer us: to enjoy the city life, our career and work, and the company of our family and others. Eventually, we "shall take less interest in" these matters when our time will come to an end. "To Think of Time" concludes Whitman's "Autumn Rivulets" cluster, which deals mainly with the themes of life and death. Hence, Whitman's final message in this cluster is to accept death as a part of the cycle of life and focus on life until our time comes. Those Transcendental ideas, especially the image "you and I flow onward", are reflected in Rihani's "Onward Keep":

The golden leaves of yesterday
All safely hidden from the wind
  Beneath the snow that melts away,
And on the shivering boughs
  New leaves and tender sprout;
They crown the winter's brows,
  And laugh away his doubt.
And in the brook/ The echoes of
What I forsook-/ What I did love.
And the frost/ 'Neath the breath
Of me must/ Welcome death;
And the heat/ Left behind
Guides the feet/ Of the blind.
Onward keep;/ Laugh and weep;
Pain and joy/ Hide and peep.
Rise and fall-/ Fall and rise;
This is all-/ This is wise (1905: 55).

The setting is wintertime when the leaves which fell in autumn are covered by snow: "all

safely hidden from the wind". Beneath the snow, which came after the leaves died, new lives emerge from melting snow: "New leaves and tender sprout". In this poem, we read about the acceptance of the death of his love: "What I did love […] Of me must welcome death". The title, which is repeated twice in the poem "Onward Keep", suggests that the speaker has moved on and he is inviting us to do the same. The cycle of life and death is represented here by the image of new leaves and sprout came out of the melting snow which already has covered the golden fallen leaves, and when the poet ends the poem by repeating that we shall "Rise and fall – Fall and rise" in this life. In his "Allah wa Ana", Rihani expresses that this rising upon death and the cycle of death is merely to pass our souls to the Divine being or the Over-Soul, who is given the voice to say: "Thou shalt rise and thou shalt live in me" (1905: 56). For Rihani, the return of the soul to the Universal Soul is considered a salvation. He expresses in his free-verse poem "The Brass Bed" that his beloved' soul "bearing the torch of Pain/ Is searching all the worlds for Death" (1905: 34), which refers to death as a relief from this world, and he welcomes it especially that "Death will not come with thee, O Pain" (*Ibid*.).

There is a striking similarity of how the concepts of life and death are reflected in nature in Whitman's and Rihani's poetry, such as to enjoy the life while living and in its due time accept death for being a part of the life cycle, and that the life and death cycle is continuously working within nature. While Whitman uses the image of grass as an element of nature to incorporate the cycle of life and death, faith, and rebirth in his poetry, Rihani uses the leaves to explore the same concepts. Whitman's image of grass represents life is not only referred to in the title of his book, *Leaves of Grass*, but also metaphorical in the pages of this book. Each page is a leaf of grass. Thus, it brings back the book to life and nature as well. The same can be shown with regard to Rihani's first poetry collection *Myrtle*

and Myrrh, each page of the book can be seen as a tree leaf that brings the book into life and nature.

Rihani not only uses Whitman's grass image to represent the cycle of life and death, when he subtitles it with leaves, but he also copies Whitman's use of the flower as a symbol of hope for the future in his poetry. In "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", Whitman uses the nature image, the flower, as a symbol of hope for a brighter future during the funeral of his beloved president Abraham Lincoln: "Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring" and "O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies" (1891-92: 257). In his "Independent Blossoms", Rihani also uses the flower imagery and connects it to springtime which represents the hope of a new, brighter future: "When the spring boughs were told/ Soon the rose will unfold/ Herself in the bower" (1905: 36), and, like Whitman, he uses the flower image here to intertwined the concept of death and living things in his "A Nocturn":

> In Eternity, shod with the hoary noul
> Of deathless Death – in dim and shimmering shades
> Of soilless vales that bosom and cajole
> The crystal flowers dropping from cloud-cascades;
> Here in the grove of myriad colonnades
> Of jet and pearl and amber I now stroll –
> Here is my soul (1905: 40).

New York

In the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, New York City provided an excellent urban environment for Whitman and Rihani to start their literary careers. While Whitman moved from rural Long Island to New York City as a teenager, Rihani emigrated from rural Mount Lebanon overseas to New York City at the age of twelve. The press of the city and the modern cosmopolitan environment were ideal space for both writers to start their literary careers. In this chapter, I will show the influence of New York as a modern metropolitan urban space on their writings.

> Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born […]
> After roaming many lands, lover of populous pavements,
> Dweller in Mannahatta my city (1891-92: 18).

With identifying Manhattan as “my city”, Whitman starts his poem “Starting from Paumanok”. As I have mentioned, when rural Long Island did not provide him with a good economic opportunity, Whitman moved to New York City to work for various newspapers in 1839.

Historically speaking, New York City was going through a big transformation as it exploded from 123,706 citizens inhabitants in 1820 to a metropolis of 813,669 (almost half of them immigrants) by 1860. Agricultural America was not used to or even ready for such an unprecedented transformation. John Evan Seery explains that cities at the beginning of the Nineteenth century were “demonized even as they became the matrix for more and more human life. People learned to curse their cities as places that were perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame, savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust” (2011: 149).

The temperance movement was one of the results of this transformation. It was a social movement against the consumption of alcoholic beverages which Whitman became interested in. Whitman advocated this movement in some of his early works such as *Franklin Evans*, which is a didactic fiction written to advocate social virtue and abstinence from alcohol. Besides, Whitman as a journalist reported favorably on a number of temperance events in New York City and published a number of other temperance tales, including “Wild Frank's Return”, “The Child's Champion”, and *The Madman* – an unfinished sequel to *Franklin Evans*, where he dealt with issues of race, class, and community in the city of New York.

In his early poetry, Whitman endeavored to acquaint the public with the new urban life style by “means of such linking, collectivizing, or aggregating structures as choric rhythm, syntactical parallelism, and promiscuously inclusive cataloguing of activities and occupations” (Thomas, 1998). “A Broadway Pageant” is an excellent example of Whitman’s New York before the outbreak of the Civil War:

> Over the Western sea hither from Niphon come,
> Courteous, the swart-cheek'd two-sworded envoys,
> Leaning back in their open barouches, bare-headed, impassive,
> Ride to-day through Manhattan […]
>
> But I will sing you a song of what I behold Libertad (1891-92: 193).

Whitman welcomes here the Japanese ambassadors to New York with enthusiasm. This visit allows Whitman to celebrate the spirit of the country’s founding principles such as liberty and freedom. “A Broadway Pageant” is full of appreciation and warmth toward the people of the East. It is an occasion where Whitman’s nationalist poetics operates within the local and global framework, and where his city – New York – transforms into a

cosmopolitan space uniting East and West.

> Superb-faced Manhattan!
> Comrade Americanos! to us, then at last the Orient comes.
>
> To us, my city,
> Where our tall-topt marble and iron beauties range on opposite sides, to walk in the space between,
> To-day our Antipodes comes.
>
> The Originatress comes,
> The nest of languages, the bequeather of poems, the race of eld (*Ibid*.: 194).

Whitman sees the Japanese ambassadors' visit as a symbol of the entire Eastern hemisphere's arrival in New York. Whitman addresses "Superb-faced Manhattan," saying that Asia finally comes "[t]o us, my city". He is very enthusiastic about and optimistic of the future of the trans-pacific relations between the Orient and the New World. The speaker celebrates the East and its rich history when he describes it as "Antipodes", "Originatress", "nest of languages", "bequeather of poems", and "race of eld".

> The countries there with their populations, the millions en-masse are curiously here,
> The swarming market-places, the temples with idols ranged along the sides or at the end, bonze, brahmin, and llama,
> Mandarin, farmer, merchant, mechanic, and fisherman,
> The singing-girl and the dancing-girl, the ecstatic persons, the secluded emperors,
> Confucius himself, the great poets and heroes, the warriors, the castes, all,
> Trooping up, crowding from all directions, from the Altay mountains, (*Ibid*.: 195).

Whitman lists here examples of common people with Asian backgrounds: "farmer", "merchant", "mechanic", "fisherman", "singing-girl", and "dancing-girl" who are part of New

York City. He says that all these common people and the great ancient ones such as emperors and the Asian poet Confucius are marching down the streets of Manhattan. Whitman sees the East imported both spatially and temporarily to New York, the West. Whitman depicts Asian peoples, cultures, languages, and lands as ancient and mystical, and later refers to the continent of Asia as “the past, the dead”. “A Broadway Pageant” places New York at the center of national identity and refers to New York’s bright future as leading civilization forward. Whitman celebrates the history, present, and the promises of a bright future of the city, celebrates the diversity of it, and recognizes the importance of the city as a leading role model for the other American cities and the world at large.

Like Whitman, Rihani expresses his love towards New York City many times in his writings. He writes in *Ar-Rihaniyat*: “I love you New York. I love your traffic, your noise and your crowds” (Oueijan, 1998: 9). Rihani praises the virtues the city will instill in its inhabitants when he adds “come to New York, where you will learn patience and perseverance. You will learn from its people the independence in work and the endurance after failure” (*Ibid*.: 12). Rihani’s poem “New York” is his lyrical experience of the City of New York, an expression of his fascination for its beauty, the diversity of its residents, and the artistic and materialistic potentials it possesses:

> Are you not the daughter of revolt in the ancient world,
> The bridge of oddity in the New World, […]
>
> Aren’t you yesterday’s divorcee of the Indians,
> Today’s [maker] of the news,
> And tomorrow’s carrier of the revolution? (2009: 12)

Rihani starts the poem by describing New York City as “the daughter of revolt in the ancient world” which refers to the rich cultural heritage it has and for being still tied to its

rich heritage. It has always been a center for civilization starting with the Native Americans who inhabited Manhattan, or as they called it Mannahatta, which was taken from them upon discovering the continent, “[a]ren’t you yesterday’s divorcee of the Indians”.

Rihani also mentions the significance of New York in his time as “[t]oday’s [maker] of the news”. At the beginning of the Twentieth century and before World War I, the modern city of New York was formed with the consolidation of Brooklyn (until then a separate city), the County of New York (which then included parts of the Bronx), the County of Richmond, and the western portion of the County of Queens. The opening of the subway at the beginning of the Twentieth century helped binding the city together to become a world center for industry, commerce, and communication. Like Whitman in the Nineteenth century, Rihani asserts the leading role the city will play in the future: “[a]nd tomorrow’s carrier of the revolution?”

New York City had an important place in the American Civil War. Whitman’s first poem of the “Drum-Taps” collection “First O Songs for a Prelude” portrays the city and its leading role in the Civil War:

> First O songs for a prelude,
> Lightly strike on the stretch'd tympanum pride and joy in my city,
> How she led the rest to arms, how she gave the cue,
> How at once with lithe limbs unwaiting a moment she sprang,
> (O superb! O Manhattan, my own, my peerless!
> O strongest you in the hour of danger, in crisis! O truer than steel!) […]
> How you led to the war, (that shall serve for our prelude, songs of soldiers,)
> How Manhattan drum-taps led (1891-92: 219).

“First O Songs for a Prelude” is a poem devoted to the Civil War, it presents Manhattan’s preparation for and leading role in the war. The line “she [New York] led the rest to arms,

how she gave the cue" reaffirms its leading role for the war, which is mentioned more clearly after a couple of lines "you led to the war". Whitman is very proud of New York City's role in the war and uses exalted words to describe it, such as: "superb", "peerless", and "strongest". The city's iron will image is expressed here in "truer than steel!"

In the aftermath of the American Civil War, the country transformed from a predominantly rural, agrarian, and isolated society to an urbanized, industrialized country. These changes were very much visible in Whitman's poetry. In his "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun", Whitman starts the poem singing of the rural life:

> Give me the splendid silent sun with, all his beams full-dazzling;
> Give me juicy autumnal fruit, ripe and red from the orchard;
> Give me a field where the unmow'd grass grows;
> Give me an arbor, give me the trellis'd grape;
> Give me fresh corn and wheat – give me serene-moving animals, teaching content;
> Give me nights perfectly quiet, as on high plateaus west of the Mississippi, and I looking up at the stars;
> Give me odorous at sunrise a garden of beautiful flowers, where I can walk undisturb'd; […]
> Give me to warble spontaneous songs, reliev'd, recluse by myself, for my own ears only,
> Give me solitude – give me Nature – give me again, O Nature, your primal sanities! (1865: 47).

Published 1865 in *Drum Taps*, "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun" tells about Whitman's desire to seek refuge in a solitary rural place away from city life with its continued reminders of the American Civil War at that time. The poem starts with the speaker singing of the country life and listing some of the settings of the countryside of America. He is

cherishing the sunlight, trees, orchards, and unmowed grass. “Give me solitude, give me Nature” suggests that the speaker is fed up with the hustle and bustle of city life and that he desires to enjoy the beauties and tranquility of nature where he “can walk undisturb'd”. In the second part of the poem, however, the speaker reconsiders city life and changes his mind completely:

> These demanding to have them, (tired with ceaseless excitement, and rack'd by the war-strife,)
> These to procure incessantly asking, rising in cries from my heart,
> While yet incessantly asking still I adhere to my city,
> Day upon day and year upon year O city, walking your streets,
> Where you hold me enchain'd a certain time refusing to give me up,
> Yet giving to make me glutted, enrich'd of soul, you give me forever faces (*Ibid*.: 244-245).

After praising country life and banishing city life, the speaker realizes that he has these temporary desires because of the “ceaseless excitement” and the hardships of Civil War. Then he begins to question himself whether he wants to abandon his city life – which is close to his heart – and retreat to nature. Upon reflecting on this concern, he becomes aware and more appreciative of city life. He recognizes that he is engaged in this bustling life of New York. He loves to walk its streets over and over, and he adores to be surrounded by its crowd, the “forever faces” that enrich his soul. After reflecting upon what the city has offered him, his wish “to escape” has been forcefully trampled down by an even stronger desire to engage his soul. Whitman explicitly mentions that living in an urban place would nurture our souls, “enrich'd of soul”. Rihani also recognizes the effect that the city can have on the soul in his call to New Yorkers to go outside and enjoy the outdoor life in his “New Year’s Eve”:

Listen!
Listen to the trumpets calling you,
And to the bells welcoming you,
As the night is smiling for you.
Even the flowers of May do not fill
The heart with such joy as those lights do.
Those cheers of happiness brighten the sky in the night
And make the gardens of Orion glitter.
Come with me to the most beautiful streets
So I may show you a crowd of misfortunate people
Having together like a heavy sea
And cheering gloriously and delightfully (Oueijan, 2002: 33).

