



ANALYSIS OF THE STORY “SILENCE IN THE MIRROR” BY ARAB WRITER MAHMOUD SHUQAIR

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Abstract

This article presents a scholarly literary analysis of the story “Silence in the Mirror” by the renowned Arab writer Mahmoud Shuqair. The primary aim of the study is to illuminate, through the artistic text, the factors affecting the psychological state of people living under conditions of war and siege. The moods of silence, anxiety, hope, and helplessness depicted in the story are masterfully conveyed by the author through symbols, metaphors, and images drawn from everyday life.

Keywords: Mahmoud Shuqair, war, siege, silence, anxiety, symbol, metaphor, translation, psychological depiction.

Introduction

Mahmoud Shuqair (1941–) is one of the most prominent representatives of contemporary Palestinian prose. His works depict, in a distinctive artistic style, the themes of war, siege, and the severe psychological states of human beings. Born into a Palestinian family in Jerusalem, the writer personally experienced throughout his life the realities of occupation, exile, and siege. This lived experience directly influenced his literary output and endowed his works with authenticity and human warmth.

“Silence in the Mirror” (صمت النوافذ), taken from the author’s collection “Silence of the Windows,” depicts the life of a married couple living hundreds of kilometers from a besieged Palestinian city. Though simple in plot, the tragedy of a society engulfed in war is expressed with depth and subtlety. The story’s



distinctive feature is that war and siege are not shown directly — they manifest instead in silence, in an awaited radio bulletin, in water from a tap, and in the drawn curtains of neighboring houses — that is, in the minor details of everyday life.

In literary scholarship, works on the theme of war are generally studied in two directions: the first analyzes battlefield actions and the heroism of protagonists, while the second examines the impact of war on the inner world of human beings, on their daily lives, and on society. Mahmoud Shuqair, as a writer belonging to the second direction, is a relatively new name for the Uzbek reader, and the translation and scholarly analysis of his works are of great importance.

This article conducts a comparative study of the story's original Arabic text and its Uzbek translation, analyzing the work's literary-aesthetic features, its system of symbolic imagery, and the challenges encountered in the translation process. The research aims to bring Palestinian literature closer to the Uzbek reader and to contribute to the study of contemporary Arabic prose.

The Anxiety Frozen in Silence in the Story "Silence in the Mirror" by Arab Writer Mahmoud Shuqair (Translation)

War. Siege. The most wretched existence in the world is, in truth, a land held captive in war and anxiety. In Mahmoud Shuqair's stories, the human heart, the inner world, and the spiritual realm are rendered in distinctive strokes through symbols and metaphors. Such works are recognized as a unique new direction in Palestinian literature. From the earliest stories he wrote and published to those created up to the present day, his oeuvre is sufficiently rich and substantive to have formed the foundation of his literary identity.

The story opens with a passage rendered in quiet stillness:

من طرف الستارة يتسلل ضياء شاحب، فركت
عينيهما، وحينما لاحظت أنه غير موجود بالقرب
منها، أفلعت عن فكرة النوم من جديد. غادرت
السريـر، أزاحت الستارة قليلاً: الطرقات خالية



والنهار لم يبدأ بعد، وغلالة الفجر تحيل العالم إلى
مساحة من الغموض¹.

A pale light crept through the edge of the curtain. She rubbed her eyes, and when she realized he was not beside her, she abandoned the idea of going back to sleep. She got out of bed, drew the curtain slightly aside: the streets were empty, day had not yet begun, and the veil of dawn turned the world into a space of mystery.² Through this single nocturnal image, the story opens with the heroine waking from sleep and searching for someone, then — as she gently parts the curtain — conveying to the reader the meaning hidden in the mysterious world beyond.

فتحت باب الغرفة، رأتها ممدداً في الصالة كعادته
منذ ليالٍ، من حوله كومة الصحف، وفي متناول
يده المذياع³.

She opened the door of the room and saw him lying in the living room as had been his custom for several nights, surrounded by a pile of newspapers, with a radio within reach of his hand.⁴

In the story, the protagonist has spent the night sleepless, searching through a stack of newspapers, while the image of a person clutching a radio and waiting anxiously for some announcement is vividly rendered.

