

The New Criterion

Reconsiderations

December 2007

The false prophet

by [Anthony Daniels](#)

On the false profundity of Kahlil Gibran.

For self is a sea boundless and measureless. We shall never understand one another until we reduce the language to seven words.—Kahlil Gibran

Among my mother's books was a copy of *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. I remember still the cream color of the cover, adorned with a soft-focus drawing of a young man with a thin moustache staring, Svengali-like, into some kind of philosophical infinity. Although—or was it because?—*The Prophet* was so popular at the time, selling by the million worldwide, I resisted reading it. I suspected that its profundity, or rather its straining after profundity, was bogus, and I was right. It is precisely in its ersatz quality that its popularity resides.

Gibran was an artist as well as a writer, and his drawings, with some of which this *Collected Works* is interspersed, suffer from a defect that is closely kindred to the defect from which his writin ...

Anthony Daniels's most recent book is *In Praise of Prejudice* (Encounter Books). Hewas born in 1949. After qualifying as a doctor, he worked in what was then Rhodesia, followed by South Africa, before returning for three years training as a psychiatrist in London's East End. Three and a half years in the Gilbert Islands were interspersed with some South American wandering, and then between 1984 and 1986 he worked in Tanzania. His first book, *Coups and Cocaine*, was followed by *Fool or Physician*, subtitled 'the memoirs of a sceptical doctor.' *Zanzibar to Timbuktu*, his trek across Africa by public transport was published to great acclaim in 1988, and was a runner-up in the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award.

[more from this author](#)

This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 26 December 2007, on page 35

Copyright © 2009 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/The-false-prophet-3710>