

RIHANI, EMERSON, AND THOREAU

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Viewing Rihani within his American context and focusing on what he wrote in English, I detect the influence of American transcendentalism. In order to briefly show that influence, I will concentrate on The Book of Khalid.

The Book of Khalid shows the influence of transcendentalism through references to Emerson, Thoreau, and transcendentalism and through the similarity of ideas in the book to the ideas of Emerson and Thoreau, as shown in their works. The book also reflects two prominent features of transcendentalism: idealism and social activism.

Khalid, the main character in The Book of Khalid, grows up in Lebanon and then emigrates to America, where he sets up a store and living quarters in a basement in the Syrian district of New York City. Eventually, he becomes exhausted by the materialism of America, his spiritual and intellectual struggles, and the sensual life of Bohemia. He settles his business affairs and returns to Lebanon.

Changed by his years in America, Khalid no longer fits into the old society: He runs into trouble with the Maronite church, is excommunicated, and flees to the woods. There he undergoes a spiritual rebirth and, after a year, returns to society a new man. He enters politics, but his political views produce a riot at the Great Mosque in Damascus and the Ottoman government tries to arrest him. He flees to Egypt, where he lives for awhile in a tent in the desert, and dreams of an Arab empire arising between the East and the West and uniting the best of each. Then he disappears.

The Book of Khalid quotes Emerson¹ and mentions a trip Khalid made to Emerson's house.² Khalid comments on what Thoreau would think of terrace walls with gaps in which wild flowers grow³ and calls Thoreau "my American brother."⁴ A character in The Book of Khalid refers to Khalid's retreat to the woods for a year as being similar to "Thoreau's passage through Walden woods."⁵

These references show that Rihani had more than a passing interest in Emerson and Thoreau. In order to show the depth of the influence of transcendentalism on Rihani, I am going to discuss some of the major ideas of transcendentalism, as expressed by Emerson and Thoreau, and show how these ideas are also expressed by Rihani in The Book of Khalid. The ideas are as follows: the primacy of intuition, spirituality, the

¹ Ameen Rihani, The Book of Khalid (New York: Dodd, 1911) 186, 188.

² Rihani 189.

³ Rihani 183.

⁴ Rihani 191.

⁵ Rihani 194.

importance of the individual, the need for an individual to undergo a spiritual change before he attempts to change society, rejection of the social order, religious faith as opposed to creeds, nature, mixture of the mystical and the practical, and the importance of doing a job that promotes spiritual development.

The Primacy of Intuition. The transcendentalists believe that they can gain knowledge through the five senses and through reason, but that they can gain knowledge of the deeper, spiritual truths only through intuition (instinct). Through intuition they can discover the meaning of outward experiences in the material world. Intuition is the "primary wisdom" while "all later teachings are tuitions," and intuition "giveth man wisdom" through his contact with the "immense intelligence" with which he is surrounded.⁶

Khalid spends two years reading. He discusses ideas with "second-hand Jerry," a used-book dealer, and attends lectures on atheism. Yet, after all this intellectual effort, Khalid begins to trust his intuition more than his reason: "our instincts . . . never lie. They are honest, and though they be sometimes blind."⁷ When Khalid is in the woods for a year after his flight from Najma's wedding procession, he befriends a hermit who tells him that he follows his instincts and implores him to submit to God and return to the church.⁸

⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," The Heart of Emerson's Essays: Selections from His Complete Works, ed. Bliss Perry (Boston: Houghton, 1933) 107.

⁷ Rihani 67.

⁸ Rihani 222.

Spirituality. The transcendentalists stress the spiritual over the material. The material is a reflection of the spiritual and can be understood only by reference to the spiritual from which it springs: "The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world."⁹ In relation to an idea existing in the spiritual world, the material expression is "an appendix to the soul."¹⁰ And since the material has come from the spiritual, it has something of the spiritual within it.

The inner, spiritual world, then, is the true world. And those who can speak about it with authority are more important than those who speak about the external, material world. True strength comes from looking within; looking outward breeds weakness, rather than strength. To find themselves, everyone has to lose their familiar world with its boundaries and limitations. Thoreau says that everyone must become an explorer--of themselves:

. . . there are continents and seas in the moral world, to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but . . . it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.¹¹

When someone accepts this inner life and follows it, they realize that outward circumstances exist to promote it, not to destroy it.

⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," The Heart of Emerson's Essays: Selections from His Complete Works, ed. Bliss Perry (Boston: Houghton, 1933) 30.