يتربقأ أولى الإذاعات في قلق إنه
ولهفة. رمى في اتجاهها نظرة، حملها شحنة من
عدم الاكتراث كي يقطع عليها سؤالاً ثقيلاً: ألم تنم
بعد؟ فعلت ذلك في بداية الأمر عدة مرات، ثم كفت
عنه حينما انتبهت إلى أنه لا معنى لهذا السؤال⁵.

He was waiting with anxiety and eagerness for the first radio broadcasts. He glanced at her with indifference in order to cut off a heavy question: Have you

النوافذ	القصصية(صمت	المجموعة	من	قصتان	النوافذ	صمت ¹
						للكتاب محمود شقير.
النوافذ	القصصية(صمت	المجموعة	من	قصتان	النوافذ	صمت ³
						للكتاب محمود شقير.
النوافذ	القصصية(صمت	المجموعة	من	قصتان	النوافذ	صمت ⁵
						للكتاب محمود شقير.

² Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan

⁴ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan



still not slept? He had done this several times at the beginning, then stopped when he realized the question had no meaning.⁶

He was waiting for such an important broadcast over the radio that he did not even hear when someone spoke to him. What was that broadcast he had fixed all his attention upon? This question heightens the reader's curiosity about the story.

اتجهت إلى المطبخ، فتحت صنبور المياه، سمعت
فحيح الهواء، كادت تيأس لولا أن الماء اندلق من
إذ منقطع منذ أيام. هل ترفّ إليه البشري؟ تراجعت، الصنبور بعد لحظة انتظار، ارتاحت نفسها، فالماء
ما قيمة ذلك؟ فهو لن يكثر، ثم إنه بالتأكيد
سمع صوت الماء.⁷

She went to the kitchen, turned on the water tap, heard the hissing of air — she had almost despaired until water finally flowed from the tap after a moment's wait. She felt relieved, for the water had been cut off for days. Shall she give him the good news? She reconsidered: what was the point? He would not care, for he had certainly already heard the sound of the water.⁸

In the story, the water tap is depicted as a fragment that shatters the silence. The heroine went to drink water, but the water did not come at first. Then an inner call seemed to arise. She posed a question to the second protagonist, who seemed to want to hear good news from the radio. The heroine's question is left open, and the narrative finds a moment of resolution when water flows from the tap.

The story depicts one family, but through that family it serves to reveal society as a whole.

لم يأبه بالأمر، هو يعرف أن تلك واحدة من
مباهجها الصغيرة، دائماً تقول: البيت بلا ماء
كالمزبلة. نهض على عجل وانتقل نحو الشرفة
حتى لا تفاجئه بكلام عابر، هاله الصمت الذي يخيم
على العالم، حدّق لحظات في نوافذ البيوت

⁶ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan
(النوافذ) القصصية (صمت) المجموعة من

⁸ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan

⁷ صمت النوافذ قصتان من للكاتب محمود شقير.



المجاورة، فلم ير سوى ستائر رمادية تنسدل على توقعات مبهمه⁹.

He paid no attention; he knew that this was one of her small joys — she always said: a house without water is like a rubbish heap. He rose hastily and moved toward the balcony so that passing words would not surprise him. He was struck by the silence that hung over the world. He stared for a moment at the windows of the neighboring houses and saw nothing but grey curtains hanging over vague expectations.¹⁰

The strange silence of the world was a peculiar sensation, yet when fear and unrest lie beneath that silence, it plunges humanity into anxiety. In the story, the neighbors' houses are also shrouded in silence, and the windows too seem concealed behind grey curtains as if on account of the war.

عاد إلى الداخل، سمع تلاطم الماء في أوعية الحديد، فأدرك أنها صعدت إلى سطح البيت، موعد الأخبار، ازداد توتره، تمنى لو ينقطع الماء وعادت تقول إن الماء لن يصل إلى الخزان. اقترب حتى لا ينجس عليه متعة الإصغاء، تلفت حوله، تتنحى معبراً عن تدمره، أغلقت باب المطبخ، فكأنما قرأت مزاجه، اطمأنت نفسه قليلاً¹¹

He came back inside. Hearing the splashing of water in the metal containers, he realized she had gone up to the roof and returned saying the water would not reach the tank. The news hour was approaching; his tension grew; he wished the water would stop so as not to spoil his pleasure in listening. He looked around and cleared his throat to express his displeasure — she closed the kitchen door, as if she had read his mood, and he felt a little calmer.¹²

When a human being is gripped by anxiety and dread, they become frightened of everything around them. In the story, even the sound of water pouring into metal containers could be heard amidst the silence of the world — and through this too the author conveys the state of the besieged city.

