**Mohammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956)**

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Egyptian novelist, travel writer, journalist, biographer, and politician Mohammad Husayn Haykal was born in al-Daqahliah District on August 20, 1888 to a wealthy family. In 1909, he finished a BA in Law from the Khedival Law School and later a Doctorate from the Sorbonne University in 1912. During his college years in Egypt, Haykal was influenced by the reformist Muhammad Abdu and the thinker, philosopher, politician, and founder of Egyptian liberalism Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed. After returning to Egypt in 1912, Haykal spent the next five years working in journalism. From 1917 to 1922, he taught at the university level. After 1922, he however gave up teaching and sought a political career. Consequently, Haykal occupied several prominent positions in Egyptian politics, including the Minster of Education, the Minster of Social Affairs, and the Head of the Egyptian Mission to the United Nations. He became very active in the Liberal Constitutionalist Party and edited its newspapers *al-Siyasa* and *al-Siyasa al-Usbu’iya*.

An avid reader of Arabic, English, and French canonical literary texts, Haykal began his literary career by writing the first Arabic novel *Zaynab* (1914) which paved the way to other pioneering novelists including Tewfik al-Hakim, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad,Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini,Yahya Haqqi, and Taha Hussein. Without the contributions of Haykal, as well as those of al-Hakim, al-Aqqad, al-Mazini, Hussein, and Haqqi, the contemporary Egyptian novel as arguably perfected by Najib Mahfouz would have been unimaginable. In *Zaynab*, the influence of Romanticism and the Romantic Movement in philosophy on Haykal is evident. Particularly, the writing of Jean-Jacques Rousseau was central to his early intellectual development and Haykal wrote a book on the life of Rousseau in 1922.

In his early career as a thinker, writer, and politician, Haykal believed in Western secularism, spoke highly of Western modernity, dreamt of importing democracy to the East, and was fascinated by European philosophy, morality, spirituality, scientific thinking, and literary culture. In many of his early journalistic articles, he described Europe as the model to imitate, but after World War One, he lost faith in the West and many of its values. European violence during the war, imperialist horrors, Western fascism, and European colonialist fragmentation of Eastern geography and peoples sent him searching for an alternative salvational national identity. Like Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed and Salama Moussa, among other Europe-educated Egyptian intellectuals, Haykal’s attention was next drawn to Egyptian Pharaonic nationalism. His interest in a pre-Islamic Egyptian identity was possibly triggered by the prominence of Orientalism and Egyptology at the time, but the heavy Christian missionary activities in Egypt under British colonial rule in the 1930s made Haykal rethink his support for an Egyptian identity that detaches itself from Islamic and Arab connections.

Haykal therefore turned his attention to Islamic history, spirituality, and cultural heritage. After a concentrated period of reading Islamic classics, Haykal published four biographies: *On the Margin of the Biography of Prophet Mohammad* (1933), *The Caliph Omar* (1944), *The Caliph Abu Baker* (1940s), and *The Caliph Othman* (1968). He also wrote *The Islamic Empire and Holy Places* in 1964. In these and other publications including *In the House of Revelation* (1936), Haykal commits to defending Islam and the East against colonialist hegemony and Orientalist allegation of Muslim inferiority. This commitment to defend, and celebrate, Islamic heritage does not however suggest a retreat from ideal democratic and secular values on the part of Haykal. It rather demonstrates his awareness of the unique situation of the East, the important contributions of Islamic history to its spiritual, moral, and intellectual makeup, and the fundamental institutional differences between Islam and Christianity.

*In the House of Revelation*, Haykal admits that he, for very long, called upon the East to adopt the West’s ways of being, seeing, thinking, and believing. He wholeheartedly thought that the East will advance only after it embraces Western morality, spirituality, and scientific thinking, but he later realizes not only how shortsighted this early call was, but further concludes that Eastern infatuation with everything Western does not grant the brotherhood, inclusivity, and equality Islam provides. Similarly, Haykal gave up his fascination with the exclusivist Egyptian Pharaonic nationalism for being incapable of competing with the possibilities inherent in Islam and Islamic history. After all, nationalism brought fragmentation, suffering, and destruction to the East. This turn towards Islamic heritage was in harmony with a general Egyptian public mood. To variable degrees, this shift in Haykal’s worldview also registers in *Biographies of Famous Egyptians and Westerners* (1929), *Thus Was I Created* (1955), *Faith, Knowledge, and Philosophy* (1964), and *Egyptian Short Stories* (1967). Haykal was a committed public intellectual. He died on December 8, 1956. His intellectual contributions, however, outlived his death.

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