

Haykal's *Zaynab*: Western Affinities

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Abstract

Although the indebtedness of Haykal's **Zaynab** (1914) to French literature has been acknowledged, if only sketchily, there is scarcely mention of its connection with English literature in writings about it. This paper suggests some affinities between **Zaynab** and English literature and thought (particularly) at the turn of the century. The novel was written during Haykal's stay in Europe (including London) while studying for his doctorate in law. Haykal has much the same pessimistic outlook on the human condition as that of the generality of writers of the period. These writers have common roots in the thought of Schopenhauer. Emphasis is thrown upon suffering and deprivation. Hamid gives up in despair, and Zaynab, embittered and unfulfilled, dies of consumption. The novel, too, contains some remarks which show Haykal's awareness of Darwinian thought. Another noticeable affinity lies in the treatment of the marriage question and the hard lot of women-- a recurring Shelleyan and late-Victorian theme. Manifest in his commentaries on Western **literati** is Haykal's great admiration for Shelley, whose impact on his culture was profound. Further, the novel develops a familiar Shelley, Hardy, and Proust theme: the subjectivity of love. Love implies a self-created rather than an objective reality.

Zaynab,⁽²⁾ which is usually thought of as the first **genuine** novel in Arabic, strikes readers sufficiently familiar with European turn-of-the-century thought and literature as bearing analogies to Western themes. The frame of mind in which it was written exhibits traces of the intellectual atmosphere with which Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal had early contact, as he went to Europe pursuing his studies in law for the Ph.D. degree. There is surely truth in Hamilton Gibb's statement that "the literary parentage" of the novel "is obviously to be sought in the Western novel."⁽³⁾ Yet **Zaynab** remains particularly homely in its colourful rustic setting, and characters qualified by environment. Haykal let his imagination play on what he knew. The countryside meant much to him -- having spent his early years within its orbit. The novel is dedicated to "beloved Egypt". We learn from the preface that Haykal wrote it in a mood of home-sickness, which led him to reminisce about rural life with its occasions and operative values. Sometimes one travels to understand one's native land better and to be more native. Haykal has integrated foreign ideas into the realities of native rural life⁽⁴⁾. It is hardly surprising to find that Haykal is not far from ideas of interest to Western writers of the time. The preface states:

This novel was first published anonymously in 1914 as by the pen of an Egyptian farmer... I started to write it in Paris in April 1910, and completed it in March 1911. A part of it was written in London and another in Geneva during a summer vacation. I felt proud of its production, having the conviction that it initiated a new phase in Egyptain literature. This continued to be my view throughout my stay in Paris as a Ph.D. law student.

Also, the scope of his reading -- one that does not show mere general knowledge -- confirms his cosmopolitan attitudes⁽⁵⁾.

The novel is about love -- a perennial theme -- and what it brings about. It focuses long on Ḥāmid -- a well-read young man of a speculative nature⁽⁶⁾. The academic cast of his mind, together with an unrestful spirit afflicted with a sense of loneliness, makes him a literary relative of the modern alienated self in Western literature. Through him Haykal elaborates his own attitudes about the human condition -- a condition darkened by the tragedy of unfulfilled aims. Being the son of the village landowner, Ḥāmid has the benefit of town education and free reading. He is brought up on the periphery of two worlds: the country and the metropolis. He is attracted to his refined cousin 'Azīzah, a childhood companion, who has grown away from country life. She has been promised to him. During a summer vacation he meets and becomes infatuated with Zaynab -- a buxom peasant girl. She is engaged in hired manual work in the fields belonging to Ḥāmid's father. (The unlettered of the village are largely in economic enslavement.) During their meetings in the fields he kisses and cuddles her. The feeling is reciprocated, and there is brief indulgence of passion on both sides. Yet Ḥāmid cannot bind himself to an obscure girl, and looks on 'Azīzah as his prospective wife. Zaynab herself cannot aspire to so great a match. Things go wrong for Hamid. In neither case is his love consummated. 'Azīzah, though cultured,

is not spared the pressure of custom and conventionality. She is forced into a parentally-arranged marriage. Zaynab, who always reciprocated love with Ibrāhīm, an overseer of farm hands, is also sold on the marriage market. Her impoverished parents marry her to the well-off Ḥasan, for whom she feels no love. Ḥasan's mother set eyes on Zaynab as daughter-in-law with no purpose in mind but to gain a household drudge. Blasted by his disappointment and despair about his love life, Ḥāmid, in a self-renouncing ethic, disappears mysteriously from the scene near the end of the novel. In a depressing valedictory letter to his father, in which he couches his thoughts, he grieves his loss and tells him that he intends to roam the world seeking out his beloved. If he fails in his mission, life to him will lose its meaning and extinction will be his choice. Zaynab is under moral compulsion to remain faithful to her husband.⁽⁷⁾ Crushed by frustrated love, resulting from the operation of restrictive conventions, as well as by farm and domestic toil, Zaynab faces a slow and wasting death from consumption,⁽⁸⁾ yearning for Ibrahim till the very end. She is a sacrificial offering to social convention. Ibrāhīm himself is conscripted into the army and ordered for service in the Sudan, since he is unable to buy himself out. However, Zaynab's holding Ibrāhīm's keepsake - handkerchief to her heart after kissing it while she is on her death-bed, and requesting her mother to bury it with her, must seem meant as a union beyond the grave. In dying she will be with her real love.

