Introduction
INTRODUCTION

In the words of Henry H H Remak:

Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e.g., politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.¹

The subject of Comparative Studies generally explores various literatures of the world or the literatures within one particular nation. It stresses the influence of literatures of different historical periods and countries upon one another. It studies their use of similar forms and their treatment of similar themes, etc. Comparative study, whatever the subject it explores and analyses, brings enlightenment and gives birth to new thoughts and concepts. It examines and tries to find new modes of analyzing literatures written in the world. Its exploration of varied approaches to analogous problems or common subjects and practices in the literatures written in different cultural environments, gives birth to a feeling of professional relationship between these literatures. It helps to find out relationship, at both surface and deeper level, between apparently distant cultures, traditions and historical milieus. Comparative study generally deals with the literatures from different countries or communities with different languages, cultures and traditions. In this way it motivates us to pay attention to the contribution and the socio-cultural functions of literatures and how these

literatures offer a comprehensive understanding of life and its various aspects. It helps literatures as well as readers to go beyond the limits of their national language. It has been seen that the literature of one nation absorbs influences of literatures from other nations and cultures and even the writers who know nothing of each other, show fascinating resemblances apart from differences. The basic plan of Comparative Literature is to encourage reading across linguistic borders. By doing so it makes readers aware about the issues and themes that are generally circumvented and ignored by the exclusive focus on a national literature and national language. Comparative study helps us to study creative writing and literary movements rising above the national and cultural limitations. It teaches us to observe life from multiple points of view. According to Henry H H Remak, “Comparative literature requires that a work, author, trend or theme be actually compared with a work, author, trend or theme of another country or sphere…”^2 Comparative studies is in many ways a new approach to deal with literatures. The studies which have been carried out using this approach demonstrate that when well executed, it adds significantly to our comprehension and appreciation of literature and authors. Comparative study of writers from different cultures is in a way a comparison between diverse literary traditions. This approach encourages assessment of a silent affiliation between the workings of the minds of writers who are on the whole universally similar. It is very rewarding to study the relationship between the literatures of different periods and different countries. The interdisciplinary nature of Comparative studies’ means that the scholars working in this area, in general, have some knowledge about translation studies, sociology, critical theory, cultural studies, religious studies, history, etc.

^2 Ibid., p. 107.
This thesis will embark on a study in comparative literature comparing two great romantic poets, William Blake and Kahlil Gibran. It is an examination of the impact and influence of Blake on Gibran. It is a study of influences and literary indebtedness. According to J. T. Shaw, “The study of literary indebtedness has never given up its place as an important branch of literary research within particular literatures, and especially in comparative literature.” Though the genesis of works of Blake and Gibran are from different literary environments, the two poets, to a large extent, share spiritual and social insights of a same kind. According to George Nicolas El-Hage, “I assert that Gibran owed more to Blake than any other poet or philosopher and that Blake’s influence on him was the most enduring.”

I have tried to bring together the points of association shared by these two writes. We know that there are times when two writers emerge from different periods and literary backgrounds and have in common with each other more than they do with other writers of their own time and national literature. Similarities between Blake and Gibran, more at a spiritual level, transcend dissimilar literary backgrounds. They share a common way of contemplation and communication that binds them in an exceptional relationship. Gibran read Blake and was greatly influenced by his thought and style. He was overwhelmed by his poetic philosophy, his visions and the prophetic charge of both his poetry and paintings. “Blake is the God-man. His drawings are so far the profoundest things done in English – and his vision, putting aside his drawings and his poems, is the most godly.” However he did not imitate him blindly. His found that his own ideas were similar to those of Blake. Whatever he learnt from Blake he made that his own in an original and innovative way. We can trace this influence by

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3 Ibid., p. 58.
5 Quoted in EL-Hage, p. 141.
focusing on the intrinsic themes and the form employed by these two writers.

J T Shaw aptly writes,

Influence, to be meaningful, must be manifested in an intrinsic form, upon or within the literary works themselves. It may be shown in style, images, characters, themes, mannerisms, and it may also be shown in content, thought, ideas, the general \textit{Weltanschauung} presented by particular works.\footnote{Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective, p. 66.}

He further writes,

The center of interest should be what the borrowing or influenced author does with what he takes and what effect it has upon the finished literary work. The study of direct literary relationships and literary indebtedness can be indispensable to understanding and evaluating the individual work of art, not only for placing it in the literary tradition, but also for defining what it is and what it essentially attempts and for determining wherein it succeeds.\footnote{Ibid., p. 71.}

This thesis argues that Blake and Gibran have enough in common to justify the creation of a new, better defined area of research between the fields of English and Lebanese-American-Arabic literature. Blake and Gibran lived in different political and even religious environments and yet both were rebels and mystics at odds with the affairs of state and religion. As poets they wrote in different countries and their literary traditions vary greatly, yet both made prolific use of symbols. Through five chapters of this thesis Blake and Gibran are compared and their essential common characteristics are explored. It is argued that these poets display a very radical stance against orthodoxy of all kinds and an intense focus on inner spiritual life and these
subjects were of higher priority to them than creativity. This thesis is a journey from
the poetry into the poetics of two writers. The interminable drama of existence is
played out on the pages of both men. Gibran was not a mere replica of Blake. He
found the support and affirmation for his early principles and beliefs in Blake’s works
and developed them in his own distinctive way.

