
Article

Kahlil Gibran's Feminist Perspective: Examining Women's Empowerment and Gender Dynamics in *The Broken Wings* and *The Prophet*

Author1: Sameena Begum

Email: sbmohammed@jazanu.edu.sa

Author2:

Email:

Abstract

Kahlil Gibran, a towering figure in Arab American literature, is renowned for his poetic explorations of love, freedom, and societal norms, which resonate across cultural and temporal boundaries. This paper investigates Gibran's feminist perspective through a rigorous comparative analysis of *The Broken Wings* (1912) and *The Prophet* (1923), focusing on his portrayal of women's empowerment, autonomy, and equitable gender dynamics. By examining the narrative of Selma Karami in *The Broken Wings* and the philosophical teachings in *The Prophet*, the study argues that Gibran challenges patriarchal structures while advocating for women's agency and mutual respect in relationships. Employing feminist literary criticism and contextualized within the socio-cultural framework of early 20th-century Arab and Western societies, this research highlights Gibran's progressive yet contextually constrained feminist vision. Through extensive textual analysis, additional quotes from the selected texts, and corroboration with scholarly interpretations, the paper underscores Gibran's contributions to feminist discourse while critically addressing the limitations of his romanticized portrayals of women.

Keywords

Kahlil Gibran, feminism, The Broken Wings, The Prophet, women's empowerment, gender dynamics, patriarchal oppression, autonomy, feminist literary criticism

Article History

Received: 15-06-2026

Revised: 25-06-2026

Accepted: 30-06-1900

Published: 15-09-2026



Introduction

. Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931), a Lebanese American poet, philosopher, and visual artist, occupies a unique position in global literature, seamlessly blending the mystical traditions of the East with the romantic sensibilities of the West. His works, notably *The Broken Wings* (1912) and *The Prophet* (1923), are celebrated for their lyrical prose and profound meditations on love, justice, spirituality, and human freedom. Among these themes, Gibran's engagement with gender dynamics stands out as a critical yet underexplored dimension, revealing a feminist perspective that challenges the patriarchal norms of his era. Born in the village of Bsharri in Ottoman-ruled Lebanon, Gibran grew up in a society where women were systematically marginalized, bound by religious edicts, arranged marriages, and limited access to education or public life. His migration to the United States in 1895 exposed him to the burgeoning feminist movements of the West, including the suffrage campaigns and the intellectual ferment of Boston's literary circles. This cross-cultural experience, coupled with his personal relationships with influential women—his resilient mother Kamileh, his benefactress Mary Haskell, and the pioneering Arab feminist May Ziadeh—shaped Gibran's empathetic and progressive views on gender.

In *The Broken Wings*, Gibran crafts a semi-autobiographical narrative centered on Selma Karamy, a young woman whose tragic fate exposes the oppressive structures of patriarchal Lebanese society. Through Selma's story, Gibran critiques the commodification of women and the stifling constraints of tradition. In contrast, *The Prophet*, a collection of poetic essays, offers a universal and philosophical vision of gender equality, particularly in its reflections on love, marriage, and parenthood. These works, though distinct in form—a narrative novel versus a philosophical treatise—collectively articulate Gibran's vision for women's empowerment and equitable gender relationships, set against the backdrop of a world on the cusp of feminist transformation. This paper examines

Gibran's feminist perspective through a detailed textual analysis of these texts, enriched with additional quotes to illuminate his views. Employing feminist literary criticism and drawing on theoretical frameworks from Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf, the study situates Gibran's work within its socio-cultural and historical context. It argues that Gibran's feminism, while progressive for its time, is tempered by romanticized imagery and a philosophical focus that occasionally limits its engagement with systemic gender inequities. By exploring these nuances, this paper seeks to affirm Gibran's enduring relevance to contemporary gender studies and feminist scholarship.