Haykal uses the love story as a means of involving the reader in social and pseudo-philosophical questions. There are, I believe, two prominent areas in which the affinities of the novel to the sensibility of the period in the West deserve notice. On the one hand, there is a Schopenhauer/ Darwin basis in Haykal's thought. The novel's pessimism of disillusion and dismaying picture of life may be read in the context of Schopenhauer's pessimistic concepts⁽⁹⁾. The emphasis is thrown upon failure, desperation, resignation to circumstance, and death. Haykal shares the German philosopher's conviction conveying man's sense of loss and hopelessness. Much of the character of Ḥāmid may be understood in terms of Schopenhauer's philosophy. The novel also appears to accommodate Darwinian (evolutionist) thought about sexual selection. On the other hand, Haykal shares with European writers an abiding interest in the theme of marriage⁽¹⁰⁾. Perhaps Haykal abroad found himself less bound by conventions in which the natives are caught. In his cynicism about marriage, to which women generally are martyrs, Haykal seems to be making a plea for a new attitude towards women. He recognises that making women dependent and will-less spells much disaster.

In his conception of love Haykal is in essential harmony with Schopenhauer. His view has little in common with the sentimental idea of blissful love. For him, love is basically yearning and frustration. According to Schopenhauer, love always ends in disillusionment. He based his "metaphysics of love" upon the view that the essence of life is the Will-to-live -- a relentless, striving force which urges all biological nature towards perpetuation. Sexual attraction is a function of the need to continue the race and not for the welfare of the lovers as individuals⁽¹¹⁾. In an authorial commentary, in the early pages of the novel, love is identified with race preservation: "It is Nature that enslaves and exploits man away from his own interests to effect its own purpose"⁽¹²⁾ (I, 1, p. 18). Man is a tool in the hands of the Will-to-live; the individual is sub-

ordinated to the benefit of the species as a whole. In his confessional letter to his father, Hāmīd acknowledges that he has been driven by the elemental urge towards Zaynab (a Darwinian mate), in spite of his class pride. Then he elaborates:

'Yes, my sole intention was to talk to this girl and to be together or to kiss her. But what for? and what ultimate effect did I seek? Is it not to fall in the snare of Nature and, through deceiving and deluding myself, to propagate the race and improve it? Yes, that is so. She is a full-figured girl, brimful of youth; so the forthcoming son will have these qualities and more, and will thus lift the human race a rung up the ladder... The present generation is only a drop in the immortal ocean of the universe... To achieve eternity, there has been implanted in the nature of every human-being and in that of every animal and every living thing the power to reproduce... In my view, the family in olden times did better towards the individual and the community than it does now. Slavery, then prevalent, allowed any well-off man of high standing who was also strongly-built and a warrior, and thus able to produce a strong progeny, to buy whichever women he admired... Although this system did not help establish strong reciprocal affection between man and woman, it answered the need of the majority of those with roving hearts. Had this system not meant gross injustice to women, it would have been the closest to nature as well as to right... I am driven by instinct towards love to make myself happy -- if there is any happiness in life -- and to propagate the race with my offspring. Nature strives to bring me together with the woman who would be the mother of the best children to be presented to society' (II, 2, pp. 256 - 59)

As the passage further shows, Hamid is subjected to the process of sexual selection; he fulfils the natural function of selecting a mate with right bodily characteristics to produce an exemplary progeny. As Darwin observes, "if the females as well as the males were permitted to exert any choice, [they] would have chosen their partners ... almost solely from external appearance" (Darwin, 1871: Vol. II, 368). This links Hāmīd with proponents of eugenics and deliberate breeding. (One thinks of Don Juan in Shaw's **Man and Superman** who speaks of "breeding the race" "to heights now deemed superhuman", and She in Haggard's **She** who is boastful of having once "reared a race of giants".) He feels that his affection for his cousin 'Aziz-ah was not genuine love because

'If it was true and solid love, it would not be evanescent. I was urged by Nature towards the woman who can, together with myself, perpetuate the race and improve it. This woman at that time was my cousin' (III, 2, p.255).

In its sole concern about propagation, Nature takes the least interest in preserving the family system or the class structure:

'Why seek a wife? Don't you find in the one who attracted you the companion who can make you happy, and make the race happy with healthy and strong sons? But I felt, in the same instance, that in this call there is ridicule of marriage, which has become sacred over the years. How and by what law does it become right for me to accompany a girl who is not contracted to me? Doesn't this carry destruction to the family system as well as to the honour of the bond?'

'Annihilation of the family! and what is the family? What does it signify? Can't I marry today, and divorce my wife after a month, then marry another and another, and have sons by all? What is the family that has been built up, and which, it is feared, will be destroyed? Also, if I wish to set up a family, there is no harm in having a peasant woman as partner. And if she is as ignorant as others, the family that is founded on love is, doubtless, better than any other'. (III, 2, pp. 262 - 63).

Haykal's delineation of another aspect of love approximates Schopenhauer's view of the subjectivity of perception, and more particularly Shelley's⁽¹³⁾ theme of idealistic love which has its origin in the inaccessible Platonic ideal. Love implies a self-created rather than an objective reality. Beauty lies in the mind of the lover, rather than in the object of love itself. The individual character of the loved one is of little account. To Schopenhauer, things are as they appear: "all that exists for knowledge, and therefore this whole world, is only object in relation to subject, perception of a perceiver, in a word, idea" (Schopenhauer, 1909: Vol. I,3). To Shelley, "nothing exists but as it is perceived"⁽¹⁴⁾. The subjective view of love is defined in Thomas Hardy's novel **The Woodlanders** (1887). Fitzpiers, a main character given to philosophical speculation, explains:

'Human love is a subjective thing -- the essence itself of man, as that great thinker Spinoza says -- **ipsa hominis essentia** -- it is joy accompanied by an idea which we project against any suitable object in the line of our vision, just as the rainbow iris is projected against an oak, ash, or elm tree indifferently. So that if any other young lady had appeared instead of the one who did appear, I should have felt just the same interest in her, and have quoted precisely the same lines from Shelley about her, as about this one I saw. Such miserable creatures of circumstance are we all! (Ch. XVI)

Pierston's love in Hardy's other novel **The Well-Beloved** is a perfect example. The **Persona** of Shelley's poem **Epipsychidion** has pursued a vision of spiritual beauty and sought its vivification in mortal beloveds:

In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of that idol of my thought. (lines 267-68)

Ḥāmid's susceptibility to illusion and the flittings of his heart demonstrate this view. It is evident in his willingness to vision his beloved in this or that young woman that most charms him. One substitutes for another. With ease he falls in and out of love time and time again:

When 'Azīzah comes to the village, he deems meeting her his greatest hope. He sings of her memories, stressing her charms. Then he writes her love letters redolent of passion. When she leaves, he goes back to Zaynab, courts her and talks to her about the happy old days. If he meets a girl in the capital, he takes her for a new sweetheart and is captivated. He finds in listening to her talk or in looking at her what makes him forget any feeling of anguish ... What is all this? What sort of heart does he possess -- one which has enough room for all these blooming beauties? Is it that every month of the year, or even every day, influences him to direct his feelings towards a new object?... No. It is but a deep - rooted disease and his actions are among its manifestations (III, 1, p. 237, Haykal's ellipses). [The disease is perhaps a fever with its intensity.]

Ḥāmid's dreams are continually battered; however, they are freely renewed. Following 'Azīzah's marriage, we read that his affection for her begins to wither away. Falling into a love frenzy, he bestows love on a string of women with whom he never establishes tangible contacts:

He feels a vacuum in his heart that increases from day to day, and is in dire need to fill it. If he meets a pretty woman, he tries to be close to her and takes her for a new beloved. When the morrow brings him another, he forgets the one and clings to the other. His heart roves as the bee flits from flower to flower. He does not know which to love and which to leave. Of them he has well more than ten (III, 1, pp. 228 - 29).

Active imagination is the creative impulse. Ḥāmid sees more with his mind's or soul's eye than with his eyes. Like Ḥāmid, other aspiring young men are in love largely with visions of their own imagination that do not take tangible shapes:

Most young men [of Ḥāmid's milieu] are susceptible to fantasies which bear no resemblance to reality. Their love flourishes most in their imagination which overpowers their senses (I, 2, pp. 26-27).

Ḥāmid's abandonment to illusion leads him to fall in love not so much with 'Azīzah as with his aesthetic preconceptions of her⁽¹⁵⁾. He imposes his own subjective desires and sees in her what he wants to. Imagination stimulates idealising pictures that "conveniently drop the defects of the real" -- to borrow a Thomas Hardy expression (Hardy, 1891, Ch. 36):

If 'Azīzah is too thin, it is because she has a finely-cut figure; if her face is pale, it is like the pale moon; if she is not sufficiently beautiful, to Hāmid she appears in the beauty of a rose; if she lacks learning, this signifies her innocence and beauty... With this imagination, they [young men] believe they have established future happiness for themselves ... When faced with stark reality and are demystified, they become desperate (I, 2, p. 27).

The idea of the migration of the ideal beloved from one individual to another has been treated by Marcel Proust in **A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs**, which belongs in time to much the same period as **Zaynab**:

'Sans doute peu de personnes comprennent le caractère purement subjectif du phénomène qu'est l'amour, et la sorte de création que c'est d'une personne supplémentaire, distincte de celle qui porte le même nom dans le monde, et dont la pulpart des éléments sont tirés de nous-mêmes' (Première Partie, 44)
... 'A vrai dire, cette brune n'était pas celle qui me plaisait le plus, justement parce qu'elle était brune et que, depuis le jour où dans le petit raidillon de Tansonville, j'avais vu Gilberte, une jeune fille rousse à la peau dorée était restée pour moi l'idéal inaccessible!' (Duxième Partie, 386).

Hāmid, however, is not caught in the idealising Platonic dream (which runs counter to the interest of the Will-to-live) all along. Haykal endows him with sexual passion. He experiences adolescent flirtation, if only fleetingly, with Zaynab and another farm girl. He responds to the prompting of his senses as well as to the bristling femininity and warmth of the girls which seem to leap from their flesh (II,4,p. 174), and descends to the merely biological. Peasant girls do not suffer any inhibiting intellectuality. They are identified with the natural setting which provides images for human nature in its simple, primitive, and unrestrained form. They contrast with the 'Azīzahs, the veiled maidens of the city (II,5,p. 186). Yet they are only a means for his spurious passion:

'I was not drawn to Zaynab out of a desire for a union with her, but by other motives: a feeling of enjoyment when viewing her for the longest possible time -- a perfect paragon of beauty she is --...; second, my personal pleasure in kissing and cuddling her and in watching blood rise to her cheeks, her tender eyes and her quivering lips unable to utter what they want to; third, the race preservation motivating force (III,2,pp. 260-61).