Written in New York in 1912, Rihani's "New Year's Eve" reflects on how an urban space such as New York City in this poem nurtures and sets our souls free. The speaker is inviting the readers to go out into the New Year's Eve and celebrate this occasion all together on the streets of New York. Rihani also expresses his preference for the urban areas over the rural ones or nature when he writes: "Even the flowers of May do not fill/ The heart with such joy as those lights do", and his love for the crowd in the lines: "Those cheers of happiness brighten the sky in the night/ cheering gloriously and delightfully".

Rihani's celebration of the crowds of New York echoes Whitman's who over and over again expresses that he is proud to belong to New York and its crowds: "This is the city and I am one of the citizens" (1891-92: 68). Whitman believes that he is connected to the inhabitants of New York through all activities connected to life:

> The city of such women, I am mad to be with them! I will return after death to be with them!
> The city of such young men, I swear I cannot live happy, without I often go talk, walk, eat, drink, sleep, with them! (1871-72: 346).

Whitman expresses his enjoyment for the urban daily activities such as talking, walking, and drinking. He not only celebrates the activities and lifestyle of the city, but also presents them as an antidote for death. The last line “sleep with them” is an expression of love towards the city’s inhabitants. Whitman is more explicit in his expression of love towards “forever faces” that the city gives him in his “Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun”. Whitman addresses the city saying:

> Give me interminable eyes–give me women–give me comrades and lovers by the thousand!
> Let me see new ones every day–let me hold new ones by the hand every day!
> […]
> Manhattan faces and eyes forever for me (1891-92: 245).

Whitman, whose *personae* like to indulge in the sexual city life of New York, is eager here to meet new potential partners, “women”, “comrades”, and “lovers” every day. He affirms this incessant desire with the concluding line: “Manhattan faces and eyes forever for me”. On the one hand, the speaker describes the rural life and connects it to starting a family in the old-fashioned way: “Give me for marriage a sweet-breath'd woman of whom I should never tire, / Give me a perfect child, give me away aside from the noise of the world a rural domestic life”. On the other hand, the speaker suggests that having a multitude of partners is part of the urban life.

Historically speaking, New York City was notorious in the Nineteenth century for the possibility of providing a relatively free sexual life to its inhabitants. The historian Elizabeth Garner Masarik affirms that “the years between roughly 1850 to about 1910 were the years that commercialized sex and vice in New York City were the most visible, the most prolific, and the most wild” (Masarik: 2017). In the late 1850s, Whitman began to become

a regular at Pfaff's saloon, which was known as a place for Bohemian artists in New York City. Pfaff's was an unusual establishment, welcoming gays and women long before it was customary to do so. Pfaff's was held so dear to Whitman's heart that he composed an unfinished poem "The Two Vaults" in 1861 hailing it:

> The vault at Pfaff's where the drinkers and laughers meet to eat and drink and carouse
> While on the walk immediately overhead pass the myriad feet of Broadway […]
> Laugh on laughers! Drink on drinkers!
> Bandy the jest! Toss the theme from one to another!
> Beam up–Brighten up, bright eyes of beautiful young men! (Levin, 2014: xi).

This Bohemian life at Pfaff's had an important impact on Whitman. He experimented with the boundaries of human sexuality there: "It was at Pfaff's, too, that Whitman joined the Fred Gray Association, a loose confederation of young men who seemed anxious to explore new possibilities of male-male affection" (Folsom, 2005: 62). Thus, Whitman extends in his poetry his sexuality to everyone in the city. "City of Orgies" is a good example where Whitman expresses his love explicitly towards the sexuality of the city and its crowd:

> City of orgies, walks and joys,
> City whom that I have lived and sung in your midst will one day make you illustrious,
> Not the pageants of you, not your shifting tableaus, your spectacles, repay me,
> Not the interminable rows of your houses, nor the ships at the wharves,
> Nor the processions in the streets, nor the bright windows with goods in them,
> Nor to converse with learn'd persons, or bear my share in the soiree or feast;
> Not those, but as I pass O Manhattan, your frequent and swift flash of eyes offering me love,
> Offering response to my own–these repay me,

Lovers, continual lovers, only repay me (1891-92: 105).

New York City is described here as a city of walks and joys. New York's eyes of love are preferred to its "pageants", "shifting tableaus", "spectacles" and "processions". The most valuable quality of Whitman's beloved – Manhattan – is its "frequent and swift flash of eyes offering me love, / Offering response to my own." This silent gaze into the eyes of a stranger with whom one is inexplicably affectionate in the streets of Manhattan is what Whitman considers a true act of love here. Whitman expresses his love for an impersonal individual, it is directed toward the entire crowd. It is what Dana Brand calls "cosmopolitan love" (2010: 183).

Whitman's "City of Orgies" shares with Rihani's "New York" its interest in the city as a subject of poetry portraying the everyday life of New York urban environment. While Whitman celebrated the multiple partners and desires in the city, Rihani only refers to the sexuality existing in the city in the lines: "The virtuous walks with the sinful,/ And the virgin walks laughing brightly with the adulterous", and "Come watch the whores touch with their shoulders/ The shoulders of the virgins and mothers" (Oueijan, 2002: 35). Rihani's speaker is accepting all people here whether they are "sinful" or "virtuous", they are all equal in his eyes. Nevertheless, Rihani was not satisfied with the socio-political hierarchy of the city or the country at large. After praising New York City's past, present, and future in the first section of "New York", Rihani constructed his criticism for certain socio-political statues in the following sections of the poem:

You are the daughter of morning whisper,
That has not the melodies and songs of dawn;
Rather, it fills with the ringing of solid gold
That is in your nightclubs and markets,

And in your banks and churches.
Woe to your sons and lovers!

You are the daughter of wealth and monopoly;
In your stores, heaped is the wealth of the earth;
In your safes, kept are moneys and jewels;
In your palaces, are culture's wonders.
But your streets are filled with appalling clamor and noise,
And your huts are filled with darkness, poverty, hunger, and pain.
Woe to your sons and lovers! (2009: 13).

Rihani expresses here his dissatisfaction with the inequality in New York City. He mentions the far cry between the wealthy markets, banks, churches, palaces etc. on the one hand and the streets that "are filled with darkness, poverty, hunger, and pain" on the other. Rihani goes on criticizing the city for being materialistic and for how much it has changed at the beginning of the Twentieth century:

Bride of the New World!
Whose bride would you want to be today or tomorrow?
Would you want [to] move from
Purity to the hiding places,
From the huts of liberty,
To the abodes of vice
In the monuments of fortune
And in the pits of revolution, woe, and death?
May God's mercy be on the souls
Which knew you when you were chaste.
Woe to those souls which adored you as their whore […]

Daughter of the [ancient people]
Where are your ancestors' virtues?
Your past is filled with fire and light;

Your present is a dilapidated light;
And your future?
The borrowed light will sure diffuse one day,
And your true image would show (2009: 15-16).

Rihani addresses the city, which seemingly has unconstrained potential for growth and activity. There is an intimacy in addressing the city as female "pride" and "daughter" to express his love for the urban environment. "Bride of the New World!" is a reference to the city being the ultimate outcome of discovering the new world and the important role it plays for the New World, such as being the door of migration into the United States. There is a criticism of capitalism and a call to "purity" and chastity. The lines: "The borrowed light will sure diffuse one day,/ And your true image would show" are explained by Albert Rihani: "New York's feigned innocence cannot last forever, and although the maintenance of this pose gave unique advantages, the city eventually would have to address the classical problem of virtue and face the sufferings of its residents" (2016: 418).

Rihani's criticism of New York City serves as a warning to capitalism to create more inclusive and equal conditions for its residents and take the responsibility for its leadership role model. In his essay collection *The Path of Vision,* Rihani speaks in glowing terms of America and compares it to Greece and Rome in its civilizing mission. He refers to its new identity tied to mass migration and the world's conditions following WWI: "The melting pot certainly has a soul. And this soul will certainly have a voice. And the voice of America […] is destined to become the voice of the world" (1921: 170).

Rihani's criticism echoes some of Whitman's lines in "Song of Myself", Whitman also expresses some dissatisfaction with materialism which is the result of capitalism:

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,

I stand and look at them long and long […]

Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth (1891-92: 54).

These lines serve as a critique on mankind as Whitman is praising the animals for being happily free of daily responsibilities. He lists sins having to do with urbanism such as feeling discontent with one's spiritual state, constantly complaining about life and the obsession of owning property. There is an anti-materialist notion in the line: "Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things". This line carries an explicit dissatisfaction with excessive consumption of material goods. Moreover, the line "Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth" carries a criticism of the socio-political condition at his time. Whitman criticizes the privileges that the capitalists have over the other citizens.

In his sociological striving, Whitman issues an editorial on "American Workingmen, versus Slavery" in 1847. He calls "the workingmen of the north, east, and west, to come up, to a man, in defense of their rights, their honor, and that heritage of getting bread by the sweat of the brow, which we must leave to our children" (1847: 318). However, the workers did not defend their rights or resist the extension of slavery to the territories. Whitman was disappointed and he wrote in the political poem "Song for Certain Congressmen", which was published in the *New York Evening Post* in 1850, that "young Freedom" was stabbed in America because the people did not rise to defend it.

Rihani expresses similar socio-political criticism of the big gap between the rich and the poor and the exploitation by the monopolies in his article "Over New York's Roofs". He states that the sight of the black chimneys continuously unleashing their smoke in the sky

of the city reminds him of the miner's black hands raised to the sky asking God to take away their affliction. Rihani condemns the long working hours, the tragic and hazardous working conditions that the miners have to undergo to provide the coal for New York City. He calls their working conditions at the beginning of the Nineteenth century "slavery" when he requests to free the miners "from the slavery" and ultimately calls for equilibrium and reform.

Rihani's article "When Hell Seems Like Paradise" deals also with socio-political matters of the city, particularly with the role of monopolizing companies. Rihani recalls a miners' strike that occurred at the beginning of the Nineteenth century in the United States, and how the mine owners refused the miners' demands for decent wages and raised the price of coal and started selling less, so that everyone was suffering. They "conspire with the law and use the power of the government to achieve their goals" (Oueijan, 1998: 21). "When Hell Seems Like Paradise" aims to criticize the American government for allowing the "monopolists" to become exploitative.

These criticisms were the results of Rihani's concern with the social and economic problems and his thoughts concerning capitalist exploitation. Although Rihani criticized the monopolist and some of the exploitative qualities of the economic system characteristic of capitalism, he was not completely anti-capitalist in his criticism; rather his aim was to fix the systems of its flaws, such as the suffering and poverty of the working class. Hajjar explains that Rihani "recognized the efforts of a number of capitalists who, indirectly, helped the workers attain a better condition of life through financing cultural and social activities such as universities, museums, and hospitals, which could benefit the rich as well as the poor" (2010: 116-117). Hajjar concludes that "one could see that Rihani had

been influenced by the socialist doctrines which he himself saw, in many of their aspects, similar to the principles of social reform and liberalism. However, his socialism did not reach the stage of ideological commitment" (*Ibid*.: 117).

Rihani, who had come to New York City in 1888 at the age of eleven, was fascinated by the city as much as Whitman. While both writers moved from rural areas to New York City, Rihani's migration had a greater impact on his writings since he came from overseas – the Orient. Living in New York City provided Rihani with an opportunity to be part of the modern society of the West and be in touch with various literature works of that cosmopolitan city;

> the emigration of Rihani from Syria to New York was an emigration of mind, spirit, emotion, and body. It was liberation from a reclusive rural Eastern environment falling under the burden of customs and traditions and an immersion in a Western urban environment opened to the world and advancing with its science, machines, and institutions towards the future (Albert Rihani, 2007: 22).

Indeed New York has provided an ideal environment for Rihani to establish his literary career. The critic Todd Fine stresses the significance of New York for Rihani: "New York offers an intellectual temple for growth and social exploration, paralleling modern cosmopolitan visions of the potential of the city to permit individual exploration and self-fulfillment" (2016: 439). In his book *The Path of Vision*, Rihani identifies how New York, the Paradise of the New World, enriches his mind and soul upon his return to Arab East in 1921:

> What have I [sic] brought with me from the Paradise of the New World, you ask. What have I gained in the country of gold and iron, of freedom and trusts? How much have I accumulated in the land of plenty and profusion […] I deposit in many banks, including the Bank of Wisdom; and my credit is good in many kingdoms,

including the Kingdom of the Soul (1921: 101).

Indeed, New York City had a center role for developing Whitman's and Rihani's literary careers; they started as journalists to grow into best-known writers in American and Arab-American literatures respectively. The two writers criticized and expressed their love toward the city life of New York. Rihani followed Whitman in celebrating New York crowds, its leading role globally for making history at their time, and the potential it had for the future. Most importantly, they celebrated it for being a metropolitan urban center and its Eastern heritage. They both – Whitman in his "A Broadway Pageant" and Rihani in his "New York" – saw in New York the bridge that connects East and West.

In addition to its key role of providing an ideal space to start their literary career, New York was always an important source of poetic imagery and democratic energy in Whitman's and Rihani's literary works. I will show in the next sub-chapter how the urban space of New York contributed to Whitman's and Rihani's visions of freedom and democracy.

Freedom and Democracy

Whitman has been described as the bard of democracy for advocating a multiethnic and equitable society, among other democratic values. I will examine Whitman's democratic vision as manifested in his work and show the processes that shaped this vision throughout his literary career. I will show how Whitman's vision of democracy is present in Rihani's literary works and how Rihani inherited this democratic self from Whitman and introduced it to the Arab readers.