¹⁰ Emerson, "Nature" 43.

¹¹ Henry David Thoreau, Walden, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (1854; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 321.

Everyone has a soul--which "is not an organ . . . but a light . . . the background of our being . . . From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all."¹² Everyone needs solitude. To explore his inner world and to plumb the depths of his soul, Thoreau lived alone by Walden Pond for two years. Sometimes during warm weather, he would sit for hours in the doorway of his house in the woods and contemplate--hardly noticing the passage of time. A whole day would pass and he would do very little outwardly; yet he believed he spent his time wisely, for during these seemingly idle hours, he "grew . . . like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been."¹³ Solitude, then, is not only a necessary activity for anyone interested in the inner world, it is also a productive one. It brings them closer to God and also to others.

Everyone needs freedom and a kind of wildness to grow spiritually. Emerson thinks that the inner self must realize its potential by expanding outward without restriction: "Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it."¹⁴ Thoreau thinks that a wilderness and someone's contact with it helps keep them partly wild and, thus, makes them more able to obey the inner light. He also says that the fields he cultivated at Walden Pond were not like regular

¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," The Heart of Emerson's Essays: Selections from His Complete Works, ed. Bliss Perry (Boston: Houghton, 1933) 145.

¹³ Thoreau, Walden 111.

¹⁴ Emerson, "Self-Reliance" 99.

cultivated fields--they were somewhere between civilized and uncivilized (perhaps reflecting him). "Grow wild according to thy nature," he advises.¹⁵

Khalid reflects this spirituality that the transcendentalists speak of. He sees a relationship between the spiritual and the material: the material depends on the spiritual. Khalid says, "But the soul is not dependent on health or disease. The soul is the source of both health and disease. And life, therefore, is either a healthy or a diseased state of the soul."¹⁶ After a year of spiritual retreat in the woods, Khalid no longer has trouble breathing and his lungs are clear. His physical condition has generally improved, and he feels healthy and fit. His spiritual labor has affected his physical body.

Khalid realizes the existence of the inner life. He calls his book "a book of travels in an impalpable country, an enchanted country, from which we have all risen, and towards which we are still rising. It is, as it were, the chart and history of one little kingdom of the Soul"¹⁷ Khalid is drawn from an early age towards the inner life: "He never was satisfied with the seen horizon, we are told, no matter how vast and beautiful. His soul always yearned for what was beyond, above or below, the visible line."¹⁸

Pulled towards the unknown, Khalid immigrates to America, where he and his friend Shakib prosper from their peddling business. On Sundays

¹⁵ Thoreau, Walden 207.

¹⁶ Rihani 219.

¹⁷ Rihani vi.

¹⁸ Rihani 23-24.

they relax in Battery Park and watch the women and the ocean. Yet, at the same time, Khalid "would be scouring the horizon for the Nothingness . . . a vague something."¹⁹ Eventually, he loses interest in peddling because he realizes "the necessity of pursuing in America something more spiritual than peddling crosses and scapulars."²⁰

Khalid realizes the existence of the soul, which he calls the divine within, and believes that he has to love this inner divinity before he can love God. In America, as he becomes more conscious of the inner life and the soul, he becomes more concerned about the soul. As he and Shakib are pumping water out of their flooded basement, he sees an analogy to the usual condition of the soul: "The soul I tell you, still occupies the basement, even the sub-cellar. And an inundated cellar at that. The soul, Shakib, is kept below, although the high places are vacant."²¹

When Khalid is trying to earn his living as a lawyer's clerk, he often sits in the park on his way to the Register's Office and watches the crowd. Everyone seems to dash about madly, unconscious of their inward divinity. To Khalid they are "the living, moving chambers of sleeping souls."²² On the boat back to Lebanon, Khalid turns his thoughts to the soul and the spiritual state of his traveling companions: "But where is the natural colour and beauty of these human

¹⁹ Rihani 46.

²⁰ Rihani 51.

²¹ Rihani 42.

²² Rihani 80.

souls, buried in bunks under hatches? Or of those moving in high-lacquered salons above?"²³

Khalid realizes the importance of solitude to the spiritual life. Solitude is "Nature's filter" and anyone practicing it gains "in every sense, morally, physically, spiritually."²⁴ Solitude lets someone look at things from a distance and gain a better perspective. Then when they return to these things they can deal with them better. The purpose of solitude is to make someone better suited for life in society. Khalid remarks that even while Thoreau was spending his two years at Walden Pond, he visited friends in Concord; he was not a hermit. Khalid condemns the solitude of religious hermits. Such solitude keeps them forever outside society and makes them useless to society.