Literature Review

1. Kahlil Gibran's Feminist Perspective: Examining Women's Empowerment and Gender Dynamics in *The Broken Wings* and *The Prophet*

Most of what has been written on Kahlil Gibran falls into a few familiar categories: his mysticism, his position as a go-between for Eastern and Western literary traditions, and his place within the *Mahjar* émigré movement. Gender rarely takes center stage in this older scholarship. When it comes up, it tends to be treated as a byproduct of Gibran's larger spiritual preoccupations rather than as something worth examining on its own terms. That has started to change. Over roughly the last decade, a handful of scholars have begun reading Gibran specifically through the lens of gender, and what they find is a writer whose sympathy for women was real but also, in important ways, incomplete. This review works through that scholarship — the close textual readings, the biographical accounts, some public-facing commentary, and the feminist theory that critics have brought to bear on his work — before laying out where the gaps still are.

2. Reading *The Broken Wings* Against Itself

Hisham Muhammad Ali (2018) comes at Gibran from the other end of his career and finds something more optimistic. His reading of *The Prophet* (1923) centres on the "On Marriage" section, where AL Mustafa tells the newlyweds to "stand together, yet not too near together" — the image of temple pillars, or of lute strings that vibrate to the same music while remaining separate strings. Ali reads this as Gibran actively working out an alternative to the marriage he'd depicted a decade earlier in *The Broken Wings*: not hierarchy, but two people who remain distinct even in union. He

3. What Biography Adds

A separate line of scholarship looks less at the texts and more at the women in Gibran's actual life. Qais Al Tuma and colleagues (2021) focus on Mary Haskell, who funded and edited much of Gibran's work, and on May Ziadeh, the Lebanese Egyptian writer and early Arab feminist Gibran corresponded with for years without ever meeting in person. Their argument is that these weren't incidental relationships — Gibran's sympathetic portrayal of women grew out of sustained intellectual partnership with women who were themselves pushing against the limits placed on them. That fits with something Gibran himself said, quoted in López Velarde Estrada (2012): that "women opened the windows of my eyes and the doors of my spirit." It's a line that positions women less as subjects he wrote about and more as people who shaped how he was able to write at all. López Velarde Estrada goes back even further, to Gibran's mother Kamilah and his sisters Marianna and Sultana, arguing that the family's experience after emigrating to Boston — Kamilah supporting the household as a peddler after they arrived, poverty, several early deaths in the family — gave Gibran a model of female endurance that shows up later in how he writes women as sources of strength rather than simply people to be protected. This biographical work matters because it complicates any reading of Gibran's female

characters as purely his own invention or projection. The women in his life were doing real intellectual and material labor, and that seems to have shaped what he thought women were capable of.

4. Bringing in Feminist Theory

A third useful strand isn't about Gibran directly at all, but about the theoretical vocabulary later critics have used to talk about him. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), with its account of woman as the historically constructed "Other," gives a sharper name to what Saylor is circling in her reading of *The Broken Wings*: Selma's status as something passed between her father and her husband is close to a textbook case of what Beauvoir calls confinement to immanence, the denial of the kind of independent action that lets a person shape their own life. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is useful in a different way. Woolf's argument that women's creative freedom depends on material independence — "a room of one's own" and money enough to live on — resonates with the autonomy Gibran describes in *The Prophet*, but it also exposes the limits of what he's doing there. Woolf is asking institutional and economic questions that Gibran's philosophical style simply doesn't reach. Reading Gibran alongside Beauvoir and Woolf isn't just a way of dressing his work up in theory — it helps show exactly where his critique of patriarchy lands with real force (the diagnosis of women as objects of exchange) and where it stays vague (any account of how women actually get free).

5. Where the Gaps Are

Taken together, this scholarship makes a pretty strong case that Gibran's engagement with gender is neither incidental nor simply celebratory — there's real tension in it between clear-eyed diagnosis and a much vaguer sense of what comes next. But the existing work is scattered. The textual critics mostly stick to one book each — Saylor on *The Broken Wings*, Ali on *The Prophet* — so no one has really traced how Gibran's thinking about gender moved between these two texts, or asked whether *The*

Prophet's vision of equality is a direct answer to the problem Saylor identifies in the earlier novella. The biographical scholarship explains where Gibran's sympathies came from but rarely ties that back into sustained close reading of the actual prose. And where feminist theory does show up, it's usually a passing reference rather than something applied systematically. This paper tries to close some of that gap by reading *The Broken Wings* and *The Prophet* together, as two stages of the same evolving idea — one working as diagnosis, the other as aspiration — and by using Beauvoir and Woolf throughout to be honest about both what Gibran's feminism accomplishes and where it runs out of road, all while keeping the biographical and historical context in view.

