On a casual stroll through Copley Square in Boston, Massachusetts, one may come across an extremely well known spot to study and find just about any book on anything: The Boston Public Library. On that same stroll one might look around a little before entering the library, to admire the scenery of Copley… the grand Trinity Church, the Fairmont Copley Plaza, orrrr they may stop and glance at one of the prettiest memorials in the city: The Khalil Gibran Memorial.

“It was in my heart to help a little because I was helped much” is found inscribed upon the memorial located in the heart of Copley. This beautiful block is so much more than a place to rest and observe. It serves as an area to protest, to gather, to live.

Buuuuut before I get into all that good stuff, you must be wondering who this man even is in the first place….

Khalil Gibran is a world-famous poet and artist. Known for his poetry and book The Prophet, Gibran has expressed raw and universal emotion, demanding the attention of the world.

Born in 1883 in the town of Bsharri, Lebanon, Gibran later emigrated to the United States as a preteen. It is in Boston that he discovered his talent for art and literature and became the artist the world knows today.

Growing up in a settlement house in South Boston, Gibran lived among his mother, half brother, and two sisters, along with thousands of other immigrants. During this time, Transcendentalism was a rising concept, promoting intellectual liberty and the naturalization of the human experience. Embodying ideas of the natural world, Khalil Gibran’s work was born of the womb of this new revolution of free-thinking during the 19th Century.

Given the opportunity to attend school while his family worked to survive, Gibran was able to explore his skills in English and art. It was while he was receiving his education that he was introduced to a man by the name of Fred Holland Day. Day influenced Khalil to explore his talents and guided him as one of the earliest art photographers.
Gibran was sent back to Lebanon where he developed stronger ties to his home country in addition to the language of Arabic and his Maronite faith and culture.

Returning to America as World War I broke out, Gibran was unable to accept the pacifism that was popular among his American colleagues. He then became active in the Syrian nationalist group, attempting to help the starving people of his homeland.

It was from this point on that Khalil Gibran began to produce his most famous work in literature and art. He channeled the pain of being an expat and living through WWI into deeply poetic and enigmatic words. 100’s of millions of copies of his most famous book *The Prophet* sold around the world, as it was translated into 40 different languages.

Discussing topics of love, faith, and life, Gibran attracted, and continues to attract, people from all walks of life, facing their own realities. He would say “My entire being is in The Prophet,” ...“Everything I have ever done before was only a prelude to this.”

Gibran soon became a pivotal figure in both Arabic and English Literature in addition to the histories of both Lebanon and America.

According to the Boston Library District, Khalil’s work was “an enlightened view of spirituality and religion, an aesthetic that was embraced years later when the 1960s countercultural wave rippled across America and The Prophet became a central text of the New Age movement. Having learned first-hand about Lebanon’s bloody history and the destructive factional struggles across the Middle East, Gibran’s work displayed a belief in the fundamental unity of religions, inviting parallels to William Blake, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.” In one of his poems is found the quote: “You are my brother and I love you. I love you when you prostrate yourself in your mosque, and kneel in your church and pray in your synagogue. You and I are sons of one faith—the Spirit.” (Boston Library District)

The memorial itself is strategically located across the McKim building of the Boston Public Library where Gibran would spend hours educating himself and learning over the years.

With a mural saying “Poet” and “Painter,” Khalil Gibran’s face is sculpted into the bronze plaque that witnesses the chaos of the square.

And in this square is where countless Lebanese souls have displayed homage for their nation.

Not too long ago, I gathered with thousands of Lebanese to protest for a new and just government. Dancing and celebrating…. shouting, we gathered to remember the hope Gibran painted for our home away from home.
And sadly, shortly after, I stood before the very same monument and read his beautiful words: “Gone are my people, but I exist yet, Lamenting them in my solitude... Dead are my friends, and in their Death my life is naught but great Disaster. The knolls of my country are submerged By tears and blood, for my people and My beloved are gone, and I am here Living as I did when my people and my Beloved were enjoying life and the Bounty of life, and when the hills of My country were blessed and engulfed By the light of the sun.

My people died from hunger, and he who Did not perish from starvation was Butchered with the sword; and I am Here in this distant land, roaming Amongst a joyful people who sleep Upon soft beds, and smile at the days While the days smile upon them.

My people died a painful and shameful Death, and here am I living in plenty And in peace...This is deep tragedy Ever-enacted upon the stage of my Heart; few would care to witness this Drama, for my people are as birds with Broken wings, left behind the flock.”

We cried out, took to the streets, and shouted before hundreds in hopelessness and pain that was the explosion of August 2020.

Gibran’s work brings silence to the understanding of life. His memorial serves as a symbol of peace and ambition in making our existence groundbreaking…. To make this life a better one. Monuments and memorials like these push us to reassess our conception of time and difference. We are all one, we are all powerful, and we all have a duty: let us forever remember the hope of our youth and the courage of our aspirations. This monument will live for years beyond our time, inspiring our future generations to come.
Bibliography