When Khalid spends a year in the woods, he, like Thoreau, leaves his solitude and visits others. He and the hermit living at the monastery become friends and have many talks. Khalid eventually leaves this solitude to return to the everyday world. He considers his lengthy stay in the woods a spiritual exercise, in which he is spiritually reborn.

Khalid believes that everyone needs freedom to develop spiritually: "There is an infinite possibility of soul-power in every one of us, if it can be developed freely, spontaneously, without discipline or restraint."²⁵ Following authority cripples the soul and prevents anyone from reaching their potential and discovering the truth

²³ Rihani 141.

²⁴ Rihani 211.

²⁵ Rihani 71.

for themselves. Freedom, Khalid declares, cannot possibly be worse than compliance to authority. The only restriction is to "let Nature be thy guide; acquaint thyself with one or two of her laws ere thou runnest wild."²⁶

The Importance of the Individual. "Who can set bounds on the possibilities of man?"²⁷ Emerson asks. Man has the divine within himself and is surrounded by it. With this connection to the divine, he has unlimited possibilities for growth. But, "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist."²⁸ Conformity blinds man to the truth; to discover what he can be he must be himself. Anything he does that reflects his true self is better than anything he does that does not reflect his true self. And, Emerson continues, man must take what he has been given and not try to be like somebody else. Thoreau echoes this same idea by saying: "However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names."²⁹ But, Thoreau explains, you should not try to follow his way. Follow your own way, and even if it disagrees with his, he will encourage you--if you are following your own way with your "whole heart and soul and life."³⁰

Thus, the individual is important. Emerson recalls that men like Moses and Socrates spoke their thoughts, which disagreed with those of

²⁶ Rihani 71.

²⁷ Emerson, "Nature" 47.

²⁸ Emerson, "Self-Reliance" 99.

²⁹ Thoreau, Walden 328.

³⁰ Thoreau, Walden 73.

others--and changed the world. The opinion of the individual can become the opinion of the many.

Khalid also believes in the importance of the individual. After he is sent to jail because of his problems with Boss O'Graft, a Tammany Hall politician, he reads Carlyle's On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History for the third time. In this collection of essays Carlyle expounds on his notion that all history is the history of "Great Men." History awaits such Great Men, who are sent down from Heaven with a mission to perform in life: without these Great Men, there are no Great Deeds. Khalid believes that he, too, has a great mission in life; his mission is to create a "great Arab Empire in the border-land of the Orient and Occident."³¹ Such a task is possible for the individual, he believes.

And Khalid also sympathizes with the struggles of others, encourages them in their struggles, and declares that he "would believe in thee, and have faith in thee, and love thee."³² He advises them to shun guides, though, and go their own way, for "the time will come when every one will write his own Book in the Life he lives, and that Book will be his code and his creed;--that Life-Book will be the palace and cathedral of his Soul in all the Worlds."³³

Khalid acknowledges that an individual can influence others, that the opinion of the individual can become the opinion of the many:

³¹ Rihani 342.

³² Rihani 3.

³³ Rihani viii.

A mighty tidal wave leaves high upon the beach a mark which later on becomes the general level of the ocean. And so do the great thinkers of the world,--the poets and seers, the wise and strong and self-denying, the proclaimers of the Religion of Man.³⁴

The Need for an Individual to Undergo a Spiritual Change Before He Attempts to Change Society. Emerson observes that, as we allow the spirit into our lives, "we come to look at the world with new eyes."³⁵ The spirit changes not only us, but all that we come in contact with. As the world changes before our eyes, we feel like a blind person "who is gradually restored to perfect sight."³⁶ Such a person can then help others and society.

Thoreau also stressed the need for this spiritual change in the individual. If someone cannot help themselves, they cannot help anybody else: "I believe that what so saddens the reformer is not his sympathy with his fellows in distress, but . . . is his private ail."³⁷ Slavery is not limited just to the Negroes in the South; someone can be a slave in various ways. In fact, when the abolitionists first sought Thoreau's help in freeing the slaves, he turned them down and told them to become free from their own slavery before they tried to free others.

Khalid speaks of the "Me" in everyone. In many, this Me is damaged and cannot accomplish much in the world. In others, it lies intact and dormant, waiting to "be awakened . . . by a spiritual

³⁴ Rihani 325.

³⁵ Emerson, "Nature" 54.