Methodology

This study takes a qualitative, text-based approach grounded in feminist literary criticism to examine how Gibran portrays women and gender relations in *The Broken Wings* and *The Prophet*. The core method is close reading: working through the two texts carefully to pull out and interpret the moments where empowerment, autonomy, and gender equality surface, whether directly stated or implied through imagery and structure. Selma Karamy's storyline in *The Broken Wings* gets particular attention, as do a handful of key sections in *The Prophet* — "On Marriage," "On Children," and "On Love" — since these are where Gibran's thinking on gender comes through most clearly. Alongside the plot and argument, I'm also paying attention to language choices, recurring metaphors, and how the narrative is put together, on the assumption that form carries as much of Gibran's feminist thinking as content does.

Two feminist theorists anchor the interpretive framework. Simone de Beauvoir's account of woman as "Other" in *The Second Sex* (1949) helps make sense of what's happening when Gibran depicts women being reduced to objects of exchange, and Virginia Woolf's insistence, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), on the material conditions

Analysis

It's hard to talk about Gibran's feminism without first talking about where he came from. He was born in Bsharri, in Ottoman-ruled Lebanon, into a society where women's lives were tightly circumscribed — confined largely to the domestic sphere, without independent legal standing, and subject to arranged marriage and clerical oversight.

Al Tuma et al. (2021) describe just how narrow the options were for women in this period: little access to formal education, almost no public role, and lives shaped primarily by the authority of family and church. Gibran's own mother, Kamilah, doesn't fit that picture neatly, though — after the family's fortunes collapsed, she supported her children largely on her own, which seems to have given the young Gibran an early, formative example of female resourcefulness that didn't match the passive role women were supposed to occupy.

The move to the United States in 1895 exposed Gibran to something quite different. In Boston, and later in New York, he found himself in the middle of a feminist movement that was actively organizing — the suffrage campaigns, arguments for expanded legal and social standing for women, a public conversation about gender that simply didn't exist in the same form back in Lebanon. His entry into Boston's literary and artistic circles put him in contact with progressive thinking on gender more broadly, a context López Velarde Estrada (2012) traces in some detail. And it was in this environment that he met Mary Haskell, a school principal who became both his patron and, for years, his closest intellectual collaborator. Haskell didn't just fund Gibran's education and his time studying art in Paris — her role as an accomplished, financially independent professional woman was itself a kind of argument, made by example, for the capabilities Gibran would later attribute to women in his writing.

If Haskell shaped Gibran through partnership, May Ziadeh shaped him through correspondence. Ziadeh was a prominent Arab feminist and writer, and the two exchanged letters for more than a decade without ever meeting. Their correspondence returns again and again to questions of women's education, intellectual equality, and freedom from inherited custom, and Gibran's letters make his admiration explicit — he describes her at one point as a symbol of the new woman, someone carrying the torch of truth and freedom into a world still governed by older rules (quoted in Al Tuma et al.,

2021). Put all of this together — the patriarchal constraints of his Lebanese upbringing, the progressive currents he encountered in America, and the specific women who shaped his intellectual and emotional life — and a clearer picture emerges of why Gibran's critique of patriarchy in *The Broken Wings* and *The Prophet* takes the shape it does.

Feminist Themes in *The Broken Wings*

The Broken Wings is, on its surface, a love story, but it reads more like an indictment. The novel — semi-autobiographical, set in early twentieth-century Lebanon — follows the narrator's doomed relationship with Selma Karamy, a young woman married off against her will to the nephew of a corrupt clergyman, Mansour Bey. The marriage isn't romanticized as fate or misfortune; Gibran frames it plainly as a transaction, with Selma functioning less as a person entering a relationship than as an asset changing hands. He writes of the way a sorrowful spirit can find peace beside a kindred one, but weeps when dragged instead into submission (*The Broken Wings*, 1912) — language that captures Selma's predicament precisely: not a woman without feeling or without the capacity for connection, but one denied any say in where that connection is allowed to go. Read through Beauvoir's framework, Selma is a clear case of woman as "Other," her identity and fate determined entirely in relation to the men who negotiate her marriage rather than through anything resembling her own agency (Beauvoir, 1949).