Whitman's concept of democracy was very much inspired by the optimistic patriotism that dominated the rising American nation in the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Before the outbreak of the American Civil War, Whitman's poetry emphasizes how the American nation is built on democracy and equality. For example, Whitman addresses democracy directly in his poem "For You O Democracy":

> The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers,
> The continuance of Equality shall be comrades […]
>
> I will make the continent indissoluble,
> I will make the most splendid race the sun ever yet shone upon,
> I will make divine magnetic lands.
>
> I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
> I will make inseparable cities, with their arms about each other's necks.
>
> For you these, from me, O Democracy, to serve you, ma femme!
> For you! for you, I am trilling these songs (1860-61: 351).

The poem was written when the United States was on the verge of the Civil War. Whitman

wrote this poem to warn about the potential destruction of the unity of his nation. He affirmed that democracy gave birth to “the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon”. Whitman announces that his poetry will unite the country with regard to the existing political tension between the North and the South at that time, in his line “I will make the continent indissoluble”. The country is presented by images from nature, “lands”, “rivers”, “lakes”, and “prairies”, and Whitman will bring them together for the sake of his vision of democracy: “I will make inseparable cities, with their arms about each other's necks/ For you these, from me, O Democracy”. When Whitman identifies democracy as female, he writes in French “ma femme” and refers to the French Revolution, implicitly alluding to its political slogan: "Liberté, fraternité, egalité!"

In his article on “Democracy” in the *Walt Whitman Encyclopedia*, Ed Folsom explains that as part of his democratic effort, Whitman endeavored to invent a poetry as open, as nondiscriminatory, and as absorptive as he imagined an ideal democracy would be. Hence, Whitman tried to construct a democratic voice that would serve as a model for his society (LeMaster: 1998). For Whitman, poetry and literature should work with the concept of democracy. In his 1855 preface, Whitman affirms the equal terms between the poet and the reader:

> The messages of great poets to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand us, We are no better than you, What we enclose you enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumbered Supremes, and that one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another (1855: VII).

He declares here that there should be no authoritative domination or “Supremacy”.

Whitman tries to build a new democratic relationship between reader and author, based on greater equality. Thus, Whitman constructs a poetry that directly addresses his readers and challenges them to act and respond. His poetry endeavors to break down the barriers of bias and convention and enlarge the self. Based on his vision, Whitman calls for "a new Literature" that would be "the only sure and worthy supports and expressions of the American democracy" (1892: 249).

The democratic principles and his sense of equality and freedom are the dominant themes of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman's reader "who would get at the spirit and meaning of *Leaves of Grass* must remember that its animating principles is Democracy" (Burroughs, 1896: 81). Whitman's celebration of the common people throughout his poetry is another example of his strife toward a truly democratic and equal society. He writes in his poem "I Sing the Body Electric": "I knew a man, a common farmer, the father of five sons / And in them the fathers of sons, and in them the fathers of sons" (*Ibid*.: 82). Whitman sings of the common human being among the masses rather than prominent figures and exceptional characters. "All the motifs of his work are the near, the vital, the universal; nothing curious, or subtle, or far-fetched. His working ideas are democracy, equality, personality, nativity, health, sexuality, comradeship, self-esteem, the purity of the body, the equality of the sexes, etc." (*Ibid*.: 79).

Democratic Vistas, written in the aftermath of the American Civil War, is the culmination of Whitman's democratic vision. The prose pamphlet was published in 1871, and is comprised of a trilogy of essays: "Democracy", where he surveys the flaws of post-Reconstruction America; "Personalism", where he provides his vision for developing individualism; and "Orbic Literature", where he deals with the emergence of what he calls

“New World literature”. In these essays, Whitman attempts to demonstrate how freedom and individualism can revolutionize and reconstruct politics, religion, sociology, manners, literature, and art (see Warren: 1994). The critic Arthur Wrobel characterizes the prose style in Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* as a “diffuse, tortured, and murky-one that seemingly dramatizes Whitman in his role as poet-prophet speaking out of a visionary trance” (Wrobel: 1998).

Whitman’s *Democratic Vistas* inspired Rihani to write two Arabic essays expressing similar democratic visions for the Arab world, “Al-Hukuma Al-Dimuqratiya” (The Democratic Government), both sharing the same name were published in New York 1900. In these early essays, Rihani expresses his admiration for the American form of democratic government and representation where the ruling power emanates from the people; he also discusses freedom in its social and individual sense denoting the opposite to slavery, and its political connotation meaning the right of people to political expression and vote. In these essays, Rihani justifies the right to participate in government from the traditional concept of consultation (Al-Shura), as expressed in the Qur’an and the tradition of the Prophet, as well as from the Christian idea of the ‘Divine paternity’ and the Arabic concept of ‘human fraternity’ (see Hajjar, 2010: 97). He attempts to introduce Western democratic concepts to Arab readers by connecting them to the traditional democratic ones existed in the Arab world before. Rihani explained that “in the democratic government, which he saw as the antithesis of tyrannical monarchy, there were no special privileges for anyone; everyone was free and a general system applied to all. Thus, he concluded democracy is another word for freedom” (*Ibid*.).

In addition to his prose essays “Al-Hukuma Al-Dimuqratiya”, Rihani’s verse also contains

the themes of equality and democracy. For example, Rihani calls New Yorkers in his “New Year’s Eve” to to liberate their souls, he includes everyone as equal citizens in this poem out of his belief that democracy must include everyone equally:

> […] I may show you a crowd of misfortunate people
> Heaving together like a heavy sea
> and cheering gloriously and delightfully.
> The rich one leaves his home tonight;
> And the poor, his hut.
> The wretched leaves his cell;
> And the slave, his chains.
> On this night, man becomes free.
> I ask those scornful of the humble joys of people
> To come with me to the deserted night clubs,
> To the dark dancing halls (*Ibid*.: 33-34).

Rihani elaborates on his crowd. He mentions equally the rich, poor, wretched, and enslaved, the latter referring to the workmen; “the worker forgets his enslavement” (*Ibid*.: 34). Rihani feels proud to be included among the crowd, which echoes Whitman’s merging with crowd expressions: “They the spirits of dear friends dead or alive, thicker they come, a great crowd, and I in the middle” (1891-92: 99), and “Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd” (*Ibid*.: 130). Whitman’s poetry is full of reference and celebration of the crowd. For example, it is the main theme of his poems “I Sing the Body Electric” and “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”.

Like Whitman, Rihani’s self is merging with the crowd democratically when he shares the same identity with masses and celebrates its diversity. Rihani goes on including everyone in his crowd regardless of the differences:

The nobleman walks with the unprivileged,
Unmindful of their whiff.
The sober walks with the drunkards,
Not disgusted by their smell.
The atheist walks with the priest,
For the first stops swearing,
And the second stops praying.
The virtuous walks with the sinful,
And the virgin walks laughing brightly with the adulterous.

I ask those scornful of the humble joys of people
To come with me to see the rich and poor
The nobleman and the workers,
The virtuous and the sinful,
The sober and the drunk,
And the priest and the atheist,
Walking together side by side.
Come watch the whores touch with their shoulders
The shoulders of the virgins and mothers.
They walk side by side
Under the same sky (Oueijan, 2002: 35).

When Rihani mentions some of the opposite qualities of the crowd such as “nobleman” and “workers”, “sober” and “drunkards”, “priest” and “atheist”, “virtuous” and “sinful” etc. He expresses his tolerance and accepting messages to everyone and confirm their equal status when they were: “walking together side by side”. Rihani’s democratic society does not focus on the sameness of people, but rather it comprehends their diversity. Rihani repeats the line “On this night, man becomes free” three times in the poem to emphasize the importance of equality and democracy to achieve freedom. This equality existing between all citizens and the rejection of any artificial social distinctions helps the general

intellect to reduce things to unity and form a true democratic society.

Rihani wrote “New Year’s Eve” in 1912 in Arabic to introduce those themes to the Arab readers and present to them the democratic society in the West. Moreover, writing this poem in free verse also expresses Rihani’s democratic self. Hajjar asserts that “for him [Rihani], advocacy of free verse went hand in hand with advocacy of democracy, individual liberty and social and political freedom” (2010: 5).

Rihani’s “New Year’s Eve” reminds of Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing”. Whitman hears America singing with its mechanics, carpenters, masons, boatmen, shoemakers, wood-cutters, mothers, girls etc. “Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,/ The day what belongs to the day–at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,/ Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs” (1891-92: 17). Rihani asserts this democratic, equitable society in his article “Altaeziat fi Almusibat walmusibat fi Altaezia” (The Calamity of Condolence): “every deceased deserves a tear and a poem, no matter if his life was a mere waft of wind in the desert of indolence or a treasure in the mountain of knowledge and charity” (Oueijan, 1998: 44-45).

Whitman’s and Rihani’s advocacy of equality is based upon their belief that each one of us is composed of the same divine material. Rihani writes in *The Book of Khalid*:

> There is an infinite possibility of soul-power in every one of us, if it can be developed freely, spontaneously, without discipline or restraint. There is, too, an infinite possibility of beauty in every soul, if it can be evoked at an auspicious moment by the proper word, the proper voice, the proper touch. That is why I say; Go thy way, O my brother. Be simple, natural, spontaneous, courageous, and free […] let nature be thy guide; acquainted thyself with one or two of her laws ere thou runnest wild (2016: 67-68).

This passage asserts Rihani's belief in the divinity of each one of us and his American transcendentalist principle of trusting and returning to nature. Rihani uses his protagonist Khalid to deliver the wisdom and the principles that he learned in New York to the people of his home country. Khalid's main goal when returning to his homeland was, in Rihani's words, "to do some good work, among the Syrian voters, for Democracy's Candidate this campaign" (*Ibid*.: 86). Rihani probably borrows these socio-political themes from his favorite writer, Walt Whitman, to push his political agenda in and introduce his vision of democracy to the Arab world. For example, Whitman's idealization of the French Revolution of 1848 is present in Rihani's writings.

In his quest to promote democracy at home and abroad, Whitman celebrates the French Revolution. He expresses his sense of identification with the French Revolution of 1848 against King Louis Philippe in his poem "O Star of France":

> Dim smitten star,
> Orb not of France alone, pale symbol of my soul, its dearest hopes,
> The struggle and the daring, rage divine for liberty,
> Of aspirations toward the far ideal, enthusiast's dreams of brotherhood,
> Of terror to the tyrant and the priest (1891-92: 306).

France is here a symbol for the speaker's hope in liberty and democracy. He identifies the usurpers of freedom as tyrants and priests. Whitman sang of this revolution many times in his prose and poetry and asserted that the revolt of the French against their king was inevitable for them to have their freedom. Whitman connects the politics of France to the United States government, He writes in a note in *Specimen Days*:

> The Official relations of Our States we know, are with the reigning kings, queens. &c., of the Old World. But the only deep, vast, emotional, real affinity of America is

with the cause of Popular Government there and especially in France (cited in Erkkila, 1980: 9).

Erkkila explains that Whitman's lifelong sympathy with France was a result of his belief that the American and the French Revolutions emerged from the same root (*Ibid*.). In fact, Whitman always considered the French Revolution as part of a universal movement that would bring democracy and liberty to the people. The elected government of the Second Republic ruled France following the overthrow of King Louis Philippe in February 1848. This transformation set off a series of uprisings in Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Italy, which were defeated later. Nevertheless, Whitman maintained his belief in the triumphs of liberty and celebrated those revolutions in his early poem "Resurgemus" (1850):

> Suddenly, out of its state and drowsy air, the air of slaves,
> Like lightning Europe le'pt forth,
> Sombre, superb and terrible,
> As Ahimoth, brother of Death.
>
> God, 'twas delicious!
> That brief, tight, glorious grip
> Upon the throats of kings (Whitman: 1850).

The tone of the speaker holds much hope for the future. The speaker is taking on the persona of a prophet promising a glorious future that lurks upon revolting against those kings. For Whitman, those revolutions were part of a universal movement from enslavement to liberation as power was transferred from centralized authorities to the sovereign power of the individual.

Rihani, like Whitman, looked upon the French Revolution as a symbol for liberty from old monarchies and religions. He mentions that explicitly in his first book *Nubdha fi Al-Thawra Al-Faransiya* (Treatise of the French Revolution), which is a critique and review of *The*

French Revolution: A History by Thomas Carlyle. Rihani defends the French Revolution in his book describing it as a great revolution that led to unprecedented progress for the French people and for the world at large.

In 1907, Rihani wrote the poem “Al-Thawra” (The Revolution) in Arabic, which has similarities to Whitman’s poem “Resurgemus!” regarding the French Revolution. Rihani writes:

> Have they not been told of Paris’s Bastille,
> Of its free prisoners and the king’s appeal,
> When King Louis was beheaded
> And French oppressors were butchered.
> Woe, then, to the oppressors! (Oueijan, 2002: 12).

Rihani mentions some of the main events of the first French Revolution; the storming of the Bastille, freeing the prisoners, and the execution of King Louis XVI. Rihani’s early literary career as a writer corresponds with the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Rihani criticizes the Ottomans when they controlled the Arab East until 1918, and he often refers to them as oppressors. Thus, his focus on the tragic end of the French “oppressor” king serves as a warning to the Ottomans. Rihani uses the French Revolution to encourage the Arabs to revolt against Ottoman rule, and promises hope in return:

> Woe to the oppressors from all men revolting!
> Woe to the corrupted from troops in red, their victory asserting!
> Have they not seen the furnace of the New World,
> Where all ambitious oppressors were devoured,
> And where purple gowns and crowns melted,
> And slaves were liberated (Oueijan, 2002: 13).

Rihani, a political activist, urges the Arabs to revolt against the oppression which would

result in “victory” and liberty similar to the ones of the New World. Rihani often expresses that freedom and democracy in the Arab world could not be imposed by force, rather it should be taken by a revolution from within (see Hajjar, 2010: 2). Thus, Rihani celebrates the French Revolution when he has his protagonist, Khalid, declare in his novel *The Book of Khalid*: “I beheld my old friend the Spouter dispensing to the turbaned and tarboushed crowd, among which were cameleers and muleteers with their camels and mules, of the blessing of that triple political abracadabra of the France of more than a century passed. Liberty, Fraternity, Equality!” (2016: 204). Khalid, who comes from New York with the goal of building a new “Arab empire”, delivers this motivational speech quoting the slogan of the French Revolution and carrying its basic concept of revolution over to the Ottomans.