Hāmid's kissing the peasant girl on the cheek (p. 171) meets with an eager response. She draws closer and submits herself to him. They are helpless before the powerful instinct (and procreation). But this makes Hamid despise himself; he feels

uneasy. The intensity of the experience forces on him an awareness of the mindlessness of passion. He bathes himself in a canal in order to purge his essentially spiritual nature of its sin in the flesh. He wonders how he could descend so low. He sees woman as a seductress, a devil entangling and attracting him irresistibly towards her. She carries danger to him by the power of the evil incarnate in her. In the same breath, he inveighs against the rigid pattern of sexual morality, and puzzles over society that sees evil in the natural feeling:

'Woman is but a damned devil whose nets are laid to ensnare helpless men! She is pure evil, danger lies in her as electricity lies in bodies. When a man touches her, she exerts a sensual attraction upon him. She throws him to the ground, getting the better of his pride and dignity ... [However,] the wild time I spent with the peasant girl is exhilarating. But such felicity is forbidden us... I harmed no one and assaulted nobody; I simply enjoyed it as I enjoy things allowable Indeed it was a memorable hour in one's life, to be superseded only by a similar experience... [Haykal's ellipsis]. Then we are told it is taboo!⁽¹⁶⁾ ...

Oh, misleading devil, into which evil do you like me to get caught, and into which abyss do you want to throw me? ... [Haykal's ellipsis]. These are tasteless, evanescent pleasures. We, human beings, come between the beasts and the angels. So either we descend to the level of the one and give instinct fair play, or be elevated to the level of the other and abandon base passion. One in my position should not have descended so low because of a mere working girl, however voluptuous her beauty is' (II,4,pp. 172 - 75).

Haykal's intimation about the beauty and sexuality of woman in devil images has a touch of the image of the fatal woman which haunted the **fin de siècle** imagination⁽¹⁷⁾

Lured and perturbed by the sexuality of a physically attractive woman, Hāmid prefers her abstracted in fantasy -- a Platonic, Shelleyan sublimation. With the unsubstantial image, he is back on familiar ground:

'I wonder how you are this hour Zaynab! Do you welcome the future with pleasure while your husband prints a kiss on your beautiful mouth, or are you living the dull and monotonous married life? I fear that you are dejected, suffering pain and agony.

We spent days in dreams and pleasures, and are deprived of even better ones by our asceticism and self-denial. Are your eyes still full of their charm, and does your smile increase the pleasure and happiness of your companion?' (II,4,p. 177).

What Hāmid craves most of all is the passive dream world of the romantic visionary. His rhapsody over 'Azīzah is much like that over Zaynab. In letter he tells her:

'My dear, many a night I spent with your lovely vision looking at me, smiling, embracing me; and we slept happily together. When it left me I longed for an hour in the day of reality to know the taste of these imaginings' (II,5,p. 182).

Hāmid takes a gloomy view of human life. His world is mainly in the interrogative mood. It teems with anguished and meditative questions. He loses the desire for life, following his disappointment in love. He seizes on this as a prop on which to hang his griefs. His pessimistic depression and eagerness for death⁽¹⁸⁾ illustrate a Schopenhauerian belief. According to Schopenhauer, the goal of the willful ego is the nothingness of nirvana. (Freud's view is very close.) In his view, the surrender of life is rendered imperative. The doctrine of the Will manifests itself in the individual as the Will-to-live; whereas the chain of necessity demands resignation, not defiance, and renunciation of living. "All things are inevitable and a product of necessity". (Schopenhauer, 1951: 92). The decline of love is then necessary and inevitable. Life is "an ephemeral, dream-like, and delusive existence" (Schopenhauer, 1909: III, 466) where indulgence of the Will results in unhappiness, which is the mark of the human condition. Hence the ability to deny the Will is the best mode of life. "Quiet and easy is, as a rule, the death of every good man: but to die willingly, to die joyfully is the prerogative of the resigned, of him who surrenders and denies the will to live" (Schopenhauer, 1909, III, p.308; see also pp. 314,364). The trauma experienced by Hāmid and brought on by his sensitive, reflecting intelligence makes early death despairingly desired. It cuts short what would be a wretched existence. He speaks out of a broken spirit:

'Existence is malignant; it is full of sadness and pain! If the hopes of the youth are illusory, we gain nothing from the hopes of old age but death which relieves us completely. We run into the nothingness that we emerged from: the immortal nothingness of eternity' (II,5,p.186).

and cries out in a bleak outburst that it would have been better for him if he had not been born:

'Death while young is equal to that in old age ... It would have been better for me to die before I was out of the flesh' (II,5,p.189).

Hamid's welcoming of death condenses the main issue of the novel about the condition of existence. Life, as Hāmid sees it, is pervaded by pain and suffering, and death is a deliverance. As Lawrence J. Starzyk remarks in his article "The Coming Universal Wish Not to Live in Hardy's 'Modern' Novels,"⁽¹⁹⁾ "King Midas, searching for man's highest good, is told by the Dionysiac devotee, Silenus, of the unattainability of this goal. Man's greatest achievement, he remarks, is 'not to have been born, not to be, to be **nothing**. But the second best is to die soon' ". This attitude forces itself on the anguished individual. It is engendered by a sense of dislocation at the nature of impediments obstructing the way to happiness. Here Haykal has ample

precedent in later Victorian English literature. Hardy and Gissing strongly convey this mood in their fiction. It is easy to amass a series of passages that illustrate the point. Father Time tells Sue on the evening before his suicide, "It would be better to be out o' the world than in it ... I wish I hadn't been born". Jude and Sue in their desperate condition believe that "they ought never to have been born" (Hardy, 1895: VI,2; V,4). Angel Clare considers it "a mishap to be alive" (Hardy, 1891: Ch. 19). When Eustacia's hopes for a life in Paris are thwarted, she feels pity for herself "that I ever was born" (Hardy, 1878: III, 4). In his desperate love for Bathsheba, Boldwood feels "it is better to die than to live" (Hardy, 1874: Ch. 38). Henchard tells Farfrae that at one point in his life he felt "like Job, I could curse the day that gave me birth" (Hardy, 1886: Ch.12). Henry Ryecroft in Gissing's **The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft** (1903) ruminates, "I think of death very often ... I always turn out of my way to walk through a country churchyard ... I read the names upon the stones, and find a deep solace in thinking that for all these the fret and the fear of life are over" (Winter, XII). A similar note of pain is sounded in Oscar Wilde's **The Picture of Dorian Gray** (1891): "'Fin de siècle ... I wish it were fin du globe,' said Dorian with a sigh. 'Life is a great disappointment'" (Ch. XV).