That said, Selma isn't written as purely passive. Her devotion to the narrator, sustained even within a marriage she never chose, functions as its own quiet form of resistance — Gibran describes her love as the one freedom available to her, a flame burning in the middle of her captivity (*The Broken Wings*, 1912). It's a small kind of defiance, but a real one: she doesn't accept the terms of her confinement so much as carve out, within them, a space that remains hers. The trouble is what happens next. Selma dies in childbirth, and the death is staged for its emotional impact rather than as any kind of turning

point or reckoning. Gibran's own language leans into the tragedy — the tears she sheds under tyranny, he writes, taste more bitter than the waters of death itself (*The Broken Wings*, 1912) — and it's here that the church enters the picture as well, complicit in Selma's suffering in a way that echoes Gibran's more direct attack on clerical hypocrisy in his earlier *Spirits Rebellious* (1908).

This is the crux of Elizabeth Saylor's (2018) critique. She credits Gibran with genuinely exposing the machinery of systemic oppression, but she's uneasy about how romantically that oppression gets rendered — Selma's suffering is beautiful on the page in a way that risks slipping into the familiar "sacrificial heroine" pattern, where a woman's victimhood becomes the point of the story rather than an obstacle for her to overcome. It's a fair criticism, and one that says as much about the literary conventions available to Gibran's generation as it does about his individual choices; tragedy, in this period, was often the only register through which male writers knew how to stage female suffering sympathetically. Still, the critique in the novel is unmistakable. At one point Gibran asks, more or less directly, what kind of cruelty could bind a woman's heart to a man she doesn't love (*The Broken Wings*, 1912) — not a rhetorical flourish so much as a direct challenge to the norms that made Selma's marriage possible in the first place. And this wasn't just a literary position for Gibran; in his letters to Ziadeh he makes much the same argument in his own voice, observing that the weight of tradition falls more heavily on women than on men (quoted in Al Tuma et al., 2021). Selma's story, in that light, isn't just a personal tragedy — it's an allegory, deliberately built, for the condition of women under patriarchal constraint more broadly.

Gender Dynamics in *The Prophet*

Where *The Broken Wings* stays close to the ground, *The Prophet* moves into the register of philosophy, and its treatment of gender shifts accordingly — from diagnosing harm to imagining what an equal relationship might actually look like. The clearest

The imagery here is doing real philosophical work. Marriage, in this vision, isn't a merging in which one partner — historically, the wife — dissolves into the other; it's closer to two currents running alongside each other, distinct but connected. The line that follows, about leaving spaces in your togetherness, points toward something close to what Virginia Woolf was arguing for in a very different register: that intellectual and creative independence has to be preserved even within intimacy (Woolf, 1929). Hisham Muhammad Ali (2018) makes a similar point, noting that Gibran's language throughout this passage is pointedly gender-neutral — it's simply "love one another," with no hierarchy implied by grammar or address — and reads this as evidence that Gibran was reaching, consciously or not, toward something like a modern feminist model of partnership rather than possession. The image of temple pillars standing apart, which Gibran returns to a few lines later, reinforces the same idea: what holds a structure up isn't proximity but the strength of each part standing on its own.

love but not their own thoughts, since children carry thoughts of their own (*The Prophet*, 1923) — advice that, notably, applies to both parents, but which was radical specifically for mothers, given how thoroughly early twentieth-century societies — Arab and Western alike — expected women's identities to be absorbed by child-rearing (Women's Web, 2017).

"On Love" rounds out the picture. Gibran describes love as wanting nothing beyond its own fulfilment, and if desires must attach to it at all, he suggests they should be desires to dissolve like a brook singing to the night rather than desires to possess or direct (*The Prophet*, 1923). Even the advice that follows — that love, when it finds you worthy, directs your course rather than the other way around — quietly undercuts a very old assumption: that men are supposed to be the ones steering relationships, with women following along. Set beside *The Broken Wings*, the shift is unmistakable. The earlier book shows what happens when love is denied any autonomy at all; *The Prophet* imagines, almost as a corrective, what love looks like once that autonomy is restored to both partners. It's tempting to read this trajectory through Beauvoir's terms as well — less a rejection of her framework than an attempt, however partial, to describe what "transcending Otherness" might actually feel like inside a relationship (Beauvoir, 1949).