³⁶ Emerson, "Nature" 55.

³⁷ Thoreau, Walden 78.

revolution."³⁸ Khalid's Me is gradually awakened. His vague, spiritual longings take him to America, "in whose iron loins" he is "spiritually conceived."³⁹ His spiritual struggles take him through a rejection of his peddling job, a program of self-instruction, the life of Bohemia, attempts at finding a suitable job, the machinations of Tammany Hall, and, finally, jail. Through all of these struggles, Khalid's Me has been emerging, and in jail he reaches a spiritual crisis: he knows he has to return to his homeland and help it in its struggles. After Khalid gets out of jail, he follows his practice of baptizing "the ideal in the fire of the real"⁴⁰ and burns Carlyle's On Heroes. Thus, he incorporates within himself the idea of a Great Man sent to help humanity.

When Khalid returns to Lebanon, he has more difficulties and, eventually, flees into nature, where he spends a year similar to "Thoreau's passage through Walden woods."⁴¹ Like Thoreau, Khalid, during his retreat, "grew . . . like corn in the night. . . ."⁴² After his spiritual transformation, Khalid leaves the woods and goes forth to help his countrymen and their society.

Rejection of the Social Order. Emerson says that we see things through the eyes of our ancestors and the traditions they have forged and no longer see things with fresh eyes. "Why," he asks, "should not

³⁸ Rihani 229.

³⁹ Rihani 127.

⁴⁰ Rihani 51.

⁴¹ Rihani 194.

⁴² Thoreau, Walden 111.

we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?"⁴³ This is a revolutionary question, one implying that we should change society in any way that seems appropriate: old laws, customs, philosophies, or religion should not imprison us. We should let the spiritual express itself through us and help us to look at things with fresh eyes. "Build therefore your own world," Emerson enjoins us.⁴⁴

Thoreau went to Walden Pond to learn what the basics for physical existence were, to simplify his outer life, and to concentrate on his inner life. In a way he created his own society, which stood in stark contrast to that of his neighbors. He believed that it was time to stop "practising idle and musty virtues"⁴⁵ and that even underneath the "dead dry life of society"⁴⁶ there is a vitality that may someday burst forth. In the meantime, traditions control society and keep its members subjected. Thoreau left his cabin on Walden Pond partly because he did not want to stay there out of habit: after being at Walden Pond for less than a week, he had already worn a pathway from his cabin to the pond.

While he was living at Walden Pond, Thoreau was arrested for not paying his poll tax. He says that he has never been attacked except by the government and that "wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions. . . ."⁴⁷ It is moral to break a law,

⁴³ Emerson, "Nature" 13.

⁴⁴ Emerson, "Nature" 54.

⁴⁵ Thoreau, Walden 331.

⁴⁶ Thoreau, Walden 333.

⁴⁷ Thoreau, Walden 171.

Thoreau concludes, if that law "requires you to be the agent of injustice to another. . . ."48 In fact, if a government becomes unjust or oppressive, everyone should resist it, peacefully at first but, if necessary, with force and violence. A bloody uprising is no worse, he asserts, than a bloody conscience pummeled by the constant blows of injustice.

Khalid goes to America, the land of the "Demiurgic Dollar"--where the inhabitants are "honest votaries of Mammon, their great God, their one and only God."⁴⁹ He is repelled not only by materialism, but also by democracy. The political parties are not interested in promoting honesty, truth, and justice--they are interested in getting their candidates in office by any means possible, including stuffing ballot boxes and buying votes. The party with the most money, therefore, wins the elections. Boss O'Graft has no time for Khalid's notion of "immanent morality," a notion the Boss deems as unable to "secure a vote during the campaign" and suitable only for "your mountain peasants or other barbarous tribes."⁵⁰

Khalid returns to his homeland and faces another society in need of change. When Khalid and his cousin Najma are making wedding plans, Najma talks about having a wedding dress with ruffles and flounces. This talk inspires Khalid to see that society, as well as a wedding dress, has its ruffles and flounces--its laws, customs, philosophies,

⁴⁸ Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," Reform Papers, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 73.

⁴⁹ Rihani 112.