More important, still, is the treatment of the marriage theme which is integral to the plot. At the centre of Haykal's harsh view are the stresses of enforced marriage and woman's experience of marriage as bondage. This constitutes a consideration of the pain of woman's condition⁽²⁰⁾. Both 'Azīzah, the educated woman, and Zaynab are sold on the marriage market (I,1,p.125;II, 5, p.201). Both women have no influence whatever on an arrangement that is to decide their lives. They are victims trapped in a closed pattern. Haykal shows the unfairness to women of social attitudes which expose them to loveless ties and a life-long suffering. The compatibility of spouses is not considered to be an essential requirement for a match.

Comments made on marriage are noticeably rather disapproving. Haykal says little in his own voice about the institution; it is Hāmid who takes up the cudgels. His anti-marriage sentiments⁽²¹⁾ are far too progressive for his environment. He goes to regard the family, the product of matrimony with some dismay⁽²²⁾. Hāmid's hostile attitude may have derived from his own frustrated passion for both his cousin and Zaynab. However, it is much more than reflections of an unhappy love affair; it has been fostered by his readings. He, we are told, read books on the woman question as well as marriage which caused him to change his convictions (II,1,p.125). His attitude can also be traced back to the way he was brought up-- in line with Herbert Spencer's views on education (I,2,p.24). Spencer, it is worth noting, strongly supported female emancipation as a way to a new type of marriage, for in his view "love and coercion cannot possibly flourish together".⁽²³⁾ All this provided a framework for Hāmid's radical sentiments:

He starts to see marriage as dull, uninteresting, and void of any happiness.... He looks in vain for a couple whose tie gave them the happiness they sought ... and deems the bond one of the fetters of custom (III,1,p.125).

He admits that at one time

'A shudder passed over me and I felt my being cry in the face of my mind asking it not to overstep its boundaries, Enough of this philosophy that has been flung at us by Franco-German thinkers!...Do you want me to violate law and custom and to submit to desire giving the rein to theories?... However, my mind emerged victorious over convictions acquired from education and environment. It proceeded along its way thinking freely, undaunted, and undismayed' (III,2,p.257)

When informed of Zaynab's marriage he, with tongue in cheek, wishes her luck in her new life which, in his opinion, will soon get monotonous, dreary, and stale ⁽²⁴⁾ (II,1,p. 133). In his letter to his father, he returns to disparage the institution, "which succeeding generations have boasted of and viewed as the best creation of man's mind". He regards it as "highly defective and feels that loveless unions are most intolerable" (III,2,p.252). In the course of a debate with some friends, he expresses, in almost acid language, disillusionment about the possibility of a successful marriage. The passage is worth quoting almost **in toto**:

'Our friend As 'ad will marry tomorrow -- wretched he will be'.
'Ali Effendi interrupts him saying, 'What makes you believe he will be wretched?

Shaykh Khaleel [a man of religion] corrects Ḥāmid remarking, "The Prophet, peace be upon him, says, 'Get married and propagate the race as I take pride in your number on Doomsday'."

Ḥāmid bursts out saying, 'Why do people marry? Because they seek happiness in marriage; celibacy is dull they want to exchange it for a new life, believing that it is better for them. Only for a few days they remain under the influence of illusory hopes. When they open their eyes to the reality of marriage, they deeply regret ever taking the step. I do not find a single one, among those whom I know, who has achieved the happiness long dreamt of' (II,1, pp. 127-28).

In the passage we have, quite unmistakably, the voice of Haykal himself in Ḥāmid's discourse. Ḥasanein, a friend attending the meeting and a representative of social morality, takes it upon himself to defend the institution against irreverence. To him it is a cherished ideal for the perpetuation of the species. He reads in Ḥāmid's thoughts a call for free love and a repudiation of the family system, to which he replies:

'Imagine this state in which you want to see people ! Imagine weak sons not knowing their parents, women who find no one to offer them support in their weakness -- in this civilised world where needs are aplenty!.... We can only work to modify some of our conventions to bring happiness to the relation between man woman ... Much happiness people would find

in the family system if only they perceived its meaning" (II, 1, pp. 129-30)

Haykal exposes the failings of the institution in his presentation of Zaynab's plight, and particularly her conflict between her heart and her duty in her marriage to Hasan:

She feels herself captive, deprived of her early freedom. She cannot dispose of her heart, nor turn it away from her husband. However, the heart is free in spite of oneself, it offers itself to whichever it chooses Zaynab was about to give way to her heart and seek out Ibrāhīm instead of being evasive with him ... If she has been forced to marry Ḥasan, she is absolved from any vow, and why not alleviate part of her dark life with moments of happiness snatched away from vigilant eyes, embracing and kissing Ibrāhīm (II, 3, pp. 141-42).