Khalid also calls for reform when he mounts the pulpit at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. He delivers a rousing speech to the public on the true meaning of reform and revolutionary change: “Ours in a sense is a theocratic Government. And only by reforming the religion on which it is based is political reform in any way possible and enduring” (2016: 232). Then Khalid goes on about how reforming religion is done by the separation of state and religion which sounds like an act of secularism’ endorsement at that time.

In his early Arabic writings, Rihani claims that liberty, democracy, and equality can only be achieved through a revolution. In his Arabic article “Tarikh Suria” (The History of Syria) (see Rihani, 2014: 319-320), written during the First World War in 1917, Rihani pushes the Arabs to join the alliance on their Eastern Front of WWI against the Ottomans. He campaigns for joining this war describing it as the only hope for the Arabs to have their liberty and independence, which echoes Whitman’s support of the revolutions in Europe. Whitman uses the same theme to encourage the Europeans to fight for their freedom and

liberty. He starts his poem “To a Foil’d European Revolutionaire” with the lines:

> Keep on–Liberty is to be subserv'd whatever occurs;
> That is nothing that is quell'd by one or two failures, or any number of failures […]
> For I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel the world over,
> And he going with me leaves peace and routine behind him,
> And stakes his life to be lost at any moment) (1891-92: 287).

After the European Revolutions between 1848 and 1849 had failed, Whitman kept campaigning against tyrannical monarchies. He identifies as the “sworn poet of every dauntless rebel the world over”. This poem is a plea to the European rebels to fight for liberty. Whitman is campaigning here for those revolutions and he is pushing the citizens of those countries to leave their “peace and routine” and to put their lives on the stake for freedom’s sake. He also asks them later to keep revolting “For till all ceases neither must you cease” (1891-92: 288).

Like “Resurgemus”, “To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire” was written before the American Civil War. This poem appeared first in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856) titled “Liberty Poem for Asia, Africa, Europe, America, Australia, Cuba, and The Archipelagoes of the Sea”. It is also a revolutionary poem where Whitman encourages revolutionaries to fight for their liberty against tyranny. However, Whitman’s poems in support of the European revolutions were not only the result of his concern with global liberty and democracy, but they were also written out of a domestic (American) concern. Those poems echo his call to the American working people to rise in defense of their rights in his article “American Workingmen, versus Slavery” published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1847. Thus, Whitman’s European revolutionary poems were meant to inspire the American workmen to defend their rights and resist the extension of slavery in the

territories. This concern was explicitly expressed in one of his anti-slavery poems, “Song for Certain Congressmen” (1850):

> We are all docile Dough-Faces,
> They knead us with the fist,
> They, the dashing southern lords,
> We labor as they list;
> For them we speak – or hold our tongues,
> For them we turn and twist.
>
> We join them in their howl against
> Free soil and “abolition,”
> That firebrand – that assassin knife –
> Which risk our land's condition,
> And leave no peace of life to any
> Dough-Face politician.

Doughfaces are the Northern congressmen not opposed to slavery in the South before the Civil War. Written from the point of view of one of those congressmen Whitman considered corrupt, Whitman argues satirically against the move in Congress to compromise the question of slavery. Whitman exposes those politicians for kneeling in front of the “southern lords”, and working against “Free soil” and “abolition”. This question of slavery was very important to Whitman by then as he expressed that it “risk[s] our land's condition”. In the voice of the corrupt politician, the speaker goes on condemning “Principle”, “Freedom”, “Rights of the masses”, and “Progress”.

Whitman’s striving for freedom, equality, and democracy did not stop with the start of the American Civil War in 1861. Written at the beginning of the Civil War, Whitman’s poem “Beat! Beat! Drums!” is a great example of his campaign for the war. “Beat! Beat! Drums!”, which was first published simultaneously in *Harper’s Weekly* and the *New York Leader* on

28th of September 1861, is an upbeat invitation to arms:

> Beat! beat! drums! – Blow! bugles! blow!
> Through the windows – through doors – burst like a force of ruthless men […]
>
> Over the traffic of cities – over the rumble of wheels in the streets […]
>
> Make no parley – stop for no expostulation;
> Mind not the timid – mind not the weeper or prayer […]
> Make even the trestles to shake the dead, where they lie awaiting the hearses,
> So strong you thump, O terrible drums – so loud you bugles blow (1865: 38).

The drums and bugles are symbols for canons and rifles drowning out all other noises, even the shouts of men running, wounded, and dying. Whitman calls on the drums and bugles to "burst" through doors and windows to call people to battle and to drown out the other noises that could distract them from their duty. The marching beat is heard over the traffic of cities etc. Whitman is also urging the drums and bugles to cover the sounds of men dying and not to mind any "expostulation", "timid", "the weeper or prayer" etc. Whitman wants nothing to get in the way of the battle.

In the second year of the war, 1862, Whitman became involved when his brother George, a soldier for the Union army, was reported wounded. He travelled to Virginia to find him. Deeply touched by seeing army hospitals, Whitman decided to move from Brooklyn to Washington and become a hospital volunteer. For the next three years, he spent his time listening to the patients' stories, writing letters to their family members, and bringing them gifts. The hospital scenes inspired Whitman's poetry and prose writings. Whitman published articles in the *New York Times* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* about his hospital experiences, and a book of war poems, *Drum-Taps*. His writings provide a compelling literary and historical record of Washington in wartime.

After the Civil War, Whitman celebrated the United States of America in many of his literary works. In his “Preface” which appeared at the beginning of the pamphlet publication of *As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free* (1872), Whitman connects the experimental impulses of his poetry with his hopes for the America of the future:

> Not [for it] to become a conqueror nation, or to achieve the glory of mere military, or diplomatic, or commercial superiority – but to become the grand producing land of nobler men and women – of copious races, cheerful, healthy, tolerant, free – to become the most friendly nation, (the United States indeed) – the modern composite nation, form'd from all, with room for all, welcoming all immigrants – accepting the work of our own interior development, as the work fitly filling ages and ages to come; – the leading nation of peace, but neither ignorant nor incapable of being the leading nation of war; – not the man's nation only, but the woman's nation – a land of splendid mothers, daughters, sisters, wives (1872).

Being inspired by the Civil War, Whitman is full of hope for America as a “leading nation of peace”. Whitman believes that with the help of his verse, America will be stable and inclusive to everyone regardless of their race or gender. Whitman’s inclusive America “welcoming all immigrants” regardless of their background empowered Rihani and the other Arab American authors. Whitman’s writings not only helped to shape the United States, but also the world. Whitman’s writings have surely generated a wide variety of aesthetic, political, and religious responses in each major culture and nation. He “enters each culture as a singular figure; his views of democracy and of democratic art are distinctly reconfigured by every culture he enters” (Allen, 1995: 8).

Being one of those poets inspired by Whitman, Rihani also sought to have a similar political role in shaping the future of the Arab world after World War I. His concerns before and during the First World War did not change much due to the colonization of the Arab

East by Britain and France. When Rihani called on the Arabs to join the Allies in their fight on the Eastern Front against the Ottomans in his article “Tarikh Suria”, he already expressed his concerns of the post-war threat of Western colonialist policies to the Arab East. Thus, Rihani sought to strengthen the role of the United States and Arab East during and after the war to prevent such a tragic end. Inspired by Whitman, Rihani established and was active in many Arab-American political organizations such as the Free Syria Society (1915), the Syrian Central Committee (1917), the New Syrian Party (1926) etc. to strengthen the role of the United States in achieving Pan-Arab unity. Rihani acted as a correspondent in Europe for *The Bookman* and *The Forum* in 1916-17 and for *Mir’at Al-Gharb* at the Washington Naval Conference on the reduction of armaments in 1921 (see Hajjar, 2010: 47).

When Rihani was in Europe covering the war, he wrote many articles encouraging the Arab-Americans to join the US Army which he described as “the greatest defender of the small oppressed people” (cited in Hajjar, 2010: 159). In return, he believed that America would speak on the Arabs’ behalf and support their independence in the Peace Conference. Rihani argued that if the Syrians fighting in the US Army asked the US government to send them to Syria, it would help them claim their national rights after liberation from the Ottomans/Turks; but if Syria were liberated by foreigners, such as the French, it would come under their sovereignty. Rihani wrote from Spain to the editors of the Arabic newspapers in New York urging them to establish a Syrian committee and to organize a Arab-American battalion to be sent to Syria under American command (*Ibid*.).

Later when Rihani found out about the Sykes-Picot Agreement which divided the Arab territories between France and Britain and remained secret till December 1917, he

expressed his disappointment with the French government for having misled him and many others in his speech, “Al-Haya w Al-Hurriya w Al-Sayf” (Life, Freedom and Summer) in 1924 (see Hajjar, 2010: 140). Rihani also expressed his disappointment in the French government in his poem “The Stones of Paris” in 1925:

> Paris! your stones and not your bullets,
> Your lights and not your fires,
> Were built to reclaim Freedom […]
> Your stones were mixed with the bold of martyrs […]
> Your stones revolted to support freedom and justice (Oueijan, 2002: 84).

Rihani addresses the city of Paris reminding it of its citizens’ sacrifices, which were made for the sake of freedom and justice. He reminds France of the principles of its revolution in order to encourage them to grant them to his home country. He continues reporting the bad conditions of Syria:

> Your bullets and shells hit the center of Damascus;
> They hit the heart of Syria.
> Are those your stones, Paris?
> Are those the stones which had often
> Revolted to support Justice and Freedom? […]
>
> Damascus’s soul has sprung from yours.
> It is a soul eager for national unity,
> Whose ideal you represent.
> Its soul solicits a united national life,
> Without which nations cannot survives.
> Damascus is the heart of a nation,
> Whose glorious history matches yours.
> The nation would shake your hand,
> If yours is the hand of sincerity and loyalty (*Ibid*.: 84-85).

Rihani wonders about how those stones, which represent freedom and justice, have turned to cause such destruction and death in Syria. He reminds the French that the Syrian fight for independence and freedom was inspired by the principles of the French Revolution – “Damascus’s soul has sprung from yours”. Rihani suggests that the Syrian would reconcile with the French, “[i]f yours [the French] is the hand of sincerity and loyalty”. When Rihani says “Syria” at the time of writing this poem, he refers to the country before WWI including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. Thus, Damascus for him is the capital of the Levant, “the heart of a nation”. The “national unity” Rihani calls for is to have the Levant united again as it had been before the war (Greater Syria). In this poem, Rihani catalogues in Whitmanesque style cities and places in addition to Damascus in the Levant: Druz Mountain, Houran, Aleppo, Aa’mel Mountains, Alawite Mountains, Kawkaba, Rashaya, Shaghour, Midan – very similar to Whitman’s catalogues of America’s geographical features. In the same way as Whitman asserted the unity and freedom of America in his poetry, Rihani catalogues those Levantine cites to express the unity of his homeland. He asserts this notion of unity in the lines “Lebanon has friends and brothers: in Aa’mel Mountains/ In the Alwaite Mountains, and beyond Damascus” and “Lebanon moans the Damascus of yesterday/ Yes! Kawkaba and Rashaya are sisters’ cities to Shaghour and Midan”.

Rihani asserts the unity of the Levant in his writings and defies Britain’s and France’s colonization of the Arab East in his book *Al-Nakabat* (The Catastrophes, 1928), which was written after the French had crushed the Great Syrian Revolt (1925-27). Rihani ends the book with a poem criticizing the Arabs who become obedient to the colonizer and reminding them of their great history to motivate them to fight on:

My brothers and sisters, children of this country, its valleys, mountains, and shores!
We dwell in the bowels of night, our destination looms far […].
Oh Lebanon my town, oh Syria my country, in you today presidents and chiefs who are descendants of the chiefs of the past.
And in you resides a people obedient, content, desperate, miserable, surrounded, surrendering, you are descended from those who, in the past, paid their dues, and in turn received a flogging (1928: 111-112).

In the years following the failure of the Arab Revolt led by Shaif Husayn and his son Faysal to achieve the independence of Syria and Iraq, Rihani spent the rest of the 1920s traveling the Arab East. He met many kings and presidents of the Arab East, and wrote several political and historical books; in Arabic *Muluk Al-Arab* (Kings of the Arabs, 1924), *Al-Nakabat* (The Catastrophes, 1928), *Tareekh Najd Al-Hadeeth* (The Modern History of Najd, 1928), *Faysal Al-Awwal* (Faysal The First, 1934), and *Qualb Al-Iraq* (The Heart of Iraq, 1935); in English *Ibn Saoud of Arabia, His People and His Land* (1928) and *Iraq During the Days of King Faisal the First* (1932). In those books, Rihani glorifies Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, founder of the Saudi dynasty, in whom he set his hopes for unifying the Arabs. He also saw in the Iraqi-Saudi treaty of 1936 a sign of a possible Arab confederation following the United States pattern.

In his autobiographical poem “Rafiqti” (My Companion), Rihani expresses that it is for the sake of freedom he undertook his travels, and he looks upon the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of Western freedom and democracy:

She is my traveling companion.
She is the subject and predicate of my life […]

She became part of my life;

She filled it with love, tenderness, and wisdom […]

Then I left to the East, my shrine,
To the Arab World, my joyful kiss.
I left New York alone;
And when my ship sailed close to the Statue of Liberty,
I felt a hand seizing me
And a voice reviving in me her memory,
Which wrapped me with shame and shyness.
It was her voice and her ever bright and beautiful face (Oueijan, 2002: 67).

Rihani describes how freedom filled his life with “love”, “tenderness”, and “wisdom”. His declares that he brought with him this American freedom, from the Statue of Liberty, to the Arab world. He adds:

It was freedom, which came to visit the Arab World
And to plant in it its pure and chosen seeds.
It was Freedom, which nourished my life
And came to serve this world […]

You kings, sultans, princes, and imams!
In your unified and word lies the life of the nation.
This word is yours; would you not utter it?
Are you united and determined to
Have peace prevail amongst you?
Are you willing to strive for unity?
Are you ready to promote the honor of the nation (*Ibid*.: 68-69).