⁵⁰ Rihani 110.

and religion that have developed over the centuries and that control everyone's life from the cradle to the grave. In the beginning, everyone went naked and worshipped in the forest, Khalid declares, but now "thy flounces thou canst not dispense with for a day, nor for a single one-twelfth part of a day."⁵¹

"Society must be redeemed . . .," Khalid believes.⁵² The current government, he contends, is "criminal" and is supported for "pressing upon our necks the yoke and fettering hopelessly our minds and souls"⁵³ Surface political changes are not enough, Khalid maintains. With the Committee for Union and Progress, a constitution, and a parliament, the Arabs are still not free: they only have a new owner. To reach the ideal, the Arabs must overhaul their present society--starting with Islam and later including the political system based on it. Khalid concludes that the present social order has to be rejected.

Religious Faith as Opposed to Creeds. Emerson believes that creeds are "a disease of the intellect."⁵⁴ Some understanding of the divine by a great man is made into a system that then replaces what it tries to explain. But the "immortal light" cannot be imprisoned in a system and will eventually break loose and "beam over the universe as on the first morning."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Rihani 163.

⁵² Rihani vii.

⁵³ Rihani 272.

⁵⁴ Emerson, "Self-Reliance" 116.

⁵⁵ Emerson, "Self-Reliance" 117.

Faith, Emerson declares, depends neither on creeds nor on authority: "The faith that stands on authority is not faith."⁵⁶ The more religion depends on authority the more it loses. Religion can be a revelation today, just as it was in the distant past; it does not have to be just a history of things past. The present, not the past, should supply inspiration. God speaks today just as he did to the prophets long ago. He speaks through nature, which teaches everyone how to worship. Religion and nature are related: nature reflects spirituality and the moral law.

Thoreau rejects religion because it is, he thinks, only a habit and an impediment to the intellect. He sees his fellow villagers, in their practice of religion, as hoping "by a certain outward observance and a few prayers, and by walking in a particular straight though useless path from time to time, to save their souls."⁵⁷ Religion can even be misused: some use the Bible to support the existence of slavery.

Thoreau says that everyone must be universal in their religious experience and listen to all who speak of the spiritual--not only to Jesus Christ, but also to Zoroaster--and "let 'our church' go by the board."⁵⁸ Everyone is divine, he continues, and can know God in the present moment more than at any other time. Forests are a better place in which to look for God than a church is. By a closeness to nature, everyone can experience the divine.

⁵⁶ Emerson, "The Over-Soul" 159.

⁵⁷ Thoreau, "Resistance" 83.

⁵⁸ Thoreau, Walden 108.

Khalid rejects the authority of the church. Before he goes to America, he breaks a statue of the Virgin Mary. When he returns to Lebanon, he refuses to pay the church to allow him to marry his cousin; he even says he would destroy the church if he could. When he is excommunicated, he tears the bull from the door of the church and burns it in the town square.

Khalid refuses to accept religion as a habit. Before he goes to America, he stops attending church. When he returns from America, he still refuses to attend church. His mother pleads with him, Father Farouch talks with him, and finally his father threatens him. Still refusing to attend church, Khalid is again forced from his home.

Khalid sees the church as misusing religion. It is always meddling in the affairs of others, causing problems, restricting freedom, not tolerating any opposition, and creating endless ways to get money from its members. He does not understand why marriage to his cousin is wrong only if he does not pay the church to get the approval of the bishop for the marriage. Khalid insists that anything which "is unlawful by virtue of the Divine Law the wealth of all the Trust-Kings of America can not make lawful."⁵⁹

Khalid thinks that religion has gotten away from its spiritual wellsprings. The church has developed through "the ruffles and flounces of twenty centuries"⁶⁰ into something far removed from its simple beginnings. Islam, too, has lost its simplicity and must be freed "from

⁵⁹ Rihani 170.

⁶⁰ Rihani 171.

its degrading customs, its stupefying traditions, its enslaving superstitions, its imbruting cants."⁶¹

Khalid is universal in his religious experience. He claims that he is both a Muslim and a Christian and, in some ways, a Bahaist also. He respects both Jesus and Muhammad: "the two combined are my ideal of a Divinity."⁶² He believes that any religion is a good one if it follows the spiritual teachings of its founder. A religion is no longer a good one, however, if it loses touch with its founder and his teachings and is perverted into something else by its priesthood.

Khalid finds God in nature. When everyone was in a state of nature, the "first church was the forest; the first dome, the welkin; the first altar, the sun."⁶³ As time passed, more and more "flounces" developed in religion--which lost its original simplicity and spirituality. Khalid returns to the original state. He worships in the forest and believes that God and His teachings are present in nature: "Here, then, I prostrate me and read a few Chapters of MY Holy Book."⁶⁴

Nature. To Emerson the material is an illusion; ideas only are real. Even the beauty of nature does not exist for its own sake; it exists as "the herald of inward and eternal beauty."⁶⁵ The outer material world reflects the inner spiritual world and its moral laws. Objects in nature have a connection with spiritual laws. Discovering

⁶¹ Rihani 320.