The idea that true affection exists between the unmarried implies more criticism of the conjugal relationship. Zaynab's marriage with Ḥasan is a valid contract in conformity with the tradition, but not a satisfying and sensible relationship. It is poor and vile compared to her love affair:

What separates her from Ibrahim, and checks her feelings towards him, is only a contract with Ḥasan said to tie them together. But can contracts, however binding they are, deprive a person of the freedom to dispose of his heart? A naturally-affianced couple should not mind what others say or be cowed into submission for lack of a contract, which is actually valueless even though people may feel that it is sacrosanct (III, 1, p. 234).

The description of Zaynab's misery serves as an attack on the circumstances that cause it. The fault lies with deep-seated conventions which deny the emotional imperatives of the individual. From the outset, the novel takes a sympathetic approach to women's plight. Their normal condition is one of alienation and suffering in silence. Haykal describes village girls returning home at dusk.

in anguish feeling sorry for the waste of youth and beauty in toiling in the fields ... In their black dresses they appear as shadows moving stealthily through lanes where they will retire into their solitude between walls for the night (I, 5, p. 82).

Women in the novel are observed to exist largely in terms of their relationship to manipulators of their lives, men. Zaynab's will is submerged in that of her father and the hated suitor he has approved of. Society, with its authoritarian family structure, does not allow woman to have a say in the choice of partner or even to make known her love. It ignores her individuality -- her freedom in the disposal of her own affec-

tions. "Zaynab should have the last word in the question of her union with Ḥasan. Is there any compulsion and coercion in marriage?" (I,4,p.66). At marriage Zaynab moves from her father's appropriation of her to deference to her husband: "Conventionality and law give Ḥasan authority and coercive rights over his wife a matter inherited from old" (II, 2, p. 139). She is submissive and uncomplaining even to the point of jeopardising her existence. She represses her natural aspirations. In her despair she meditates upon her dilemma:

'Would God above bless a reunion with Ibrāhīm or frown upon it as they will be untying the knot that God ties Ḥasan and herself up in?... But God, the just and compassionate, knows how inflicted with misery she is and that she has not achieved the felicity she sought in marriage Thus her heart becomes the field of conflicting motives. At times it looks for happiness with another dear heart that bears it reciprocal emotions; at others it accepts what fate has ordained... Ultimately she comes to the conclusion that her dull life is unendurable' (II, 3, p. 143).

To Haykal, Zaynab's position is unjust and deserving of sympathy, but he does not sanction a radical solution. Zaynab is bound to a man she does not love, but she cannot renege on the marriage. She is not bold enough to really herself with Ibrahim.

Women cannot deviate from the disposition of being subservient and silent; otherwise they fall afoul of society. "They are even unable to laugh loud lest they should be condemned as base and corrupt" (I,3,p. 46). They are subject to man's physical violence. We witness a tyrannical husband flogging his wife into humility. He maintains manly authority by venting his spleen on her (II, 5, p. 197). In all her letters to Hamid, 'Azizah deplores the situation of helpless and vulnerable women. She lingers on deprived girlhood in exasperated moans, which earn her our sympathies. The advantages are all on the side of men:

'Do you think brother Ḥāmid that we, young women, are happy in our antique prison? You believe we are content, but God knows the bitterness of our life that we are forced to bear with and get used to as a sick person accommodates himself to his sick-room and his disease ... We the weaker sex, as they call us, are in need of what fortifies us. Our hope lies in God and in the affection of our lovers ... We suffer seclusion and loneliness even among our families and within the walls of our homes. Our hearts are aflame with the fire of love but we are forced to suppress their promptings What have we, who are buried alive, to do with love?... You, men have the beauty of existence and Nature. Live to enjoy yourselves, and leave us in our cells and prisons' (II,5, pp. 192-200)

'Azizah is apparently powerless to alter her sordid condition. She is not allowed to

fulfil herself. The love feeling is regarded as a silly affection; it is interpreted in the worst of lights (I,1,p.100). While taking a walk with other members of their family, 'Azīzah and Hāmid have an opportunity to be alone. However, they are unable to express their feelings, They have no chance of real communication; they only love in silence. The writer comments:

Hāmid gets rid of the young chaperon accompanying them. He finds himself alone with 'Azīzah; however, he is at a loss what to say or what to do. He only takes her hand in his. The girl cannot find a taste for privacy ... They have the excuse. They loved only in dreams. True affection between lovers is strange to them. They only read about it in translated novels. They know only cold life ... spent either with a group outdoors, or in loneliness with imagination and poetry as companions (II,5,p.198).

As a town-bred girl, 'Azīzah has to wear the black veil, which to her is the dress of distress and misery (II,5,p.192). Earlier in the novel, the writer hits out at his "society which has preserved the veil custom" (I,2,p. 30). The custom, we are given to understand, is inappropriate and should be discarded.

One infers from the novel an argument in favour of giving girls freedom to form their lives independently of parental domination. External obligations which stand in the way of self-realisation and threaten integrity should be overcome. Outside, life is going on unchangingly all the time. The unalterable rhythm of life and the centuries-old tradition are stressed by repeated references to the pyramids, standing as a metaphor for antiquity and continuity, as well as to rural activities surviving from Pharaonic times (II,2,p. 137; I,1,p.19; I,2,p. 29; II,3,p.147). The many passages in the description of Nature in the novel, although often over-elaborate, are not merely decorative as some critics hold ⁽²⁵⁾. They serve, I believe, besides being a record of rustic life, to point up the discrepancy between the bondage to entrenched attitudes and the freedom of Nature, and that the latter should be the norm of behaviour. There are implications that stultifying and hackneyed conventions are already waning in the shadows of modern technology as represented in the novel by the railway train (I,5,p. 80; III,3, p. 278) coming to the countryside. Zaynab's last words to her mother on her death-bed are feminist-sounding. She attempts to exact from her a promise not to force any of her sisters to enter a loveless marriage ⁽²⁶⁾ (III,5,p. 305). Girls should choose their life partners away from parental domination. The writer is perhaps suggesting the point that the wretchedness of the human lot, notably the subjected position of women, is not completely beyond hope of change.