Rihani’s call to the Arab world to be united, mirrors Whitman’s call to the unity of the American States in his time. Like Whitman, Rihani believes that freedom and democracy will happen only if the nation is united. Unity is the way for Rihani to honor the nation, which suggests progress, democracy, and liberation from foreign rule.

In his book *The Path of Vision* from 1921, Rihani states explicitly that it is Whitman's vision of the Western democracy and freedom which he brought with him to the Arab world:

> I have brought with me from the Eldorado across the Atlantic a pair of walking shoes and three books published respectively in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. The good Grey Poet, the Sage of Concord, and the Recluse of Walden are my only companions in this grand congé. Whitman and Emerson and Thoreau are come to pay you a visit, my beloved Syria. […] My companions knew and loved you before you became the helpless victim of cormorant hierarchs and decorated obscurants and rogues. Not that they ever visited you in the flesh; but clothed in the supernal and eternal mystery of genius, they continue to live and journey in the world of the human spirit, even like your ancient cedars, even like your sacred legends (1921: 102-103).

It is interesting that Rihani not only borrowed Whitman's democracy and revolutionary visions and thoughts, but also gave explicit tribute to him. When Rihani says that he brought Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau with him, it suggests that his thoughts and themes in his writings and strife are the result of their writings.

Rihani's efforts, conditioned by his American experience, to achieve Whitman's vision of progress, liberty, and democracy before and during World War I resemble Whitman's own striving in the American Civil War. Before WWI, Rihani sought to achieve the independence and freedom of the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, he borrowed themes from his favorite writer, Walt Whitman, to push his political agenda and naturalize Whitman's vision of democracy. For example, Whitman's view of the French Revolution as a symbol of hope and liberty, of reforming society by the separation of religion and state, achieving social equality and striving for freedom all resonate in Rihani's writings. During the war, Rihani's travels from New York to Europe as a journalist to report on WWI

echo Whitman's trip to Washington in 1862, and Rihani's writings encouraging the Arabs to join the war echo Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!" However, the end of WWI did not mark the end of Rihani's political ambition due to the British and French colonization of the Arab world. Thus, Rihani borrowed Whitman's vision of freedom and democracy to achieve the unity of the Arab world and liberation from the foreign European imperialism.

The Orient

In the Nineteenth century, there was a massive influx of Oriental material into American literature, especially by way of the Transcendentalists, who were American scholars and clergymen in New England. Although as a New Yorker, Whitman did not belong to the Transcendentalists, he is still considered a poet of Transcendentalism as I have mentioned earlier. Like most Transcendentalists, Whitman found important inspirations in Eastern philosophy, spirituality, religion, history, and literature. His interest reflects also his convictions paralleling Oriental mysticism which represents the quest for the divine, the faith in the unity of the whole and oneness of all. I will show in this chapter how the rhetorical construction of the Orient in Whitman's writings empowered Rihani to speak on his own heritage and birthplace in his writings.

The magnet of the Orient for Whitman was its firm rooting in spiritual depth. Whitman's "Passage to India" is the best example of his view of the Orient as a spiritual fountain. I have shown how in this poem Whitman assumed the persona of the poet-prophet envisioning world unity and celebrating the cultural heritage of spiritualism and the philosophical richness the East brought closer to him by the achievements of modern engineering: the transatlantic undersea cable, the opening of the Suez Canal, and the completion of the transcontinental American railroad.

In "Passage to India", Whitman celebrates the East, viewing it as a place of "myths", "fables of eld", "far-darting beams of the spirit", "deep diving bibles", "legends", "poets", and "elder religions". He sings and makes reference to different places in the Orient, starting with the Suez Canal: "In the Old World the east the Suez canal". He sees the

opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 as both a reason for celebration and an opportunity to connect with the spiritual traditions of the East. He elaborates on this event in section 3:

> Passage to India!
> Lo soul for thee of tableaus twain,
> I see in one the Suez canal initiated, open'd,
> I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie's leading the van,
> I mark from on deck the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level sand in the distance,
> I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen gather'd,
> The gigantic dredging machines (1891-92: 316).

After referring to the spiritualism and the philosophical richness of the East, Whitman envisions the present, the opening of the Suez Canal in Egypt. He sings of the steamships and van (fleet) referring to the importance of this artificial waterway for allowing transportation and trade between Europe and Asia in record time. Then he moves on to sings of “landscape”, “pure sky”, and “level sand in the distance” in Egypt, he even sings of “workmen” and “[t]he gigantic dredging machines” there. Whitman sees the canal as a chance to strengthen the face of world commerce and to extend the possibilities of cultural exchange between nations. He elaborates on the latter notion in the lines:

> Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,
> I and my soul to range in range of thee.
>
> O Thou transcendent,
> Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
> Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,
> Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
> Thou moral, spiritual fountain–affection's source–thou reservoir (*Ibid*.: 321).

Whitman describes the East as a moral and spiritual fountain from which emanates the

philosophy of life. The East is a land of physical, spiritual, and intellectual beauty. Whitman is very enthusiastic about this new era of worldliness that happened because of those new scientific achievements. The speaker goes on to celebrate the marriage of continents and refers to various places in the East:

> Europe to Asia, Africa join'd, and they to the New World,
> The lands, geographies, dancing before you, holding a festival garland,
> As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand.
>
> Passage to India!
> Cooling airs from Caucasus far, soothing cradle of man,
> The river Euphrates flowing, the past lit up again (*Ibid*.: 320).

Whitman envisions Europe, Asia, Africa, and America dancing “as brides and bridegrooms hand in hand”. He starts cataloging some of the main ancient places and events of history to be part of this present wedding. Whitman starts from the cradle of civilization – Mesopotamia – by the Euphrates River, which flows through Iraq and some parts of Turkey and Syria. Whitman, who mentions the Orient multiple times in his poetry, affirms its role as the cradle of civilization. In Section 6, Whitman perceives the East as an ancient land of history, adventure, morals, spirituality, and religion and he welcomes it saying “Lo soul, the retrospect brought forward/ The old, most populous, wealthiest of earth's lands”. He describes the geography of India at that time which is comprised of modern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. He refers to natural boundaries and the greatness of the Indus and the Ganges Rivers which pass through the north of nineteenth-century India and other counties surrounding India:

> On one side China and on the other side Persia and Arabia,
> To the south the great seas and the bay of Bengal,
> The flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes,

> Old occult Brahma interminably far back, the tender and junior Buddha […]
> The traders, rulers, explorers, Moslems, Venetians, Byzantium, the Arabs, Portuguese (*Ibid*.: 319).

Placing India among other big empires and countries – “China”, “Persia”, and “Arabia” – is a celebration of India as a part of the East and a celebration of the East at large. Whitman also calls the Arabian Sea “the great seas” which also signifies respect and admiration for the Arab world. He states that “traders, rulers, explorers, Moslems, Venetians, Byzantium, the Arabs, Portuguese,” “Alexander” the Great, Brahma, Buddha, Muhi-ud-Din Mohammad Aurangzeb, Tamerlane, Marco Polo, and the Arab scholar Ibn Battuta all shared in its history. Whitman finally emphasizes how the East is a place of wisdom, spirituality, and religions, he describes his journey “back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions” (*Ibid*.: 320).

It is fascinating that Whitman recognizes the Arab scholar Muhammad Ibn Battuta among globally famous figures such as Alexander the Great or Buddha. The Moroccan Ibn Battuta was a traveler who visited most of the medieval world over a period of thirty years. His journey included North Africa, the Horn of Africa, West Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and China. According to Ross Dunn, Ibn Battuta’s *Rihla* includes detailed accounts of his journeys and offers a picture of medieval civilization (see Dunn: 2005). While Ibn Battuta is a very well-known scholar in the Arab world, most of Western critics were not familiar with him and did not even mention him while writing and dealing with Whitman’s “Passage to India”. It shows great insight of Whitman to mention Ibn Battuta as one of the great figures that shaped and accounts for Indian history.

“Salut au Monde!” is another example of Whitman’s recognition of the Arab world in his global poetics. It is a poem reaching out to all: “And you each and everywhere whom I

specify not, but include just the same!" (1891-92: 119). Whitman begins "Salut au Monde!" with the self-referential and expansive poetic style of *Leaves of Grass* saying: "O take my hand Walt Whitman!" (*Ibid*.: 112) to go on with him on a journey to experience the world. The dialog starts with the speaker addressing Whitman and asking a question: "What widens within you Walt Whitman?", Whitman's answer "Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens,/ Asia, Africa, Europe, are to the east–America is provided for in the west" (*Ibid*.).

The speaker then asks three brief questions: "What do you hear Walt Whitman?", "What do you see Walt Whitman?" and "Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you?". In his answers, Whitman attempts to catalog the global community which is loaded with reference to the Arab world. Whitman addresses the Arab world in his answer to the first question:

> I hear the locusts in Syria as they strike the grain and grass with the showers of their terrible clouds,
> I hear the Coptic refrain toward sundown, pensively falling on the breast of the black venerable vast mother the Nile […]
> I hear the Arab muezzin calling from the top of the mosque (*Ibid*.: 113).

While the first two sentences refer to Syrian and Egyptian landscapes respectively, the third one is more general and includes any part of the Arab world. Whitman also refers to other parts of the Arab world in his answer to the second question:

> I see the Lybian, Arabian, and Asiatic deserts […]
> The clear-sunn'd Mediterranean, and from one to another of its islands,
> The White sea, and the sea around Greenland […]
>
> I see the site of the old empire of Assyria, and that of Persia, and that of India […]

I see Algiers, Tripoli, Derne, Mogadore, Timbuctoo, Monrovia […]
I see the Turk smoking opium in Aleppo […]
I see Teheran, I see Muscat and Medina and the intervening sands, I see the caravans toiling onward,
I see Egypt and the Egyptians, I see the pyramids and obelisks (*Ibid*.: 114-119).

Whitman's answer to the third question, "Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you?", has also abundance references to the Arab world:

You foot-worn pilgrim welcoming the far-away sparkle of the minarets of Mecca!
You sheiks along the stretch from Suez to Bab-el-mandeb ruling your families and tribes!
You olive-grower tending your fruit on fields of Nazareth, Damascus, or lake Tiberias! [...]

You Caffre, Berber, Soudanese!
You haggard, uncouth, untutor'd Bedowee!
You plague-swarms in Madras, Nankin, Kaubul, Cairo! (*Ibid*.: 119-120).

Whitman brings these Arab places, things, and lands to himself, his poetry, and his readers. These Arabic references range from countries such as Syria and Egypt, to cities like Algiers, Tripoli, Aleppo, Muscat, Medina, Memphis, Mecca, Nazareth, Damascus, and Cairo, to people: Coptic, Arab, Egyptians, Berber, Soudanese and Bedowee, and places: "the Nile", "Lybian, Arabian, and Asiatic deserts", "Mediterranean", "The White sea", "old empire of Assyria", "pyramids and obelisks", "Suez", "Bab-el-mandeb", and "lake Tiberias". Whitman's awareness and perception of the geographical specificities of the Arab world is remarkable in this list and catalog. The persona of Whitman has been elevated to the level of omniscience and supreme authority by listing all the territories that he experienced inside and outside the Arab world. He assumes the authority in his answers to speak of the world and its people, and offers the reader to hear through his ears and see through

his eyes. Ford characterizes Whitman's Oriental imagery "as items in the catalogues he uses to suggest breadth, diversity, or representativeness" (1987: 13).

"Salut au Monde!" and "Passage to India" are not the only Whitman poems with Arab world images. I showed earlier how Whitman dedicates "A Persian Lesson" to express his admiration for Sufiism and the East at large, how he welcomes the East in "A Broadway Pageant", and how he shows his admiration to the East's history, philosophy and religions in "Song of Myself", among many other poems with reference to the Orient, namely: "Song of the Exposition", "Proud Music of the Storm", "Washington's Monument, February, 1885", "With Antecedents", and "Song of the Broad-Axe".

Whitman's poetry clearly carries an open invitation to writers and readers of the Arab world, an invitation full of equality, love, and democracy. This dialog is carried on a few years after Whitman's death by Rihani. Whitman's inclusive poetry encourages Rihani's celebration of the Orient in his writings. Rihani continues this dialogue with his writings, starting with first book of poetry, *The Quatrains of Abu'l-Ala*. In his rendition of Abu'l-Ala's poetry into English, Rihani explains in his preface that his aim is "to confirm and not to convulse, to expand and not to contract the Oriental influence on Occidental minds" (1903: XIX). Thus, his main goal is to draw the attention of Western readers to his Arabic heritage, and to transmit the Eastern spiritual message and values to the West. As I mentioned in chapter II, describing Abu'l-Ala as "the Lucretius of Al-Islam, the Diogenes of Arabia and the Voltaire of the East" (*Ibid*.: VI) is merely an attempt to put the Arab poet into a Western context and within the reach of the American reader (see Albert Rihani, 2007: 67).

Wail Hassan explains how Abu'l-Ala, in Rihani's translation,

> becomes a particularly appropriate subject not only for interrogating Eastern and

> Western self-images and particularly Western views of the East, but for renewing East-West dialogue, since he embodied the kind of synthesis between spiritual wisdom and skeptical rationalism that Rihani took for a civilizational ideal, one which he himself promoted and aspired to embody in his own work (Hassan, 2007: 48).

It is after Rihani read Whitman and other Western writers and realized the Eastern influence in Whitman's poetry, such as "A Persian Lesson", that he decides to translate Abu'l-Ala's poetry, especially after Rihani realizes the similarities in the two poets' thoughts, philosophy, and imagery. As a result, Rihani finds it important in his first book of poetry to reinforce the notion of the West being in debt "to the wisdom of the East in general, and to Arab civilization in particular, thereby undermining the supposed superiority of the West" (Hassan, 2016: 382).

In Rihani's English poetry collections *Myrtle and Myrrh* (1905) and *A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems* (1921), the Oriental theme is traceable in most of his poems. Starting with his 1905 preface, Rihani expresses that though he came to America "to learn from the Yankees the way to do things", the Oriental theme is what really defines and distinguishes his poetry; "the spots of a leopard are irremovable; and so is the lethargy of an Oriental" (1905: 5). Most of his poems are taking place in the Orient, for example: "Upon the Peak of Sanneen" has Rihani's birthplace, Mount Sannine in Lebanon, as its setting. In addition to various places in the Orient such as "Arabia" in his "Prayer in the Desert", Lebanon in his "Lebanus", Turkey in his "Constantinople", and Egypt in his "In the Palm Groves of Memphis".