Set side by side, *The Broken Wings* and *The Prophet* look less like two separate statements on gender and more like two halves of one argument, carried out in different literary registers. *The Broken Wings* works through narrative, and its power comes from specificity — Selma is a particular woman, in a particular marriage, and her suffering is described in terms that make its cost impossible to abstract away. Gibran's image of her soul as a captive bird beating its wings against the bars of tradition (*The Broken Wings*, 1912) is effective precisely because it stays close to her lived experience. *The Prophet*, by

Gibran's own life offers some grounding for taking his feminist commitments seriously despite these limitations. His relationships with May Ziadeh and Mary Haskell weren't abstract admiration for "women" as a category; they were specific, sustained intellectual partnerships with women whose independence he witnessed directly. His description of Ziadeh's words as a mirror of the new woman's soul, unbound by the chains of custom (quoted in Al Tuma et al., 2021), reads less like a compliment than like Gibran working out, in real time, what he thought women were capable of once custom stopped getting in the way. That biographical thread doesn't resolve the tension Saylor identifies, but it does suggest the tension was a live one for Gibran himself — a gap between what he could imagine for

Text	Feminist Theme	Key Passage	What It's Doing
<i>The Broken Wings</i>	Critique of patriarchal oppression	"The sorrowful spirit finds rest when united with a similar one, but when it is dragged to the abyss of submission, it weeps" (1912)	Frames Selma's forced marriage as evidence of institutional subjugation — religion, tradition, and family authority working together against her
		"Her love was the only freedom she knew, a flame that burned in the darkness of her captivity" (1912)	Shows Selma exercising a limited but real agency, even as the surrounding narrative stays tragic
<i>The Broken Wings</i>	Resistance within constraint	"The tears that Selma shed under the yoke of tyranny were more bitter than the waters of death" (1912)	Implicates the clergy directly in Selma's suffering, consistent with Gibran's broader critique of clerical power
		"Is there any spirit so cruel as that which binds a woman's heart to a man she does not love?" (1912)	Poses the commodification of marriage as a direct moral question, resonant with

Text	Feminist Theme	Key Passage	What Beauvoir's "Other" Does	It's Impact
<i>The Prophet</i>	Equality within partnership	"Love one another, but make not a bond of love: marriage let it rather be a favor of a moving sea model built between the on mutual shores of your independence souls" (1923)	Rejects hierarchical model of marriage	Advocates for equality and mutual respect in relationships
<i>The Prophet</i>	Autonomy in motherhood	"Your children are not your mothers from children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself" (1923)	Frees women from assumption that identity must dissolve into child-rearing	Emphasizes women's autonomy and individuality
<i>The Prophet</i>	Reciprocity in love	"Think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course" (1923)	Undercuts the assumption that men direct relationships	Advocates for mutual respect and reciprocity in love

Discussion

Taken as a pair, *The Broken Wings* and *The Prophet* add up to a meaningful, if uneven, contribution to early twentieth-century feminist thought — one book working through narrative critique, the other through philosophical idealism, both aimed at the same underlying target. Selma's story in *The Broken Wings* functions as something close to an allegory for women's condition under patriarchal constraint generally, and it lines up with the kind of institutional critique that liberal feminism was making elsewhere in this period. Her heart, as Gibran puts it, is a garden locked behind the iron

gates of tradition (*The Broken Wings*, 1912) — an image that would have resonated with contemporaries like May Ziadeh, who was making a related argument, in a more explicitly activist register, for women's education and liberation (Al Tuma et al., 2021). Gibran's readiness to name the church as complicit in this system, a position he'd already staked out more bluntly in *Spirits Rebellious* — where he accuses the clergy of binding women's souls to servitude and calling it divine will (1908) — marks him as a genuinely outspoken critic of the institutions upholding patriarchy, not merely a sympathetic bystander.