Notes

1. The emphasis in this paper lies on **Zaynab** and English literature. The indebtedness of **Zaynab** to French literature has been noted, if only sketchily. There is scarcely mention of connection with English literature in writings about **Zaynab**. It should be noted that tracing affinities is not intended to deny

the significance of the novel independent of any recognition of these.

2. The subtitle is "Manāzih wa Akhlāq Rifīyyah" (Rural Scenes and Manners). The text used throughout is the Dar al-Mārif edition (Cairo, 1979). For convenience in consulting any of the editions, I have given part and chapter numbers, in addition to page numbers, in parentheses. Throughout, the translation of the text is my own. The system of transliteration followed is mainly that adopted by the **Encyclopaedia of Islam**.
3. **Studies on the Civilization of Islam**, p. 302. However, he does not pursue his point in detail. He remarks that the language of the novel bears the influence of French "in the long and complex sentences, with the principal clauses interrupted by numerous subordinate clauses and apocopes" (p. 294). He tells us further:

Long ago it was borne in on him that the vocabulary of Arabic put it at a disadvantage compared with the language of Western Europe. 'I used', he has written, 'to rebel inwardly when I found myself unable to express in my own language what I felt in my heart and pictured in my mind's eye, and the shape of its French or English expressions formed themselves in my imagination' (pp. 273 - 74).

One may add that some of the terms that Haykal uses like "djam'iyyah" (II,1,p. 129; III,2,p.251) and "nota" (II,5,p.202) are the literal translations of "society" and "note". The corresponding Arabic terms are "mudjtama" and "hāsheyah". Haykal himself acknowledges the presence of Western elements in the novel, though he inadvertently limits this influence. Gibb notes what Haykal admits in the preface to the second edition (1929) "that behind many of the novel's peculiar features lie the influence and example of the modern French psychological novel" (p. 294). Instances like Ḥāmid's confession to Shaykh Mas'ūd bear a direct influence. The principle of confession is foreign to Islam.
4. Sometimes foreign ideas seem superimposed on background. See note 6, below.
5. It was the English language which had introduced Haykal to European culture. He admits in his **Thawrat al-Adab (The Revolution of Literature)** (1933) that as an undergraduate law student in Cairo he "started influenced by circumstances irrelevant to deal with here, to read books in English literature and English philosophy such as Carlyle's **Heroes**, John Stuart Mill's **On Liberty**, and Spencer's "Justice." "These readings widened the scope of my thinking -- a thing not achieved by my readings in Arabic". He goes on, "Then I left for Paris and started to study French and get in touch with its literature ... My readings... led to a great admiration for Western civilization which has produced these fine fruits. What attracted me most was the revolutionary spirit that pervades literature there". (p.212). It is clear that the influence of English writers preceded that of the French in point of time. Earlier in the book in an article on the art of fiction, he admits that the novel in modern Arabic literature is basically an imitation of that in the West (p. 74). Ḥāmid's father, we learn, brings him up in line with Spencer's doctrine of self-education (I,2,p.24). See also notes 13 and 20, below.
6. Arguments are sometimes obtrusively set down that they slide into orations. Ḥāmid's valedictory letter to his father is a case in point (III,2). In literary terms, this is one of the flaws that mar the novel. However, it is the message, not the technique, which is our main fare here.
7. It is clear that Zaynab is not intended to stand as a portrait of a free woman. Unlike the turbulent and independent heroine of Haykal's later novel **Hākadha Khuliqat (Thus She Was Created)** (1955), a middle-class and not a working woman, and heroines of a group of novels that were written in England at the turn of the century (see note 10, below), Zaynab is too overpowered to reject the marriage tie with Ḥasan. She does not rebel and break out of her marriage. However, we admire her physical strength and endurance which enable her to undertake back-breaking farm-and house-work. Haykal stresses the robustness of peasant girls when he describes them as "full of vigour" (I,2,p.30) and as having "sturdy and beautiful legs" (II,3,p.152).
8. Zaynab's untimely death may be taken as suicidal. Consumption comes as a release from her conjugal misery. In suppressing her natural impulse to love Ibrāhīm, she resigns the Will-to-live. She becomes careless about herself. Her death is modelled on Western lines. This is a point that has not escaped critics and there is no need to investigate it further.
9. When Ḥāmid remarks of the infiltration of the ideas of German thinkers, among other Europeans, he probably refers to philosophers like Schopenhauer (III,2,p.257). The thoughts of Schopenhauer pervaded the work of writers of the period in both England and France. In discussing G. Gissing's affinities with Zola, W. T. Young remarks that a number of contemporary writers in both England and France all have common roots in the thought of Schopenhauer (**Cambridge History of English literature**, XIII, Ch. 14, p. 457 [1953 edn.]). See also Ralph Hinsdale Goodale's article "Schopenhauer and Pessimism in Nineteenth-Century English Literature" **PMLA**, 47 (1932) 241-61; and C. J. Francis, "Gissing and Schopenhauer," **NCF**, XV (1960), 53-63.
10. Among the English works that deal with the question there are: Eliza Lynn Linton, **The World Well Lost** (1877); G. Gissing, **Demos** (1886), **The Odd Women** (1893); G. Moore, **A Drama in Muslin** (1886); William Barry, **The New Antigone** (1887); Marie Corelli, **Thelma** (1887); **The Murder of Delicia** (1896); G. Meredith, **Lord Ormont and his Aminta** (1894).