Whitman's celebration and inclusion of the Arab world encouraged and paved the way for Rihani's celebration of his home country. Rihani not only sang of different parts of the Arab

world, but also of its great history. His poem “The Pagan” is a great example celebrating the ancient history of the Levant:

> I walked into her Temple, as of yore
> My Tyrian sires, allured by cryptic signs;
> But sudden as I entered closed the door
> Upon the hope that mortal love resigns
> Before her ancient, myrtle-bowered shrines (1921: 48).

In these lines, Rihani sings of a pagan temple in the ancient city of Tyre in Lebanon. Al Maleh explains that “[t]he early Arab American writers chose to Orientalize themselves into – Eastern – glory to ingratiate themselves to American readers” (2016: 11). In “The Pagan”, Rihani celebrates and raises the awareness of one of the great ancient civilizations in the East. It is interesting how Rihani after celebrating this ancient Orient civilization in this poem, reiterates his unity-with-God argument. Rihani asserts that the union of man with the creator is achieved, after the manner of Whitman, through placing faith, whose agent is love, over reason:

> Even so her heart, by knowledge undismayed,
> On Love’s one altar with thy hand upreared,
> To Love’s one God is evermore endeared (1921: 49).

He not only celebrates but also idealizes those old Eastern times. His Arabic poem “Al-Nasr Al-Arabi” (The Arabian Eagle) 1933 describes the natural and free life of an eagle, symbolizes the Arab in the past:

> His refuge is the pavilion,
> And his bed and his youth yard
> Are the sands of the deserts.

The Arabian Eagle the haven of Freedom enjoys.
He is free, daring, and humble;
He is gracious, cordial, and loyal;
And he rests in the shades of divinity.
He is compassionate, generous, and virtuous
He is patient, strong, and pious (Oueijan, 2002: 97).

Rihani's "Al-Nasr Al-Arabi" carries much adoration and praise to the Arabs and glorification to the past of the Arab nation, and the freedom they enjoyed. Ancient Egypt is another civilization celebrated by Rihani. Egypt is the setting of many of his Arabic and English poems such as "In the Palm Groves of Memphis" (1921), "Ibnat Fir'awn" (The Daughter of Pharaoh, 1922), and "Ila Raml Al-Iskandaria" (On the Sand of Alexandria, 1922). Rihani's nostalgia for Ancient Egypt is expressed in the following lines of "In the Palm Groves of Memphis":

Alas! where are the roses which the prime of summer share
With the sesame, the myrtle and the thyme
In the meadows fair?
Where is the sacred lotus and the bloom
Of cumin and mimosa, whose perfume
Once filled the shrine of Isis and her tomb?
Where is the pomegranate flower that shone in Cleopatra's hair? (1921: 28).

Memphis refers to the great Egyptian capital on the banks of the Nile or Memphis daughter of Nilus in the Egyptian mythology. The speaker uses the word "Alas!" to express his pity for the loss of the great times and civilization of ancient Egypt. This poem is full of colorful natural images representing the ancient Egyptian city: "Palm", "roses", "summer", "sesame", "myrtle", "thyme", "meadows", "lotus", "bloom", "cumin", "mimosa", "perfume", and "pomegranate flower". There are also various references to the divine, exotic, and

spiritual statues that Egypt had: “sacred”, “shrine of Isis”, “tomb”, and “Cleopatra's hair”.

Rihani’s “In the Palm Groves of Memphis” carries similar images of Whitman’s Egypt; such as being energetic “[s]wift winging in a cycloramic flame” (*Ibid*.: 27), spiritual and freedom-loving “But through the storm a spirit wings his flight” (*Ibid*.: 32), parallels Whitman’s lines of “Proud Music of the Storm”: “I hear the Egyptian harp of many strings,/ The primitive chants of the Nile boatmen” (1891-92: 314). Rihani’s interests in ancient Egypt overlapped with Whitman’s remarkable affection for Egyptian lore and myth in his “Salut au Monde!”:

> I see Egypt and the Egyptians, I see the pyramids and obelisks,
> I look on chisell'd histories, records of conquering kings, dynasties, cut in slabs of sand-stone, or on granite-blocks,
> I see at Memphis mummy-pits containing mummies embalm'd, swathed in linen cloth, lying there many centuries (1891-92: 118).

Whitman’s interests and his familiarity with Ancient Egypt are developed during the many afternoons spent in conversation with Dr. Abbott Henry at Abbott's Egyptian Museum on Broadway during the years *Leaves of Grass* was first being composed (see Abbott: 1853). In 1855, Whitman wrote an essay for *Life Illustrated* recommending the museum and presenting its artifacts as “tangible representations of the oldest history and civilization now known upon the earth” (Whitman, 1972: 30). In this essay, he sees Egypt as alive, energetic, freedom-loving, and great-an older kind of American people. The critic Stephen Tapscott explains that “Whitman had shown an amateur enthusiasm for Egyptology and a familiarity with the largest historical and linguistic issues of the subject […] he identified himself imaginatively with Osiris, the god of vegetative regeneration and of the underworld, the most important god of the Egyptian pantheon” (1978: 50-51). Whitman refers to the Osirian myth and other ancient Egyptian mythology throughout his poetry, for

instance in “Song of Myself”, “Song of the Exposition”, “With Antecedents”, “Proud Music of the Storm”, “To-Day and Thee”, “Old Chants”, and “Salut au Monde!”.

Critic Rosemary Gates Winslow suggests that one of the reasons for Whitman’s interest in Egyptology is that Egypt provided a pre-European model useful in the rejection of European traditions. The rejection of the European traditions creates a direct link between the American culture and the Orient which results in more sense of independence of the American culture and literature from its British and European counterparts. In his essay, Whitman praises the “ancient people for the nature and quality of their daily life and religion, comparing the people to Americans as energetic, spiritual, and freedom-loving” (1998: 200).

In addition to those ancient civilizations in the Orient, Rihani celebrates Istanbul and Al-Andalus as symbols for bridging East and West civilization. In his poem “Constantinople” 1921, Rihani celebrates the merging of East and the West:

> When church and mosque and synagogue shall be,
> Despite the bigot’s cry, the zealot’s prayer,
> Unbounded in their bounties all and free
> In every heritage divine to share (1921: 22).

Istanbul alternated through history between being capital of Eastern or Western civilizations. Besides being a transcontinental city, a bridge between Europe and Asia, Istanbul represents a metaphorical bridge between East and West, not only geographically but also historically, religiously, and culturally. Although Rihani frequently shows his resentment against the Ottomans in his literary works, he still expresses his love for the city describing it as “a new-born of the East and West” (*Ibid*.).

In addition to Istanbul, Rihani's celebrated Al-Andalus, also known as Muslim Spain, as a bridge between East and West. Rihani's poem "Andalusia" is distinguished from his other Oriental poems for not merely celebrating the history of the East but also for serving as bridge where East and West merge. "Andalusia" is a recall of the lost golden age of Al-Andalus, which was a Muslim empire existing in most of what are today Spain and Portugal, and briefly a small part of southern France. The empire started with the Umayyad Caliphate conquest of Hispania in the year 711 and ended when Granada as the last Muslim state on the Iberian Peninsula surrendered to the Kingdom of Castile in 1492. Rihani uses many images in this poem to bring back Al-Andalus' golden times to the reader's mind. This poem is composed of four different titles, each one of them named after different Andalusian cities or monuments, ending them with the following couplets:

> Arabia dark-eyed, light-hearted, fair,
> Is but a flower in Andalusia's hair [...]
> Arabia, once counted of the strong,
> Is but a sigh in Andalusia's song [...]
> Arabia, in Allah's chaplet strung,
> Is but a word on Andalusia's tongue [...]
> Arabia, the bearer of light,
> Still sparkles in the diadem of Night (1921: 23-26).

The speaker sings for the Arabs who inhabited Al-Andalus centuries ago. He describes them as "dark-eyed", "light-hearted", and "fair". The image "flower in Andalusia's hair" shows the wonderful connection of the Arabs to Iberian Peninsula at that time. Rihani mourns the Arab loss of Al-Andalus upon saying that Arabia is "a sigh in Andalusia's song" after it lost its power. Rihani grieves deeply the fall of Al-Andalus and the great Arab civilization that once existed there; the Arabs were "the bearer of light" in the Eighth

century, sparkling in the dark night of Europe. The writer Osman Bakar explains how Al-Andalus served as a good example of coexistence and tolerance between East and West:

> Andalusia has charmed students of its history, culture and civilizational achievements. Many authors, including famous Westerners, have lavished praise and astonishment at Andalusia […] Andalusia was exceptionally enlightened and tolerant. Philosophy, science, literature and the arts flourished […] Andalusia was perhaps the only place in medieval Europe where followers of the three Abrahamic faiths – Muslims, Christians and Jews – lived together in relative peace, produced a common culture and a common civilization over such a long period of time (2014: 209).

Rihani's singing of Al-Andalus is not only a celebration of the Orient, but also of this East-West connection, the birth of this East-West culture and civilization. Rihani's "Andalusia's song" is parallel to Whitman's naming his poems as songs, such as: "Song of Myself", "Song of the Open Road", "Song of the Broad-axe", "Song of the Exposition", "Song of the Broad-Axe" etc. Thus, in his Oriental poems, such as "A Peasant's Song", "The Song of Siva" and "A Sufi Song", Rihani sought to align his Oriental work and voice so closely to Whitman's to assert himself as a viable Eastern voice worthy of Western attention. Rihani's "I am the East", is probably the best example of his Oriental voice, he starts his poem with the lines:

> I am the East
> I am the hunchback of the world;
> I am the archer of the universe […]
> I laid the corner stone
> Of man's first dream, first temple, first throne
> And ever since I began to build and dream
> For myself and for the gods that be,
> I have been bowed down, and I have been free (2007: 88).

Rihani wrote “I am the East” in 1922 in both English and Arabic, “Ana Al-Sharq”. Here Rihani directly addresses a “young man of the West”. Rihani borrows Whitman’s “I”, a lyric persona that strives to express the thoughts of all humanity. For example his first written poetic lines: “I am the poet of the body/ And I am the poet of the soul” (Folsom, 2005: 18), or his first lines of “Song of Myself” “I celebrate myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume” (1855: 13). For Rihani, humanity is in constant motion, and this non-stopping caravan of life is moving from East to West and vice versa:

> The leader of my caravan
> Is tethered to Canopus, and the last
> I cannot see the last.
> He may be at the gates of Liverpool,
> Or trudging through the stench of Samarkand,
> Or browsing in the valley of the Nile,
> Or lagging on the White Way of New York (2007: 88-89).

Rihani uses Whitman’s cataloging technique to include various places representing East and West “Liverpool”, “Samarkand”, “valley of the Nile”, “White Way of New York” etc. Rihani expresses the West’s debt to the East in the lines:

> I am the East
> A phantom, O my Brave Lad of the West,
> In the material pageantry of Time.
> But hear you not the phantom’s voice!
> A voice of strange discordances, indeed,
> Which echoes in the temples of my many-headed Truth,
> As well as in the universities of your own land (*Ibid*.: 89).

In the course of the poem, Rihani expresses the intersection of cultures, nations, social structures, traditions, and beliefs:

I am a thousand colors melt and fuse
And luminate one through the other ‘neath the brush of Time […]
In me a thousand voices speak:
They whisper, murmur, sob.
They kiss and cry,
They sing and chant and wail
They shout aloud in my own heart
A rhapsody, a psalmody of silence
A thousand gods (*Ibid*.: 89).

Rihani places great value on the diversity of Eastern spiritualty, religiosity, traditions etc. In his Arabic poem “Ana Al-Sharq”, Rihani delivers similar images; “I am the East!/ I approached you, son of the West, as a companion” (Oueijan, 2002: 58). Rihani, the East, is setting himself as equal to West, by calling it his companion, and it also reveals a sense of friendship between the two. These lines echo Whitman’s where he declares himself as companion to everyone: “I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself” (Song of Myself, 1891-92: 34).

Rihani repeats that the Eastern spirituality can help Western civilization: “I have what may cool and refresh your confused soul/ And what may cure your heart from the ills of civilization” (Oueijan, 2002: 58). The ending is the most prominent section of this poem:

I am the East.
I have philosophies and religions.
Who would exchange them for aircraft? (*Ibid*.: 60)

This ironic question reflects Rihani’s thoughts in the aftermath of World War I. “Ana Al-Sharq” was published in the leading Arabic newspaper *Al-Ahram* in Cairo on February 15, 1922. Rihani concludes the poem by offering his, the East’s, philosophies and religions in exchange of the modern science of the West. Funk explains the reason for Rihani’s choice

of “aircraft”: the poem eschews bitterness and concludes with a plea for peace, for the cessation of violence and war fought out largely on the ancient soil of the poet’s spiritual homeland (2004: 33). Rihani suggests by this bitter and ironic question that the West is in need of the Eastern spirituality as much as the East needs the Western scientific development.

In addition to his poetry written in English, the Oriental theme is also present in Rihani’s other English writings, especially in his essay collection *The Path of Vision* 1921 and novel *The Book of Khalid* 1911. *The Book of Khalid* is probably the best-known book of Rihani and is still considered to be a landmark in Arab-American literature. It is a book which conveys the teachings of the East and is written in the language of the West by an Arab emigrant who cherished both worlds. It is Rihani’s first novel, and, as I have stated above, it is the first novel written in English by an Arab author.

The Book of Khalid’s manuscript was originally written in Arabic and then translated, edited, and published by Rihani in the hope to introduce the book to the English-speaking public. When Khalid arrives on Ellis Island and becomes caught up with the cultural and commercial life of New York, representing the West, he soon occupies himself with the pursuit of both money and sexual pleasure. However, he manages to maintain and promote ethical and moral values. After spending three years in the United States, Khalid returns to Lebanon, his homeland. He wanted to carry the knowledge and experience he acquired in the West to his own land, “to graft the strenuosity of Europe and America upon the ease of the Orient, the materialism of the West upon the spirituality of the East” (2016: 178).