⁶² Rihani 295.

⁶³ Rihani 162.

⁶⁴ Rihani 191.

⁶⁵ Emerson, "Nature" 24.

this connection increases knowledge; for example, proverbs use something material to express something spiritual: "A rolling stone gathers no moss; A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; . . . Make hay while the sun shines,"⁶⁶ and so on.

The closer someone is to nature, the closer they are to the spirit that is behind it. When someone learns to see nature properly, they will be changed by it; their contact with the spiritual behind it will transform their life. They will recreate their world.

Thoreau says, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach. . . ." ⁶⁷ Nature seems to Thoreau to encourage his quest for simplicity. It also seems to help him regain an innocence he has lost in the world of civilization. "I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born," he laments.⁶⁸ Thoreau feels close to nature. He feels that it is friendly and supportive. He also feels that there is something like himself in nature--something wild and uncivilized that can respond to nature and to the higher self. Thus, he believes that everyone must have access to nature when they live in the towns and cities of civilized society; they must preserve their link to the higher self within.

Thoreau believes that the earth is not something dead--not just strata to be observed by scientists and considered as history; the earth is alive and changing. And nature must be enjoyed for its own sake, not

⁶⁶ Emerson, "Nature" 29.

⁶⁷ Thoreau, Walden 90.

⁶⁸ Thoreau, Walden 98.

just for what it produces. Farming, he observes, has lost its sacred purpose and has become only a means of making money; the farmer now "knows Nature but as a robber"⁶⁹ and has lost his sacred relationship to the land. Furthermore, someone may enjoy the turpentine that a tree produces--but not the spirit that is within the tree.

Thoreau differs from Emerson in his approach to nature. Emerson sees nature as "a background for human life rather than the foreground of personal experience."⁷⁰ Thoreau stresses the direct, mystical experience of nature and not its moral aspect. By coming close to nature, by observing it in its varied details--by just being--he sometimes has mystical experiences. He reaches the divine through the medium of nature.

Nature is an important part of Khalid's life. Khalid says that he loves nature almost as much as he loves his own life and calls for erecting monuments to it in the city. Like the transcendentalists, he sees more to nature than just its outward beauty: physical nature "is but a symbol of the invisible."⁷¹ Moreover, "Thought . . . alone is real and eternal."⁷² Khalid shows himself to be an idealist: the material is a reflection of the spiritual.

Khalid sees a connection between physical objects and the ideas behind them. Tall pine trees symbolize contentment. Stars are "the

⁶⁹ Thoreau, Walden 166.

⁷⁰ Joel Porte, Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1966) 13.

⁷¹ Rihani 241.

⁷² Rihani 242.

embers of certainty eternally glowing in the ashes of doubt."⁷³ The sunrise is "flaming with the ardency of love and hope."⁷⁴ And the terraces on the hillsides are "rich with faith and love, luxuriant with the life divine and the wondrous symbols thereof."⁷⁵

Khalid realizes the transforming power of the spirit behind nature. He goes to the woods in poor health: He has trouble breathing because of his asthma, which sometimes makes him, in desperation, want to ram a poker down his throat and try to clear his breathing passages. Khalid goes to the woods sick in body and soul, his "Me" still not liberated. After a year in the woods, he breathes freely and his Me has emerged--"triumphant, loving, joyous, free."⁷⁶

"Can we not simplify life as we are simplifying the machinery of industry?" Khalid asks.⁷⁷ Like Thoreau, Khalid goes to the woods and simplifies his life. He lives in a booth that he has built in a pine grove. When he leaves after a year, he carries away his few personal belongings in a reed basket.

The stars in a clear sky, the tall pine trees, the pattering of rain in the forest, the fresh earth smells, the gentle breezes, the moon, the mountains, the deep ravines, the birds, the wild flowers, the blueness of the nearby sea, the beautiful and changing colors of sunrise--all these various aspects of nature, full of beauty and

⁷³ Rihani 234.

⁷⁴ Rihani 236.

⁷⁵ Rihani 185.

⁷⁶ Rihani 231.