My method of approach will be fundamentally individual one. I shall first read
separately Gibran’s and Blake’s writings in their own contexts and then compare them
with each other. This research employs a biographical approach and also focuses on
the close readings of the writings of original texts of the two writers. As such, the
research presented here could be called conventional. It does not make use of any
special theory whether classical or modern. Focusing on the texts of two writers and
discovering the similarities between the two poets’s from two different traditions is in
itself a useful method and criteria for examining these poets. This set of criteria will
enable examination of not only literary methods in the works of such poets, but also
establish a relationship between their imaginative faculties. Blake and Gibran are
poets whose reputation as poetic masters extends beyond the boundaries of their
countries and beyond the centuries in which they lived. Within the current field of
literary studies, it is difficult to establish a comparative approach when dealing with
poets who do not fit in the same literary tradition or period. Such an approach requires
in the first instance a great breadth of knowledge concerning diverse literary
traditions. For example in order to compare Blake and Gibran one would first have to
begin with the separate traditions of English romanticism, and Arabic romanticism as
well as pay attention to the social and political backgrounds of the poets.
While some remarks about Blake’s influence on Gibran can be found scattered in books on the Lebanese American poet, no attempt except by George El-Hage has been made to bring the two writers together in a thorough comparison with a detailed analysis of their works. The title of his PhD thesis which is now in a book form is *William Blake and Kahlil Gibran: Poets of Prophetic Vision*. But throughout this book his focus is on imagination, nature and prophecy only. The majority of comparative literature studies taking Blake as the predominant figure compare him with some other western poet. Numerous scholars have compared Blake with poets such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Yeats and other European poets. Only a small number have set Blake beside eastern poets. Rosy Sing attempts a comparison between the east and the west in her work *Tagore, Rilke, and Gibran: A comparative Study*. These comparative studies are infrequent, however, and do not seem to be consolidated into a particular field.

The worlds Blake and Gibran inherited have similarities outnumbering their differences, one may assume because of their living in different countries, culture and times. Both were poets, painters, mystics and visionaries. Both were romantics and like all romantics valued nature, children, emotions, intuition and discarded reason giving foremost importance to imagination. Both poets considered themselves as one with the bard and the prophet. More so, they viewed themselves as the witness of the absolute truth, the spectators of all time and existence. Blake and Gibran through their writings fought for the rights of women and criticized the patriarchy and religious institutions for suppressing the weak. Both the writers vehemently criticized orthodox religions taking an example of Christianity for it committed wrong against humanity by propagating false morality.
The thesis is divided into five chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. Blake and Gibran are not compared in all the chapters but the main chapters thoroughly compare the works of the two writers. Their social, political, and economic context, their vision and worldview are also evaluated in comparison with each other. As Henry H H Remak says, “A comparative literature study does not have to be comparative on every page nor even in every chapter, but the overall intent, emphasis and execution must be comparative.”

In Chapter I of the thesis Blake and the context against which he wrote are discussed at length. The chapter discusses the inception of romanticism in England whose chief originator was Blake himself. This chapter deals with Blake, his writings and his other preoccupations. However its focus is on Blake as the originator of English Romanticism. It talks at length about how the Romantic Movement started and tries to define romanticism. This chapter tries to differentiate Romanticism from its preceding Enlightenment ideology and general eighteenth century literary culture. It traces the changes in the intellectual history from Enlightenment thought of the 18th century to the Romantic thought at the close of the 18th century and during the first half of the 19th century. It is seen that the Romantic Movement was influenced by foreign philosophers and poets like Rousseau and Goethe. The chapter also introduces those writers who came before the Romantic Movement but contributed to its growth and can be called pre-romantics like James Thomson, William Collins, Thomas Gray, Robert Burns, William Cowper, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, James Macpherson and Thomas Percy and tries to establish Blake as the originator and pioneer of Romantic Movement in England. Then some poems from Poetical sketches

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8 Ibid., p. 15.
and *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are discussed in detail in order to see the romantic themes employed by Blake. Examples from some of his other later works are also given.