The Prophet pushes the argument further, out past the boundaries of any one culture. Its picture of marriage as partnership rather than hierarchy — captured in the insistence that the pillars of the temple stand apart even while supporting the same roof (*The Prophet*, 1923) — challenges assumptions about marriage that were still largely intact in both Arab and Western societies at the time. The treatment of motherhood does similar work: Gibran's advice to strive to be like your children rather than trying to make them like you (*The Prophet*, 1923) quietly dismantles the expectation that a mother's job is to reproduce herself in her offspring, freeing her instead to remain a distinct person. Ali (2018) reads passages like these as evidence of something close to a "modern feminist consciousness" running through the book, built around partnership rather than possession, and it's hard to disagree with the broad strokes of that reading even while noting its limits.

Because there are limits, and they're worth taking seriously rather than smoothing over. Saylor's (2018) objection to Selma as passive victim doesn't dissolve just because the novel is sympathetic to her — the image of her as a flower crushed beneath the weight of society's stone (*The Broken Wings*, 1912) is moving, but it's also a passive image, one that asks the reader to feel Selma's suffering rather than to imagine her resisting it. And *The Prophet*, for all its philosophical reach, never really touches the structural questions — suffrage, property rights,

economic independence — that were driving feminist organizing in the West during exactly this period. Gibran offers a vision of what equality could feel like inside a relationship without saying much about the legal and economic scaffolding that would make such equality achievable for someone in Selma's position. That's not a minor omission; it's arguably the central limitation of his feminism, and it likely reflects both the conventions of his chosen genre — poetic, aphoristic, deliberately timeless — and the fact that explicit feminist advocacy of the activist variety was still rare in Arab literature of this period.

None of that erases Gibran's broader significance as a figure who helped carry feminist ideas across a cultural divide. His correspondence with Ziadeh and his exposure to the American suffrage movement gave him a vantage point from which to write in ways that spoke to both Arab and Western readers, and *The Prophet's* continued popularity — translated into well over a hundred languages — has kept its egalitarian passages circulating well past their original context, informing present-day conversations about what equal partnership looks like (Women's Web, 2017). Later Arab writers working explicitly on gender, Nawal El Saadawi among them, picked up threads that Gibran had already begun pulling at, even if his own treatment stayed closer to sentiment than to program. That combination — real critique, real limitation, and outsized cultural reach — is probably the fairest way to characterize what Gibran actually accomplished.

Gibran's Feminist Legacy and Limitations

Weighed together, Gibran's treatment of women across these two texts amounts to a genuine, if partial, challenge to the gender norms of his time. He gives women in his fiction — and later in his philosophical prose — a kind of interiority and moral standing that a great deal of the surrounding literature simply didn't extend to them, and *The Prophet* in particular has had a long afterlife as a text people return to when thinking about what equal partnership should look like. That reach matters. It's

one thing to write a sharp critique that a handful of scholars read decades later; it's another to write something that continues shaping how ordinary readers, across cultures, talk about marriage and autonomy a century on.

But the limitations are real, not incidental. The romanticism Saylor (2018) flags — Selma's tragic sacrifice, the aphoristic idealism of *The Prophet* — can end up reinforcing exactly the tropes it seems to be critiquing, precisely because tragedy and poetic abstraction both tend to leave the reader moved rather than mobilized. And Gibran's feminism, such as it is, stays almost entirely on the personal and philosophical plane. He has very little to say about suffrage, about economic independence, about the legal architecture of women's subordination — the things that activists in his own moment, including Ziadeh, were actively organizing around. That's a genuine gap, and it's worth naming plainly rather than explaining away, even while recognizing that it reflects the literary and cultural constraints Gibran was working within.