⁷⁷ Rihani 239.

symbolic meanings, make Khalid feel that nature is friendly and supportive. He feels close to nature and is nurtured by it: ". . . I resign myself to my eternal Mother [nature] and the soft western breezes lull me asleep . . . I dream my dream of contentment and resignation and love."⁷⁸

Khalid enjoys nature for its own sake, not for what it can produce. He believes that the earth is alive and changing and that in it "the living spirit of Allah is ever present."⁷⁹ He enjoys the grass and the flowers in the fields and the children who play there in a true experience of nature. He is annoyed by the man who comes to cut down the grass and the flowers to make way for planting "the ugly mulberries, which are cultivated for the ugly silkworms."⁸⁰ The man gives the oxen the grass "as a bribe to do the ugly business."⁸¹

Khalid is not interested in a cold, analytic study of nature; he is not interested in carrying a notebook with him to write down the details of plant and animal life in the woods. He wants to enjoy the flowers and the trees and, by his closeness to nature, to "bring back a few impressions of some reassuring instance of faith. . . ."⁸²

Nature to Khalid, as to Thoreau, is "the forefront of personal experience." And Khalid's stay in the woods, his communion with nature,

⁷⁸ Rihani 191.

⁷⁹ Rihani 191.

⁸⁰ Rihani 186.

⁸¹ Rihani 186.

⁸² Rihani 187.

and his spiritual growth are an experience "like Thoreau's passage through Walden woods."⁸³

Mixture of the Mystical and the Practical. The transcendentalists did not just bask in the spirit they discovered behind nature. Although Emerson himself was not a reformer, he encouraged others, through his teachings, to become reformers. Many transcendentalists went out into the everyday world and became involved in human affairs. They worked for women's suffrage, temperance, better working conditions, the reform of education, and the abolition of slavery. They supported Free religion and experimented in alternative ways of living, as at Fruitlands and Brook Farm.

Emerson had a conflict between a literary life and a life of practical work. Thoreau says that he cannot imagine seeing Emerson push a wheelbarrow down the street--because such an action would be so unlike Emerson. Thoreau, on the other hand, developed many practical skills. He built his cabin in the woods and grew his own vegetables. In fact, he was so busy with manual labor during the warm weather that he had little time to read. He sold some of his crop, and he says that he made a profit of \$8.71 on it. He even gives instructions on how to plant beans: beans should be planted "in rows three feet by eighteen inches apart."⁸⁴ Then, he warns, beware of worms and woodchucks.

While he was living at Walden Pond, he also surveyed the pond and made a detailed map of it. Contrary to popular superstition that the

⁸³ Rihani 194.

⁸⁴ Thoreau, Walden 163.

pond was bottomless, Thoreau discovered that it was only 102 feet deep at its deepest point. Thoreau undertook such practical, mundane tasks at the same time that he spiritually grew by leaps and bounds.

Thoreau also became involved in political and social affairs. He refused to pay his poll tax in protest of a "state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of its senate-house."⁸⁵ He later became an abolitionist, wrote essays praising John Brown,⁸⁶ and helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad.

So, Thoreau the mystic was also Thoreau the abolitionist. His spiritual quest did not lead him away from the world--it brought him out into the world and its affairs.

Khalid likewise shows this mixture of the mystical and the practical. He calls his book "the chart and history of one little kingdom of the Soul"⁸⁷ and spends a year in the woods as a spiritual exercise, but he also keeps a connection between the inner and the outer life. When he finishes reading a book, he burns it to "baptise the ideal in the fire of the real."⁸⁸

Khalid is grounded in the practical life. Before he leaves Lebanon, he works as a muleteer to earn his living. In America he works as a peddler. When he lives in the woods after his return to Lebanon, he makes a booth to live in and survives off the land. Even on the boat

⁸⁵ Thoreau, Walden 171.

⁸⁶ John Brown, a fiery abolitionist, was hanged for leading an insurrection in the hopes of attracting an army of escaped slaves who would fight to free other slaves.

⁸⁷ Rihani vi.

⁸⁸ Rihani 51.

to America, though, Khalid begins to have a vision of something bigger. In a dream he rides through the desert at the head of a large group. They enter a city and Khalid is crowned king. This dream troubles Khalid, and Shakib remarks that this is "the first time he looked pensive and profound."⁸⁹

After many ups and downs in America, Khalid is eventually drawn to do something for his homeland: "For our country is just beginning to speak, and I am her chosen voice. I feel that if I do not respond, if I do not come to her, she will be dumb forever."⁹⁰ Khalid returns to Lebanon with no clear idea of what he is supposed to do. After being excommunicated, losing Najma, and spending a year in the woods, he returns to the world and finds his task: to free the Arabs from the Turks, to purify Islam through Wahhabism, to reform the political system based on Islam, and to found a mighty Arab empire. So, Khalid the mystic is also Khalid the Pan-Arabist. Like Thoreau, he does not stay in the woods to be a solitary mystic.