- The Amazing Marriage** (1895); Mona Caird, **The Daughters of Danaus** (1894); Emma Frances Brooke, **A Superfluous Woman** (1894); Menie Muriel Dowie, **Gallia** (1895), **F.F. Moore, I Forbid the Banns** (1893); Thomas Hardy, **The Woodlanders** (1887), **Tess of the d'Urbervilles** (1891) **Jude, the Obscure** (1895); Arnold Bennett, **Whom God Hath Joined** (1906); H.G.Wells, **Ann Veronica** (1909). Many of the comments in these works are adaptations of Mill's, Shelley's, and Schopenhauer's views. Mill and Shelley are "standard reading" for almost all the heroines. For more on the point, see Gail Cunningham, **The New Woman and the Victorian Novel** (London, 1978), pp. 48-110. For the influence of Mill and Shelley on Haykal, see notes 5 above and 13 below.
11. **The World as Will and Idea**, Vol. III, Ch. xiv. See in particular pp. 342,364,365,368.
 12. See also I,2,p.33;III,2,pp. 255,256,258,261.
 13. Haykal had great admiration for Shelley. In his view, he is the "prophet of freedom and truth". He wrote a lengthy essay on him in 1929, which was reprinted in his **Tarājim: Miṣriyyah wa Gharbiyyah (Biographies: Egyptain and Western)**, pp. 284-365. For a résumé of the main ideas in this article (in English), see M. Abdel-Hai, "Shelley and the Arabs: An Essay in Comparative Literature", **Journal of Arabic Literature**, III (1972), 72-87. One may add one more idea in the article which is important: Shelley's acrimonious arguments against marriage. Haykal seems to celebrate Shelley, the antagonist of oppressive custom.
 14. See Walter Bagehot's essay on Shelley in **Literary Studies**, Vol.1, 270; quoted in F.B. Pinion, **Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought** (London, 1977),p.160. See also Shelley's **The Revolt of Islam** VIII, ix, and **Epipsychidion**, lines 190-191.
 15. Ḥamdi Sakkūt in the chapter on **Zaynab** in his **The Egyptian Novel** (Cairo,1971) wonders why "no convincing reason is given to explain why Ḥamid never makes any attempt to ask for 'Azīza's hand, even though as her cousin, and moreover an educated young man from a rich family, he would be a suitable match". He goes on, "even when she informs him that her parents are about to accept another man and that she is against the proposed marriage, he takes no action and merely yields to disappointment" (p.16). The argument I offer perhaps shows why this is so.
 16. One here is reminded of Hardy's statement in **Tess of the d'Urbervilles** about the opposing central forces -- nature and the moral law: "So the two forces were at work here as everywhere, the inherent will to enjoy, and the circumstantial will against enjoyment" (Ch, 43).
 17. See Mario Praz, **The Romantic Agony**, Ch..iv.
 18. See I,3,p.43; I,7, p.98;II,4,pp.172,178;II,5,p.186; II,6,p.208; II,7, p.233;III, 1, pp. 229,231, 232.
 19. **NCF**, XXVI, 4 (March 1972) , 419-35. Starzyk quotes Nietzsche, **The Birth of Tragedy**, Ch. 3.
 20. One recalls here Haykal's reading of John Stuart Mill (see note 5, above), whose **The Subjection of Women** (1869) is an early vindication of the rights of woman. The question formed part of the thought of the period in Egypt. The number of journals dealing with woman rose considerably at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first Egyptian school for girls was founded in 1872; In 1919 women were allowed to go out in a demonstration against the exile of the nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghlul. The writings of Qāsim Amīn, a social reformist, immediately come to mind. In his **Tahrir al Mar'ah (The Emancipation of Woman)** 1899, and **al-Mar'ah al-Djadidah (The New Woman)** 1900, he calls for the recognition of the rights of women. For more on the emancipation of Egyptian women (in English), see John A. Haywood, **Modern Arabic Literature: 1800-1970**, pp. 124-25.
 21. Ḥamid has joined in the anti-marriage fervour of the time in the West. The novels listed in note 10 above are rife with cynicism about the institution that matches Ḥamid's own.
 22. See what I mentioned above about the point.
 23. Herbert Spencer, **Social Statics**, pp. 166-67. Haykal's familiarity with Shelley's poetry and thought comes to mind (see note 13,above). For Shelley's views on marriage and the freedom of love, see in particular "Notes" to **Queen Mab** which Hyakal must have read, as his article on Shelley shows. See also **Epipsychidion**, lines 149-59:

I never was attached to that great sect,
 Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
 Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend
 And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
 To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
 Of modern morals, and the beaten road
 Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread
 Who travel to their home among the dead
 By the broad highway of the world, and so
 With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
 The dearest and the longest journey go.
 24. The idea of the boredom, dullness, and stagnation of marriage is reiterated in II, 2, pp. 137, 139; II, 3, p. 143; II, 4, p.177.
 25. See, for example. Gibb. **op.cit.** p. 293.

26. One here is reminded of Mill's **On liberty**, which Haykal read early in life (see note 5, above). **On Liberty** expounds Mill's belief in the necessity of a person's choosing his own plan of life, and how people are made to suffer by conformity (Everyman edn. [1950], pp.156,168).

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