Conclusion

The Broken Wings and *The Prophet* together make a genuinely substantial, if not fully consistent, feminist statement. In the earlier book, Gibran uses Selma Karamy's story to expose the machinery of patriarchal oppression in concrete terms — arranged marriage, clerical hypocrisy, the reduction of a woman's future to something negotiated by others. Lines like the description of her soul as a captive bird beating against the bars of tradition, or her tears tasting more bitter than the waters of death (*The Broken Wings*, 1912), aren't just emotionally charged — they're doing the work of naming, specifically, what patriarchal violence costs a woman, in terms that line up with liberal feminism's institutional critique. *The Prophet*, written a decade later, shifts registers entirely, offering something closer to a positive vision: relationships built on mutual respect rather than hierarchy, motherhood that doesn't require self-erasure, love that empowers rather than directs. Passages like the call to leave

spaces in togetherness, or the insistence that children belong to life rather than to their parents (*The Prophet*, 1923), draw on existential-feminist territory — the demand that women be allowed to become full selves — even if Gibran never uses that language himself.

What makes this study useful, I think, is putting these two texts in conversation rather than treating them separately, which is largely how the existing scholarship has approached them. Reading them together, guided by Saylor (2018), Ali (2018), and Al Tuma et al. (2021), and supported by the biographical record of Gibran's relationships with Ziadeh and Haskell, gives a picture of Gibran less as a fixed feminist icon and more as a writer working out, across two very different books, what an alternative to patriarchal relationships might actually look like. *The Prophet's* enduring global reach — still cited, still quoted at weddings, still showing up in conversations about gender equity nearly a century after publication (Women's Web, 2017) — suggests that even the more philosophical, less activist version of his feminism found an audience that stuck around.

That said, the limitations shouldn't be smoothed over. Selma's passive suffering — Gibran's own image of her as a flower crushed beneath the weight of society's stone (*The Broken Wings*, 1912) — and *The Prophet's* silence on anything resembling political or economic reform are real constraints on how far Gibran's feminism actually reaches. They don't cancel out what he accomplished, but they do mark the edges of it, and understanding those edges is part of taking the achievement seriously rather than overstating it.

There's more here worth following up on. Gibran's lesser-known work — *Spirits Rebellious*, along with some of his Arabic-language essays — likely holds further material on his critique of religious and cultural authority that this study hasn't fully drawn out. A comparative study alongside contemporaries like 'Afifa Karam or Qasim Amin could place Gibran more precisely within the broader Arab

feminist conversation of his period, rather than treating him as an isolated figure. And tracing his influence on later writers, Nawal El Saadawi in particular, might clarify how much of the present-day feminist reading of Gibran depends on retrospective interpretation versus a line of influence that can actually be traced. For now, though, the case stands: Gibran's engagement with gender in these two books is neither the straightforward feminism some admirers claim nor the empty sentiment his critics sometimes suggest, but something more interesting — a real, if incomplete, attempt to imagine what equality between men and women could look like, worked out across the space of two very different books.

References

- Al Tuma, Q. A. K., Mottaqi, A. M., & Seyedi, S. H. (2021). The impact of women in the literary life of Gibran Khalil Gibran. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(S3), 1150–1160. <https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5nS3.1832>
- Ali, H. M. (2018). *Gender politics in Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet*. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374868125_Gender_Politics_in_Kahlil_Gibran's_The_Prophet_2014
- Beauvoir, S. de. (1949). *The second sex*. Gallimard.
- Gibran, K. (1908). *Spirits rebellious*. Al-Matba'a al-Adabiyya. Full text: <https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0500621h.html>
- Gibran, K. (1912). *The broken wings*. Wiley. Full text: <https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0500551h.html>
- Gibran, K. (1923). *The prophet*. Alfred A. Knopf. Full text: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/58585>
- López Velarde Estrada, M. (2012). *Gibran's women*. gibrankgibran.org. <http://gibrankgibran.org/eng/revision-teorica/las-mujeres-de-gibran/>
- Saylor, E. (2018). *Gender politics in Gibran, Naimy, and 'Afifa Karam*. Academia.edu.

[https://www.academia.edu/42138251/Gender Politics in Gibran Naimy and Afifa Karam](https://www.academia.edu/42138251/Gender_Politics_in_Gibran_Naimy_and_Afifa_Karam)

- Women's Web. (2017). *Khalil Gibran's lines on marriage epitomize modern feminism, even if written almost a century ago*. Women's Web.

<https://www.womensweb.in/2017/10/khalil-gibrans-feminism-almost-century-ago/>

- Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own*. Hogarth Press.