Importance of Doing a Job That Promotes Spiritual Development.

Emerson was a Unitarian minister who eventually became repelled by the emphasis of Unitarianism on a rational approach to God; he wanted to know God emotionally. He had to be free to express his ideas without the limitation of any church or group. His job was a hindrance to his spiritual development, so he left the ministry and moved to Concord,

⁸⁹ Rihani 32.

⁹⁰ Rihani 128.

where he founded American transcendentalism. He wrote and gave lectures.

Thoreau tried a variety of pursuits but never really found a job; he says he "thought often and seriously of picking huckleberries" as a job, since he liked picking huckleberries and could make enough money to give him time to devote to his spiritual work.⁹¹ Some men, Thoreau observes, are unfortunate enough to inherit a farm and be condemned to being owned by it, never having any freedom to choose their own job. Their work gives them no pleasure; they come to nature "but as a robber"⁹² and are concerned only with the money they can make from labor in the fields. Also, most men spend a good part of their effort in unsatisfying labor, with little leisure time, and have "no time to be any thing but a machine."⁹³ At night they come home from work, weary and unsatisfied, rather than "with new experience and character."⁹⁴

Thoreau worked only to earn enough money to support his simple way of living and devoted his time to activities that nourished his soul. After his stay at Walden Pond, he traveled and wrote, kept detailed records of Concord's weather, and recorded other information about nature around Concord. He studied foliage, swamps, and the like, all of which he recorded in his journal. Throughout his life, Thoreau did what he thought was truly productive, took care of his "business," and did not lose his soul to a job.

⁹¹ Thoreau, Walden 69.

⁹² Thoreau, Walden 166.

⁹³ Thoreau, Walden 6.

⁹⁴ Thoreau, Walden 208.

Khalid, after a successful eight years in the peddling business, realizes that his job is getting in the way of his spiritual growth. For two years he makes only a few peddling trips to the suburbs each month and undertakes a concentrated reading program. Finally, he gives up the pretence of working at his job and burns his peddling box. He is not interested in "success" and is willing to live simply and work at anything "if he can but preserve inviolate the integrity of his soul and the freedom of his mind."⁹⁵ A key element of this integrity is honesty, or "immanent morality."⁹⁶ As clerk to a lawyer, he cannot maintain his honesty and, therefore, has to leave his job.

Khalid's enthusiastic stumping for "Democracy's illustrious Candidate and the Noble Cause"⁹⁷ for Tammany Hall ends in disillusionment that returns Khalid to his "immanent morality." After being released from jail, he becomes a peddler of oranges to earn his fare back to Lebanon. In this temporary job, he does not have to lie about his wares: he divides his oranges into three groups and puts a price sticker on each group. No more claiming that something comes from the Holy Land or is made of gold. Still, he does not like his work; he does it only out of necessity. "If a labor of love doubles the power of the soul, a labor of hate, to use an antonym term, warps it, poisons it, destroys it," he complains.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Rihani 77.

⁹⁶ Rihani 80.

⁹⁷ Rihani 106.

⁹⁸ Rihani 128.

Finally, after emerging from his yearlong retreat in the woods and traveling to Beirut, he finds his true job--working for the freedom of the Arabs from the Turks and for the establishment of an Arab empire blending East and West. He works wholeheartedly at this task, which does not earn him any money. At last, he finds a job in harmony with his spiritual development.

CONCLUSION

As I have tried to show, the influence of transcendentalism on The Book of Khalid is significant. And this influence is also detectable, not only in Rihani's other writings in English, but also in Rihani's life.

Rihani at first displayed the spiritual, mystical tendencies of the Emigrant School of Arabic Literature but later moved from spiritual and mystical concerns to a political commitment to Pan-Arab nationalism. In this political tendency he parted company with the spiritual tendency of the Emigrant School.

But looking at Rihani within the context of transcendentalism, I do not see a split between the spiritual and the political. To the transcendentalists these two elements are not incompatible--they are complimentary: A spiritual person is supposed to be involved in the world. Like the transcendentalists, Rihani went out into the world on a mission. His social activism found its expression in Pan-Arabism, just as Thoreau's social activism found its expression in abolitionism.

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