Ameen Rihani: An Arab-American Humanist Intellectual

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Sydney Ideas Key Thinkers
1 September 2010
The University of Illinois, 1930

To us all, life is a gift, liberty is a right, and the pursuit of happiness is the object supreme. But our conduct in the pursuit differs in accordance with the measure of justice we uphold. A common measure, irrespective of class or creed or race or color, is the pivot of the equality we uphold, … it is the only safeguard to peace and progress; but a common measure is only possible when we begin to understand and learn to appreciate each other’s point of view and point of direction.
My dear Uncle Sam, I am one of your adopted children, a beneficiary of democracy ... To me ... you are setting an example... In gratitude as well as in principle you have entered this war. And in gratitude as well as in principle, every blessed son ... who holds your Certificate of Adoption should stand by you today.

*Letters to Uncle Sam, 1917*
I am a Lebanese, volunteering in the service of the Arab homeland, and we all belong to it. I am an Arab volunteering in the service of humanity, and we all belong to it. (1928)
In New York (1888-1890s)
Al-Rihaniyyat, 1910

Liberty!

When would you turn your face to the East?!
Some of Rihani’s Books in Arabic and English

The Book of Khalid, 1911
The Descent of Bolshevism, 1920.
A Chant of Mystics and Other Poems, 1921.
The Path of Vision, Essays of East and West, 1921.
Ibn Sa‘oud of Arabia: His People and His Land
The Maker of Modern Arabia, 1928.
Arabian Peak and Desert, 1930.
Around the Coasts of Arabia, 1930.
The Fate of Palestine, 1967.
Critiques in Art, 1999.
Letters to Uncle Sam, 2001.
Wajdah: A Play in four Acts, 2001
The Lore of the Arabian Nights, 2002.

Essays
THE RIHANI ESSAYS (AL-RIHANIYYAT), 1910,
EASTERN AND WESTERN FIGURES
LITERATURE AND ART
WRITINGS OF EARLY DAYS
MY WILL

Literary Criticism
YOU THE POETS
MY STORY WITH MAY

Novels, Short Stories, and Plays
THE TRIPARTITE ALLIANCE IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM
THE MULETEER AND THE MONK
THE LILY OF GHOORE
FAITHFUL TIME
THE REGISTER OF REPENT

Poetry
HYMNS OF THE VALLEYS

Historical and Political Analysis
TREATISE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
KINGS OF THE ARABS
THE DISASTERS
THE MODERN HISTORY OF NAJD EXTREMISM AND REFORM
THE HEART OF IRAQ
NATIONALISMS
FAYSAL THE FIRST

Travel
THE HEART OF LEBANON
THE FAR MOROCCO
THE ILLUMINATION OF ANDALUSIA

Sayings
SEEDS FOR PLANTERS

Letters
THE ARABIC LETTERS OF AMEEN RIHANI
The Book of Khalid, 1911
The first English book authored by an Arab
Gibran, *The Prophet*, 1923
Naimy, *The Book of Mirdad*, 1948
Abu al-’Ala’ al-Ma‘arri: The Philosopher of al-Ma‘arra (11\textsuperscript{th}-century)
Tolstoy: The Sage of Yasnaya Poliana (1828-1910)
Rihani: The Philosopher of Freike (1876-1940)

Rihani on Abu al-‘Ala’ al-Ma‘arri:
‘An intransigent with the exquisite mind of a sage and scholar, his weapons were never idle’
Edward Said, BBC Reith Lectures, 1993

The Intellectual:

An individual with a specific public role in society . . . endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role . . . cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma . . . to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose raison d’être is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously.
The Politics and Poetics of
AMEEN RIHANI
The Humanist Ideology of an
Arab-American Intellectual and Activist
NIJMEH HAJJAR

‘They are trivializing the notion of democracy by proclaiming that that is what they are trying to do in the Middle East. I don’t think it’s ever happened in history that democracy is brought in by conquest and bombing . . . I think we are headed for really bad times’. 
‘The politicians of Europe and America cannot right the wrongs of the world. They have done enough already to make this international task an official impossibility’, 1930
Rihani at The University of Illinois, 1930

‘To force a point of view and point of direction upon me by legislation or by religion, is to make of me a slave, or a hypocrite, or an ass—that is, if I obey your law or accept your creed. If I do not obey, however, and you resort to force, there will be trouble—a conflict, a revolution, a war’. 
The Great City المدينه العظمى

‘Where East and West meet, . . . and must meet . . . on the higher plain of mutual understanding and mutual esteem’.
Symposium, Washington DC, 2002

AMEEN RIHANI: BRIDGING EAST AND WEST
A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding

Edited by Nathan C. Funk Betty J. Sitka
The Fate of Palestine
Lectures in America, 1929-1939

‘The peace of the world depends in a measure upon peace in the Holy Land’
Rihani, My Story with Mayy

قصّتي مع ميّ

Mayy Ziadeh
(1886-1941)
Rihani’s Books in Arabic and English

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THE ARABIC LETTERS OF AMEEN RIHANI
The Tripartite Alliance in the Animal Kingdom, 1903

The Ass - The Mule - The Horse
For twenty years I ate of this man's bread and salt,—that is yours, Uncle—enjoyed the freedom of his commons, slept under his hospitable peaceful roof, . . . was treated like an equal by his people, without as much as paying a rap or contributing a song-and-dance to the entertainment . . . I have been, in a word, an unpatriotic citizen, . . . But now that your Uncle is at war, Rihani, what are you going to do about it? Will you continue to dawdle and dilly-dally among monuments of your brave ancestors, deciphering couplets on the walls of Alhambra . . . , while the country in which you were reared and schooled and entertained, is now preparing for battle? Will you for all the beauty and loveliness of Andalusia forego your right to join in the combat? (1917)
‘Speaking truth to power’

Rihani to the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

‘If strength and justice are the foundation of the state, education is its shield.’

Picture: Rihani & Ibn Sa’ud, 1922-1923
Europeans in the Arab World!
Rihani:

‘Will not the President [Roosevelt], would not the American people, to be consistent, apply the same principle of rule by majority to the Arabs of Palestine whose number is more than double that of the Jews”
Jekyll-and-Hyde!
‘Speaking truth to power’

‘The East sees nothing in European civilization except evil, greed and selfishness . . . before the East awakes, I want the European to become just and the Oriental to become more rational, so they can reach mutual understanding, trust, and co-operation’.

Rihani, *The Kings of Arabia*, 1924
‘I am by nature a man of peace’
My Will - 1931 وصيّتي


Jihad for Freedom

- ‘People’s right to self-determination is sacred. I enjoin you to engage in a struggle for its sake (usikum bil-jihad fi sabilih)’

- ‘Fight against mandatory governments and all oppressive governments’
‘The educators of us all, in the East and the West’