Chapter II deals with Gibran, his life, his writings and his chief preoccupations as a writer. It traces Gibran’s evolution as a writer and the foreign influences he absorbed after migrating to the US. This chapter focuses on Gibran’s contribution to Arabic romanticism and chief romantic qualities of his writings. It also talks about how Gibran was influenced by English romantics especially Blake whose influence on him was the greatest. It discusses Gibran’s childhood, his love of nature and his sensitiveness and the influence of his homeland Besharri on him as a man and a poet. It talks about his emigration to America in 1895 and how he interacted with Boston’s social and intellectual life and discovered its flourishing world of art and literature; also how he met Fred Holland Day, who supported him greatly in his artistic endeavors. It also recounts influences like those of Mary Haskell whose support and guidance was very important for Gibran’s growth as a writer. The chapter also mentions how Gibran with the help of Day and Mary came under the influence of English language poets especially the English romantics. Next, this chapter relates in detail the publication of his books from time to time and discusses the themes of his works, focusing on the romantic sensibility and elements and compares some of his prose poems with Keats’ an Shelley’s poems for his love of beauty, nature and innocence etc. This chapter tries to establish him as the pioneer of Arabic romanticism. It talks about how he introduced western romanticism into Arabic literature. He developed a new form called the prose poem. The chapter also discusses his social rebellion, mysticism, social reform, isolation, love of instinct and intuition
and his immense contribution to Arabic literature and his innovations in Arabic literature.

Chapter III compares mystical thoughts which run through the works of Blake and Gibran. It expresses their differences as well as similarities as mystics living in different traditions. This chapter traces their development and evolution as mystics and the influences which helped them to evolve. The chapter establishes that the essence of their mystical thought was same though apparently different. It starts with the definition of mysticism and talks in detail about mystic perception in relation to reality i.e., how different mystics choose different paths to reach the same reality and to experience divine consciousness, enlightenment and oneness with the one who contains all. The chapter discusses in detail about different schools of mysticism like Christian mysticism, Islamic mysticism, Kabala, Gnosticism etc. It talks about how mystics have chosen poetry as a vehicle to convey their message because it is not easy to pass gnosis in any other medium. It tries to relate romanticism and mysticism and tries to establish Blake as the mystic proper and a supreme creator. It talks in detail about Blake’s mystic status and how Blake saw himself as the instrument of the divine and how he spent his life for the purpose of revealing higher truths. His spiritual life was more important to him than his creative life. He was a visionary mystic and a poet mystic. Blake’s search for spiritual truth has been studied by analyzing his poems and mystical thoughts focusing on the poems from Songs of Innocence and Experience. Lines from ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’ are also quoted. In the same way Gibran’s prose poems have been analyzed for their mystical content. The Prophet is analyzed in detail.
Chapter IV is a comparative study of Blake’s and Gibran’s social rebellion, social protest and social reform. It deals at length with Blake’s and Gibran’s development as social critics. They both abhorred injustice of all kinds. They stood for the poor and the weak. They were severe critics of Orthodox Church and tyrant state. Blake and Gibran, though born in different countries and contexts, had strong affinities with each other. This chapter discusses in detail how Gibran came under the influence of Blake’s revolutionary vision, and how he like Blake abhorred outdated social customs and stood in rebellion against the institutions of state and church. Both stood for woman’s emancipation and liberation. The religious beliefs of both Blake and Gibran were at odds with the common people as well as with religious authorities. It analyses in detail some important passages from the works of both writers for their revolutionary and rebellious content and compares them with each other in order to see the similarities as well as the impact of Blake on Gibran. It shows that Blake and Gibran were actively involved in the political development of their times. The chapter gives a detailed analysis and comparison of Blake’s *Vision of Daughters of Albion* and Gibran’s *Broken Wings* and how both championed the rights of woman and criticized false morals of the society. A detailed study of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Gibran’s “John the Mad Man” and “Cry of the Graves” has been made. Blake’s *America, a Prophecy* and Gibran’s “My Countrymen”; Blake’s *Tiriel* and Gibran’s “Kahlil, the Heretic” have been also compared and analyzed. Some poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have been compared to Gibran’s “Decayed Teeth”, “Slavery” and “Narcotics and Dissecting Knives”.

Chapter V of this thesis discusses the style, use of prosody, symbols and myths employed by these two writers. It talks at length about Blake’s use of myths and symbols. This chapter talks about Gibran’s use of symbols and his deft use of
language. However it is found that there are not many similarities in their style and the use of myths and symbols. Gibran’s works can be compared to Blake’s songs in their style but there is no comparison when it comes to the Blake’s prophetic works. It talks in detail about the relation of myths and symbols with poetry in general and romantic poetry in particular. Blake invented his own mythology and used fresh symbols. The chapter talks in detail about the mythic world and symbolic characters created by Blake and it nuances and subtleties. Blake had to take recourse to these myths and symbols because it was not possible to present his gnosis otherwise. Some poems from *Songs of Experience* are analyzed stylistically for their grammar, prosody, metaphors, structure etc. Gibran style and use of symbols is also discussed in detail. It is said that though Blake and Gibran had many similarities in terms of subject matter and themes of their works but their styles didn’t match with the exception to Blake’s earlier works such as *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have the simplicity of diction and melody which we find throughout Gibran’s writing. The influence of Blake, Bible and Nietzsche on Gibran’s style is discussed in detail. Gibran’s contribution to Arabic literature in terms of style is highlighted. Some passages from *The Prophet* are also analyzed stylistically.