

Egyptian Arabic transcript:

طبعاً نجيب محفوظ مش الكاتب الوحيد عندنا في مصر يعني الحمد لله عندنا ناس تانية بتكتب ومعروفين برضوا. فعازية أقول بشكل عام أن الأدب المصري بدأ في أواخر القرن التسعاشتر، ومن الشعراء المشهورين عندنا، أسامي يعني، زي مثلاً أحمد شوقي، هو كان معروف بإسم أمير الشعراء، عندنا برضوا محمد حسين هيكل إلي كتب أول رواية معروفة، واسم الرواية دي "زينب"، وكتب الرواية دي في سنة 1914 يعني في أول الحرب العالمية الأولى، وهي قصة حب في قرية مصرية. برضوا رواية حلوة عشان ضلعنا من المدينة شوية، طلعا من القاهرة ومن الإسكندرية، ودخلنا في الريف. حلوة عشان بتدي فكرة تانية عن الشعب المصري، عشان طبعاً مش كل الشعب المصري عايش في المدن. يعني طبعاً أكبر مدينة مدينة القاهرة، إحنا حوالي عشرين مليون في مدينة القاهرة، فمدينة كبيرة جداً، كبيره أوي أوي، بس في برضوا ناس عايشين أول حاجة في المدن الثانية زي الإسكندرية، وبني سويف وأسيوط وكل المدن دي، وبرضوا بنفس الوقت في ناس عايشين في الريف، يعني بره المدن خالص، ومهم أن نتكلم هن الناس دي برضوا، فأنا حبيت الرواية دي أوي لسبب داه. عندنا برضوا طبعاً طه حسين، وطه حسين أنا بحبو أوي لعشان مكانش بيشفوف، كان أعمى. وعشان مكانش بيشفوف كان بيتخيل حاجات مختلفة أوي في دماغه. أن هو عشان مكانش بيشفوف حاجة حواليه، كان بيتخيل حاجات كثيرة، وعشان كده كتبوا فطبعة. هو تعلم في الأزهر، بالقاهرة، وسافر باريس وتعلم اللغة الفرنسية وكلوا، وكتب قصة حياتوا وهو صغير. انتشر الكتاب داه بإسم الأيام، بس إلي مهم أوي هو كان دوره في المجتمع، عشان هو بيجمع حاجتين مختلفه أوي. أول حاجة هو تعلم في الأزهر، يعني تعليمه كان ديني، تأسيس تعليمه ديني، وفي نفس الوقت سافر إلي باريس، يعني مكانش بس بيكتب عن الغرب، عاش هناك. ودي حاجة مهمة أوي لازم نفهمها في الكتابة في الوقت دا. كثير من الناس دي سافرت إلي باريس، إلي إيطاليا، إلي أمريكا، وشافت العالم هناك، شافت إيه إلي بيحصل، والفرق الثقافي، والحاجات المختلفة، والفرق السياسي، وكتبوا عن الموضوع داه لما رجعوا. ودي فكره مهمة أوي عشان في ناس كثيره بتكتب أو بتفكر أن الكاتب المصري بيكتب عن الغرب من غير ما يفهم حاجة، وفعلًا في ناس كثيره بيعملوا كده. بس طبعاً مختلف، لو أننا عشت في الغرب، شفت صورته حقيقية، وشفت إيه إلي بيحصل، وبتكتب عن الموضوع داه، حاجة مختلفة أوي. وهو طه حسين سافر إلي باريس، وفهم حاجات، وكان طول حياتوا بيجمع العالم إلي هو الشرقي الديني، وفي نفس الوقت العالم الفرنسي، وبيتكلم عنوا، وبيشجع التعليم كثير، وبيشجع تعليم اللغات بطريقه فطبعة. عشان هو فهم أن اللغات طريق كويش عشان تفهم ثقافة تانية، هو تعلم الفرنسي وتعلم الإنجليزي عشان يفهم الثقافة أحسن.