Although Whitman and Emerson – representing Western literature – are strongly present

in *The Book of Khalid,* Rihani's novel carries some Arabic primary sources as well, namely the Qur'an and *The Arabian Nights*. So Rihani orientalized himself into the past glory of the "East" to appeal to the American reader and to present some intertextuality by which he refers back to his own "Eastern" cultural history (see Hassan 2007; Al Maleh 2016). These elements are best expressed through Khalid's dream "[...] that, in the multicoloured robes of an Arab amir [prince], on a caparisoned dromedary, at the head of an immense multitude of people, I was riding through the desert […]" (2016: 40). Besides, the novel is full of other Eastern images, for instance deserts, camels, and princes. Thus, Rihani found inspiration from both East and West when Khalid declares: "The West for me means ambition, the East, contentment: my heart is ever in the one, my soul, in the other. And I care not for the freedom which does not free both; I seek not the welfare of the one without the other" (*Ibid*.: 179). Khalid here confirms that East and West can complement each other.

The West is presented throughout the novel as a materialist and scientific place while the East is described as a more spiritual one. When the best characteristics of these two worlds are combined, they balance each other and open new pathways for the advancement of civilization. The critic Youssef Choueiri further argues that the coupling of New York as a city bustling with incessant energy, simultaneously commendable and reprehensible, and the meticulous descriptions of the social mores and political ferment in Beirut and Damascus in *The Book of Khalid* represent a dialogue between West and East as well as an attempt to demonstrate how such a dialogue could enrich human civilization, creating a new and different synthesis that retains the best characteristics of both worlds' spiritual and material achievements (2016: 348).

Bawardi refers to *The Book of Khalid* as symbol-laden and as a story of deracination, immigration, and perseverance in the pursuit of a higher universal goal (2016: 290). *The Book of Khalid* was not commercially successful, and it did not meet Rihani's high expectations. Hassan explains that:

> It is written in the wrong language […] its English is both archaic and at times nearly unintelligible to readers unfamiliar with Arabic and its cultural frame of reference because of the infusion of Arabic words, expressions, proverbs, and even rhetorical strategies characteristic of nineteenth-century Arabic literature, such as parallelisms and rhymed prose (2016: 386).

Thus, Rihani attempts to forge a new language that works as the vehicle of a new genre, which can be called the Arabized English novel, or the Arabic novel written in English. He envisions this genre as it will represent a literary synthesis of East and West that can carry the cultural and political synthesis. *The Book of Khalid* is the output of this quest concerning language, intertextual reference, and themes. However, this vision was not successful due to the fact that it requires expert readers in these bicultural hybrids to understand the cross-linguistic wordplay, in-jokes, untranslated Arabic vocabulary and phrases, references across fourteen centuries of Arabic literature and four hundred years of European texts.

Nash says about Rihani's language in his English-language works in general and this novel in particular that they are

> framed in a discourse clearly borrowed from Western Romantics, and at others in an idiom that reads like a literal translation from Arabic. What can be said of most of these writings is that in foregrounding the Arab and oriental constituency, they make little accommodation for a Western readership in the sense of diluting or acculturating oriental idioms to suit occidental pre-dispositions and expectations

(1998: 18).

Rihani used to write for *Al-Hoda*, a periodical targeted to the Arab-American readership at that time. Thus, when he wrote *The Book of Khalid*, he followed the same language that he used for that Arab-American audience. Rihani wanted his novel to be accessible to Western readers but it failed due to the abovementioned reasons and it was sold mainly to the Arab-American community.

The Book of Khalid was not Rihani's only novel, he also wrote *Juhan* (Outside the Harem) in English in 1905. *Juhan* is a literary social protest on women's issues. Failing to find a publisher, it remained a manuscript till Rihani had it translated into Arabic. In 1917, it was rendered into Arabic by Abdul Massih Haddad and published in Beirut under the title *Kharijal Hareem.* The story of *Juhan* also seeks a bridging between East and West; it is about a self-liberated Turkish social-rebel heroine who falls in love with a high-ranking German officer and gives birth to a child who symbolizes an ideal East-West union (see Hajjar, 2010: 29).

Whitman's celebration of the Orient and the ancient Eastern civilization and his unlimited boundaries and inclusive American lines: "Here is not merely a nation, but a teeming Nation of nations" (1855: V), and "Great is the greatest Nation – the nation of clusters of equal nations" (1855: 94) inspired Rihani to celebrate and represent the Orient in his English writings. He also considers himself and the Orient as essential parts of America:

> Like Greece and Rome, America is developing itself from a conflux of various nations and antithetical elements. The Melting Pot certainly has a soul. And this soul will certainly have a voice. And the voice of America […] is destined to become the voice of the world. Its culture, too, its arts and its traditions, which […] are being colored and shaded, impregnated with alien influences, will embody the noblest

> expression of truth and beauty that the higher spirit of the Orient and the Occident combined is capable of conceiving. They will embody also a universal consciousness, multifarious, multicolor, [and] prismatic. […] while every people has its own traditions, which differ more or less according to the national, social and historical influences acting upon them, they all find a common soil in America and an uncommon hospitality. And from these traditions, developing gradually into a homogeneity all-embracing, will spring the culture and the consciousness that will make America, not only a great national power, but, what is greater, an international entity (1921: 170-171).

Rihani celebrates the multiculturalism that America represents. He compares the greatness of America to the ancient Western empires, namely Greece and Rome, with regards to inclusivity, and how those empires were established and stood on those values and principles. America, which is tied to its new identity by way of mass immigration, has a civilizing mission for being the leading nation. It is by combining the Orient and the Occident that America becomes a "universal consciousness". Rihani also sought to trivialize the differences between the Orient and the Occident in his article "Where East and West Meet" 1927:

> The highest ideal of the prophets and the poets – the ideal of the soul – which includes the ethical and the practical aspects of life, and which is neither Oriental nor exclusively Occidental. It is supremely human. Before it every mark of birth disappears; and customs and traditions are held in abeyance, and the differences in nationality and language cease to be a hindrance to understanding. The soul seeking expression, the soul reaching out for the truth, is one everywhere. [...] In the Orient and in the Occident the deep thinkers are kin, the poets are cousins, the pioneers of the spirit are the messengers of peace and goodwill to the world. Their works are the open highways between nations, and they themselves are the ever living guardians and guides (1927: 9-10).

Rihani suggests that it is part of the poet's responsibility to build a bridge between the

Orient and the Occident. Thus, he sought in his works to present the Orient to the Western readers and remind them of its spirituality and contributions to Western civilization to raise their awareness and tolerance toward it. Rihani advocated the understanding between East and West, particularly to contribute to the cultural dialogue between Americans and Arabs. According to his vision and philosophical view, a good, lasting relationship between East and West cannot be based on political foundations alone; he believes there has to be an ethical and intellectual harmonization which will bring about mutual acceptance, respect, and appreciation between these two worlds.

Chapter IV: Conclusion & Implications

Arabic literature is widely considered to have witnessed a significant evolution because of Arab writers working outside the Arabic-speaking countries and territories. Working in the United States gave writers considerable political, cultural, and literary freedom. The Arab writers who left their home countries, settled down in the new world temporarily or permanently, and brought their own identity, culture, religion, and mother tongue to their new countries. These immigrant writers, writing from a perspective of at least two cultures, national identities, and languages, have produced distinct literary works related to their experience. These works are framed cross-culturally mostly to introduce or preserve immigrants' Arabic culture and identity while living at their new country.

Rihani's immigration to America coincides with the first wave of Arab immigration in the last two decades of the Nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, as mentioned in chapter I. Rihani's pioneer publications in English and Arabic in New York inspired the other Arab émigré writers, including Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931). The critic Robin Waterfield confirms that "Rihani was, in general, a pioneer in almost every field later explored by Gibran and his fellow Mahjar writers" (1998: 118-119). As I have mentioned, Gibran is the co-founder, along with Rihani, of the Mahjar school of modern Arabic literature. Rihani met Gibran for the first time in Paris in the time Gibran was studying art there in the spring of 1910, from where they went on to London in the summer, and upon Rihani's invitation, Gibran moved to New York in 1911. Nash states that "Rihani's presence in New York was an important reason for Khalil's relocation, and re-

establishing their friendship became his chief pursuit" (2016: 262).

Like Rihani, Gibran's literary career started out by contributing to Arab-American newspapers. Most importantly, there was a self-Orientalizing practice in his writing, linking East and West, and reconstructing Whitman's poetics by adopting his free-verse poetry and themes. Gibran followed the footsteps of Whitman and Rihani and adopted the artist-as-prophet stance. For instance, Rihani's novel, *The Book of Khalid* (1911), illustrated by Gibran, was the forerunner of the latter's most famous work, *The Prophet* (1923). Gibran produced the illustrations, seven in number, for Rihani's novel when they met in 1911. Albert Rihani argues that those illustrations confirm that Gibran understood the importance of Khalid's prophet-hood for highlighting the prophetic aspect of Khalid, such as including a smiling sphinx with wings, the person carrying the torch, and the human bodies following the leader (see Albert Rihani, 2007: 109).

Waterfield confirms that Rihani was a model for Gibran "in two important ways: as a pioneer of protest and, with regard to *The Book of Khalid* in particular, in writing about Arab experiences in English, that is, for an international audience" (1998: 313) and that Rihani helped changing Gibran's role "from that of angry young man to that of prophet" (*Ibid*.: 172). Thus, by assuming the role of the prophet, Gibran composed his English free-verse poetry collections, *The Madman* (1908), *The Forerunner* (1920) and his masterpiece *The Prophet* (1923).

The Prophet is a book composed of 28 poetic essays that are philosophical, spiritual, and inspirational. The speaker in this book, the prophet Al Mustafa, lived in the fictional city of Orphalese for twelve years and is about to board a ship which will carry him home. He is stopped by a group of people, with whom he discusses topics in a prophetic manner.

Those topics – which form the 28 chapters of the book – range from love, marriage, children, freedom, beauty, religion, death etc. Khalid's prophetic vision is echoed by Gibran's Al-Mustafa. Al-Mustafa's life-long aim was to balance the material and the spiritual. Like Khalid, Al-Mustafa dealt with topics such as truth, human existence, knowledge, love, friendship, and democracy and they both had their disciples (Shakib and Al-Mitra respectively) who played the role of pupil and interviewer. Moreover, both preached Eastern spirituality among the people of a foreign land.

In *The Prophet*, Gibran sought a divine origin in the poet, prophet-hood, to spread his wisdom to his companions, the reader. We can see the Whitmanian notions of everyone as divine and equal in Gibran's lines "Like the ocean is your god-self;/ It remains for ever undefiled./ And like the ether it lifts but the winged" (1923: 45).

Although *The Book of Khalid* has foreshadowed *The Prophet*, *The Prophet* is widely considered the more successful one. The attraction and success this book accomplished is outstanding and unprecedented for the Mahjar school. *The Prophet* has been translated over 100 times and it has been reprinted over 188 times with an estimated readership of 100 million people (see Kalem, Kahlil Gibran Website).

In New York, Gibran held many positions, such as being a member of the advisory committee of the widely acclaimed journal *The Seven Arts* (1916) which was a vehicle for his success in the English-speaking world, especially in view of the fact that he was the first immigrant to join its board. Gibran's studio later became a meeting-place for leading Arab-American intellectuals of the Al-Mahjar group. One of the main accomplishments of the Mahjar literary movement was the foundation of a literary society called *The Pen League* or *the New York Pen League* "Al-Rabita Al-Qalamiyyah". Formally organized, it

existed from 1920 until 1931. It was founded by Gibran Khalil Gibran as president, Mikha'il Na'ima as secretary, William Catzeflis as treasurer; members included Nasib Arida, Ilyas Farhat, A. H. Haddad, Rashid Ayyub, and Nadra Haddad.

Whitman's poetics – which has had a great impact on world poetry – plays a significant role in the Arabic poetic reform. Like Rihani, the English and Arabic works of those Mahjar writers were published in various newspapers and periodicals in the United States and the Arab world. The free-verse poetry that Rihani introduced in Arabic literature, became more naturalized throughout the Arab world upon the literary writings of other Mahjar writers. Following Rihani's footsteps, Whitman's poetry helped also the Arab-American poets to move away from the weight of traditional rules and conventions and write in free verse. Einboden explicitly states that "Whitman plays a pivotal role in Arab poetic reform, helping authors revise and abandon rules of traditional prosody" (2013: 157).

In a similar manner to Whitman and Rihani, the Mahjar writers did not only use this new genre of poetry, but also wrote critical essays and articles defending it. Mikhail Na'ima, who is known for his literary criticism and being a reformist, wrote many critical articles that opened doors to a new concept of literature among his fellow Arab writers. In his critical article "Fajr al Amal" (The Dawn of Hope), published in *Al-Funun* (Arts) in 1913, he completely rejected traditional Arabic literature as a literature of classical decoration and imitation. Na'ima argued that the poet should focus primarily on imagination rather than language, essence rather than form. Thus, Na'ima's "Fajr al Amal" arguments and approach is reminiscent of Rihani's essay in *Ar-Rihaniyat* 1910.

Na'ima's allegorical novel *The Book of Mirdad* (1948) follows the same prophetic figure of *The Prophet* and *The Book of Khalid*. Nash claims that those "so-called prophets of New

York created a genre of writing that in publishing terms had its roots in Western romantic literature and American Transcendentalist writing of the previous century but whose content drew mainly on the mystical writings of the East (2016: 269-270). Although Nash does not mention Whitman explicitly, we can see how Whitman fit very well within this description and he is the main source for Mahjar writers as I argued and showed in this thesis.