English translation:

Naturally, Naguib Mahfouz¹ is not the only writer that we have in Egypt. I mean, thankfully, we have other people who write and who are also famous. I want to say that, on the whole, Egyptian literature started at the end of the 19th century. Of the famous poets, we have names like Ahmed Shawqi,² for example, who was famous under the name of "Prince of the poets." We also have Muhammad Husayn Haykal,³ who wrote the first famous novel, and I think the name of this novel is *Zeinab* ... and he wrote this

¹ Naguib Mahfouz, the most famous Egyptian writer, was born in Cairo in 1911. He won the Nobel prize for Literature in 1988. He is the only Arab ever to have won this prestigious prize in the Literature category. He died recently, in 2006.

² Ahmed Shawqi is a pioneer of the Egyptian modern literary movement. He was born in the mid-nineteenth century and is famous for his distinctive poetry. He has been nicknamed "Prince of the Poets."

³ Muhammad Husayn Haykal is an Egyptian writer and journalist. He was born at the end of the 19th century in Mansoura, and he is famous for his role as minister of Education in Egypt. He died in 1956.

novel in 1914, at the beginning of the First World War, and it is a story of love in an Egyptian village. It is a beautiful novel, because we get out of the city a little bit; we get out of Cairo and Alexandria, and we enter the countryside, and it is beautiful because it gives another idea of the Egyptian people, because naturally, not all of the Egyptian people live in the cities.

I mean, of course, the biggest city is the city of Cairo; we are about 20 million in the city of Cairo, so it is a very big city, a very, very big city. But there are also people living first of all in the other cities, such as Alexandria,⁴ Beni Sueif,⁵ Assiut,⁶ and all of these cities. And also, at the same time, there are people who live in the countryside -- I mean completely outside of the city. And it is important for us to speak about these people too. So, I liked this novel a lot for this reason. Naturally, we also have Taha Husayn.⁷ And Taha Husayn, I like him a lot, because he could not see. He was blind. And because he could not see, he imagined very different things in his mind. Because he could not see anything going on around him, he imagined a lot of things. And because of that, his books are exceptional. He was taught in Al-Azhar,⁸ in Cairo, and he traveled to Paris, so he learned the French language and all, and he wrote the story of his life when he was still young. This book was published by the name *El-Ayyam, The Days*, but the most important [thing] was Husayn's role in society, because he gathered together two very different things.

First of all, he was taught in Al-Azhar, so this means that his education was religious, the foundation of his education was religious, and, at the same time, he traveled to Paris, which means that he did not only write about the West -- he lived there. This is a very important thing we must understand in the writing of this time. A lot of these people traveled to Paris, to Italy, to America, and they saw the world there, they saw what happens there, and the cultural difference, and the different things, and the political difference, and they wrote about this situation when they came back. This is a very important idea, because there are a lot of people who write, or think that the Egyptian writer writes about the West without knowing anything. And, in reality, there are a lot of people who do that. But, of course, this is different. If you lived in the West, you saw a real image, and you saw what happens, and you write about this situation. It is a very different thing. And Taha Husayn traveled to Paris, and he understood things, and all his life he brought together the Oriental, religious world, and, at the same time, the French world. He speaks about it and supports education, and he supports the education in languages in an exceptional manner, because he understood that languages are a great

⁴ Alexandria is the second largest city in Egypt, situated on the North Mediterranean Coast of Egypt. It is a big seaport for trade, but it is also a city famous for its history and tourism, attracting both foreign and Egyptian tourists.

⁵ Beni Sueif is a city at the very beginning of Upper Egypt, about an hour and a half from Cairo by car. It is a very important agricultural center.

⁶ Assiut is a city in the center of Upper Egypt and the capital of the Assiut governorate.

⁷ Taha Husayn was one of the most prominent writers of the twentieth century in Egypt. He was born at the end of the nineteenth century and died in 1973. Despite his blindness, he was the first student to earn a Ph.D. at the University of Cairo, and he later became Minister of Education for Egypt.

⁸ Taha Hussein went to al-Azhar seminary in Cairo, the leading Sunni centre of higher Islamic education. A few years later, he entered the new secular University of Cairo, and he was the first to obtain a Ph.D. there.

way to understand another culture. He learned French and he learned English in order to better understand the culture.

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