The prophet's role that Rihani assumed in his career is reflected in his choice to translate into Arabic Whitman's "To Him That Was Crucified". DeYoung asserts that Rihani's choice expresses a similar exaltation of the poet as prophetic figure, and asserts the brotherhood of such unacknowledged legislators of the world, no matter what their origin (2004: 28). Everything Rihani learned from Whitman and all his previous literary work lead him back to his home country. Rihani himself took the role of his protagonist Khalid, who represents a fictionalized persona of Whitman as a prophet as I argued earlier. Rihani ascribed this prophetic role explicitly to himself in his Arabic poem "Ila Gibran" (To Gibran), which he wrote in Freike upon the death of Gibran in 1931:

> And at the cradle of prophecies,
> Around the pilgrims' sanctuaries,
> Where rests the sacred valley
> Beneath the cedar boughs,
> Where days, hymns of praise, chanted,
> Time stood, with reverence thrilled,
> While poetry's brides from incensed valleys
> Advanced with cups of ivory
> Teeming Time's distilled potion […]
> For his spirit, in Lebanon, blooms again (Oueijan, 2002: 91).

Rihani described his and Gibran birthplace, Lebanon, as “cradle of prophecies”. This description includes the other Arab-American authors as prophets for coming from the same sacred divine place. Rihani catalogues the divinity of the place: “pilgrims’ sanctuaries”, “sacred”, “hymns of praise, chanted”, “reverence” etc. Rihani’s usage of the word cradle repeats his notion of the Orient being the original source of civilization, philosophy, religion etc. that he mentioned in his previous poems, such as “Al-Nasr Al-Arabi” (The Arabian Eagle), “I am the East” etc. This reflects on Whitman’s description of the Orient in “A Broadway Pageant”: “The nest of languages”, “The Originatress”, and “the bequeather of poems” (1891-92: 194). Whitman’s description “the bequeather of poems”, is reflected in Rihani’s imagery “poetry’s brides from incensed valleys”.

The poem’s refrain “For his spirit, in Lebanon, blooms again” echoes Whitman’s line “I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love”. Gibran’s and Rihani’s cycle of life will result in being part of nature as flowers parallel to Whitman’s grass.

> And though he bid his country farewell,
> He could not leave his heritage
> Which he carried beyond the seas.
> Distance glorified his good deeds and his memories (Oueijan, 2002: 92)

Rihani mentions here how Gibran has brought his culture with him to the United States, and how being overseas made Gibran more nostalgic for his origin. This description is attributed to Rihani as he includes his voice with Gibran’s in the last sections of the poem stating:

> May Death do justice to both of us […]
>
> Time will ever acknowledge our best.
> And whatever literature for our fellow men we created,

The future will give us justice when my dust
In the valley of Al-Freike will rest
And call yours in the sacred valley (*Ibid*.: 96).

Rihani acknowledges that he and Gibran created a new genre of Arabic poetry, reconstructing Whitman in Arabic literature, which will live in future generations. Rihani includes Gibran here as co-creator of Whitman's free verse in Arabic as a sign of recognition for Gibran's part of naturalizing free verse in Arabic poetry. Though Rihani pioneered in using free verse in Arabic poetry, it was Gibran who mastered it. The critic Khalil Hawi suggests that Rihani was an intellect and was far more inventive than Gibran in his approach to life, letter, and politics. But Gibran improved and mastered the Arabic free-verse poetry pioneered by Rihani, who "lacked Gibran's gifts of imagination and emotion as he lacked his gift for language" (1972: 273). With the enormous success of *The Prophet*, Gibran gained international recognition in addition to his Arabic one due to publishing his free-verse poetry in the leading Arabic newspaper of the day, *Al-Hilal*. Thus, free verse achieved such success in the Arab world that in many collections of the Mahjar works the free-verse poetry of Gibran and his other colleagues was reprinted (see Moreh, 1988: 22).

When Rihani moved back to his country of origin, he brought back with him his aspiration of uniting the best of both East and West. Parallel to his poems written on the unity of East and West in the United States, Rihani wrote his poem "Awdah ila Al-Wadi" (On Revisiting the Valley) upon his return to Freike in 1922:

I brought you the transquility of Dahnaa' and Noufoud,
Which fills the spirit with devotion and piety
And diffuses all qualms and fears.

I brought you the contentment and honor,
The freedom and valor,
And the independence and security of the Bedouin.
I brought you the Arabian pride and veneration;
I brought you the Arabian honor and devotion, (Oueijan, 2002: 76-77).

Rihani enumerates some of the national characteristics that he believed the East provided to the West such as spirituality, reverence, serenity, fearlessness, gallantry, pride, modesty, and devoutness. On the other side, the West would bring something to the East:

I brought you, the freedom
Of the Frenchmen in their revolution,
The vigor of the Americans in their work,
And the faith of the free men
In life and in Man (*Ibid*.: 77).

Those lines summarize what Rihani has learned from living in New York, and the West. We can easily attribute all those traits to Whitman, as Rihani explicitly announces in his article “From Concord to Syria” in *The Path of Vision*: “I have brought with me from the Eldorado across the Atlantic […t]he good Grey Poet [Whitman]” (1921: 102). Whitman is present in Rihani’s notions of freedom, democracy, revolution, faith in the universe, and humanity; subsequently, Rihani expresses here how he has borrowed Whitman’s vision and thoughts. Rihani further says that through his work, Whitman will continue “to live and journey in the world of the human spirit, even like your ancient cedars, even like your sacred legends” (1921: 103). Then Rihani expresses Whitman’s influence in the simile of the plant of elecampane

The elecampane, that most peculiar of perennial herbs, is not a stranger to your roads and fields. Its odor is strong, acrid, penetrating; the slightest touch of it has

> an immediate and enduring effect. When you approach it, you must, willy-nilly, carry away with you some token of its love. And one of its idiosyncrasies is that it only blossoms when the hills and fields are shorn of every other variety of flower. (1921: 104-105).

Once again, Rihani gives full recognition here to Whitman. He asserted that he brought Whitman to his home country as “toke on [his] love”. Upon constructing this simile, elecampane is described as “most peculiar”, “not a stranger”, “strong, acrid, penetrating”, “immediate and enduring effect” etc. Rihani goes on describing elecampane as “ubiquitous”, you can find it everywhere, and it “grows and glories in its abundance – and its pungent generosity”. Then he asserts that “Walt Whitman is the elecampane in the field of poetry”. This imagery reflects on Whitman’s own words in “Song of Myself”:

> I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
>
> The last scud of day holds back for me,
> It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
> It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.
>
> I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
> I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.
>
> I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
> If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles (1891-92: 78).

In the last section of “Song of Myself”, Whitman says goodbye to his readers and assures us that we can find him everywhere. He is part of the “scud” (quickly passing clouds) and part of the shadows. Since he dissolved into the materials of the world – the air, the sun, the eddies, the lacy jags, the dirt, and the grass, we must look to nature if we want to reach him.

When Rihani compares Whitman to an elecampane in Lebanon, he reaffirms that

Whitman can be found everywhere. Thus, Rihani declares that Whitman came “to pay you a visit, my beloved Syria” (1921: 103). It is not only by this return-to-home journey that Rihani brought Whitman to the Arab world, but also by considering his own writing as a response to Whitman. To naturalize Whitman’s form and style in Arabic poetry, Rihani not only criticized the traditional rules and conventions in his essays and identified his own poetic practice with Whitman in the preface to his first volume of Arabic poetry but he also mentioned the Whitmanite societies in New York. Rihani’s preface anticipates the establishment of the Arab American society in New York City, The Pen League, which is reminiscent of the Whitman societies still founded in Whitman’s lifetime.

For Whitman, American poets symbolize the different races of people who are Americans: “The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the races of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people”. Those poets come together to compose the American poem, in spite of their differences. This definition includes the Arab-American poets – Ameen Rihani, Khalil Gibran etc. – who brought with them their own culture and backgrounds into their new home, the United States.

Reading Whitman’s poetry encouraged Rihani to leave his family business and pursue an artistic career. Rihani was only one among many other international writers in the early Twentieth century inspired by Whitman’s democratic poetry. A poetry that Whitman used to produce for his democratic readers. He expresses this intention in “Song of Myself”:

> I am the teacher of athletes,
> He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own,
> He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher […]
>
> I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me?
> I follow you whoever you are from the present hour,

My words itch at your ears till you understand them (1891-92: 47-48).

Whitman started section 47 of “Song of Myself” by portraying himself and his readers as tough athletes upon stating that he is “the teacher of athletes”. By these lines, Whitman is trying to forge a reader that would “most honor” his style and by learning “under it to destroy the teacher”. It also shows that there is great honor for him as a teacher when his students manage to surpass him. Whitman did not want quiescent imitators, nor epigones, but rather tough democratic readers and future poets who would question, undermine, argue, and set out on their own journey. Whitman suggested that his words be as tough as the reader needs to be; he teaches his reader to “stray” from him, but he cannot easily escape Whitman’s words because they will follow him and “itch” at his ears until he understands them.

In his poetry, Whitman sought a democratic readership, not a group of elites, aristocrats, or the intelligentsia. Throughout his poetry, Whitman sought to inspire his reader to write in his own voice. He insisted on having an entirely new kind of democratic literature in his essay *Democratic Vistas*:

> Books are to be call’d for, and supplied, on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half sleep, but, in highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast’s struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay–the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or frame-work. Not the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does. That were to make a nation of supple and athletic minds, well-train’d, intuitive, used to depend on themselves, and not on a few coteries of writers (1892: 257).

This text reflects his line “I am the teacher of athletes”. Whitman believed that many of the problems of democracy could be solved by the nation changing its reading habits, such

as that the reader should learn democratically, that he should not accept the writer's authority, and he should bring as much to every book as the book brings to him. Whitman anticipated the global reception of his poetry, he has himself received songs from all over the world as he stated in his "Proud Music of the Storm":

> All songs of current lands come sounding round me,
> The German airs of friendship, wine and love,
> Irish ballads, merry jigs and dances, English warbles,
> Chansons of France, Scotch tunes, and o'er the rest,
> Italia's peerless compositions (1891-92: 312).

Whitman's *persona* is hearing the harmonized songs from various cultures. His desire was not only to capture the essence of those cultures but also to be echoed by them, as he exclaimed at his early career in his poem "Poem of Salutation", which was renamed later to "Salut au Monde!":

> My spirit has passed in compassion and determination around the whole earth,
> I have looked for brothers, sisters, lovers, and found them ready for me in all lands (1956: 120).

As I mentioned in Chapter I, Whitman, who opened the full range of rhythmic possibilities beyond traditional metrics and rhyme, had attracted unprecedented international attention. He was reconstructed during the struggles from monarchical regimes to modern nation-states in Europe and from colonial to postcolonial regimes in the Third World. Those reconstructions have been accompanied by the same political unrest Whitman encountered as an aspiring poet in his newly emerged American nation. His poetry always seemed revolutionary to writers working from within regimes that are inhospitable to yearnings for liberty and social justice.

Those democratic notions resonated in the work of Rihani. Like most of the writers at his time, Rihani sought to respond to those democratic notions that he held very dearly, so dearly that he brought Whitman's book with him on his journey back home. Rihani's claim that he brought Whitman's work with him in his *The Path of Vision*, is reflected in his essay "Min Ealaa Jisr Brooklyn" (From Brooklyn Bridge), when he looked at the Statue of Liberty from the viewpoint of the Brooklyn Bridge and asked when freedom will turn its face to the East and entire World, he asked when the boats of commerce, bringing products to the world, will bring freedom to the shores of the Red, Yellow and Indian seas (see Oueijan, 1998: 11).

By receiving Whitman, Rihani's work had a great impact on changing the face of Arabic literature. Choueiri exclaimed that "Rihani's early output in both English and Arabic announced the coming of age of a school of practice and thought whose spiritual and romantic, but secular, concepts and programs of action looked forward to the dawn of a new Arab renaissance, or Al-Nahda Al-Arabiyya" (2016: 366). Rihani was honored many times during his life by high-ranking officials in New York and Boston, in addition to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Morocco, England, and Mexico. After his death, several commemorations were held in recognition of his memorable accomplishment. Rihani's lasting significance is reflected in institutes and centers that have been established carrying his name, and his works and contributions to both American and Arab culture are often discussed in workshops and conferences (see Choueiri, 2016: 338).

As I have shown in Chapter 3, Rihani always asked for more cultural exchange. He wrote in his essay "From Brooklyn Bridge" that the West should "carry to the East the dynamism of the West and bring back to the West the Eastern quiescence. Take to India a parcel of

the practical American wisdom and return to New York with some bags containing seeds of Indian philosophy. Spring on Egypt and Syria the outcomes of the engineering science and come home with a stream of Arab deeds" (Oueijan, 1998: 11-12). Rihani envisioned a Hegelian dynamic that would eventually blend East and West into higher civilizational synthesis and saw himself in the role of two-way reformer and facilitator of that process. Hassan described Rihani's endeavor to unite East and West as an attempt "to fuse Arabic and Western literature thematically, linguistically, formally, and structurally" (2016: 385).

This thesis aimed to fill an important gap in the study of Whitman's reception in international literature, and to address the cultural dialogue between the United States and the Arab world. I have shown how the Arabic poetic heritage encountered the Western cultural tradition through the early Mahjar writers, specifically with Ameen Rihani. His position in the canon of Arab-American literature is foremost on account of his pioneering contributions to establishing literature and literary institutions, in both Arabic and English, by Arabs in the United States, and for his endeavor to give life to the reform movements incorporating social, religious, and political positions in the Arab world and the United States. He learned from Whitman to see in the poet a person who reflects upon the good of humanity and strives for its future, and that every human is divine and possesses powers of revelation equal to any god's. Ultimately, he borrowed Whitman's democratic, anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian implications of mysticism.

Rihani's name and works has always been linked to Whitman's poetics and themes in Arabic literature and vice versa. Rihani advocated "a poetics that has both societal as well as artistic implications, anticipating a progressive portrait of Whitman – both aesthetic and political – that recurs through the coming century" (Einboden, 2013: 158). Ultimately, his

Hymns of the Valleys announced the beginning of free verse in Arabic poetry, which flourished in the Arab world and guided modern Arabic poetry throughout the Twentieth century. His works, which have a strong affinity to Whitman's, initiated the tradition of modern Arabic literature that eventually played an indispensable role in the emergence of the Arab literary Renaissance. One can simply argue that Whitman himself is the founding father of modern Arabic literature.

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