⁹ صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ) للكاتب محمود شقير.

¹⁰ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan

¹¹ صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ) للكاتب محمود شقير.

¹² Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan



المذيع: هدوء حذر يسود محاور القتال بعد قال
شقت الباب في حذر، ووقفت على مقربة منه، اشتباكات عنيفة دامت تسع عشرة ساعة.
صامدين. لكنه أثر الصمت، فلا بدّ من أنها حدّق فيها منتشياً، كاد يقول لها إنهم ما زالوا
استنتجت ذلك دون أن يخبرها به¹³.

The announcer said: A cautious calm prevails along the battle lines following fierce clashes that lasted nineteen hours. She opened the door cautiously and stood close to him; he stared at her with delight, almost telling her that they were still holding out. But he chose silence, for she must have drawn that conclusion without his telling her.¹⁴

The news anticipated from the radio was broadcast. The report announced that Palestine had experienced some relief after nineteen hours of siege by Israel. Yet behind that news it is difficult to imagine the bloody clashes in the city at that moment and the loss of calm among the population.

بدأت جفونه ترتخي، تمدّد على الكنب، شعر بخدر
لذيذ يسري في أطرافه كالمدمن بعد أن يتناول
وجبة المخدر، إنه مدمن إذاعات، أبهجه التشبيه
وهو يتجه نحو مملكة النوم، ثم فكّر لحظة: ترى
هل يحدث ذلك صدفة، حيث لا يفعل شيئاً سوى
الاستماع إلى الإذاعات؟ كاد السؤال أن يطرد
سلطان النوم من عينيه، غير أنصوت المذيع
أنقذه، فاختلطت الصور في وعيه، ثم غاب في
إغفاءة طويلة¹⁵.

But he remained silent, for she must have drawn that conclusion without being told. As he lay on the sofa, his eyelids began to grow heavy. He felt a pleasant numbness spreading through his limbs like an addict after taking a dose. He was addicted to radio broadcasts. The comparison pleased him as he drifted toward the kingdom of sleep. Then he wondered for a moment: did this happen by chance, given that he did nothing but listen to broadcasts? The question nearly

13 صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ)
للكتاب محمود شقير

¹⁴ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan

15 صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ)
للكتاب محمود شقير.



drove sleep from his eyes, but the announcer's voice saved him; the images blurred in his consciousness, and then he sank into a long slumber.¹⁶

A person who longed to hear some news spent the story listening to radio broadcasts about the besieged city. The protagonist listens to broadcasts but, unable to sleep, takes medicine and drifts off. Yet this is no peaceful sleep — it is one from which he will awaken to the anxiety of tomorrow.

واصل المذيع والمرأة تصغي إليه: اعتصمت نساء
المدينة في المسجد احتجاجاً على قطع الماء
والكهرباء. فطنت فجأة إلى أنها نسيت صنبور
المياه مفتوحاً على الوعاء، فلا بد من أنه امتلأ
والماء يفيض على جوانبه الآن¹⁷.

The woman was listening to him as the announcer continued: The women of the city gathered at the mosque in protest against the cutting of water and electricity. She suddenly realized she had forgotten to close the water tap over the bowl, and it must be full by now with water overflowing over its sides.¹⁸

When the city was placed under siege and caught in the whirlpool of war, the population faced frequent cuts to water and electricity. In the story, it takes considerable time to collect even a single bowlful of water — this is reflected in the narrative — and the woman, thinking the bowl she had set earlier must by now be full, heads to the kitchen. War leads a person toward moral and material degradation.

المطبخ، حدثت في الصنبور مندهشة، رأتها صامتاً إلى سارعت
لا تنزّ منه نقطة ماء، حدثت في الوعاء، فإذا به لم
يتملأ، حركت مفتاح الصنبور يميناً وشمالاً،
فأيقنت أن الماء انقطع من جديد، شعرت بالأسى،
هنا لا بيتها مئات الأميال، واعتقدت أن هذا الذي يجري وأشفقت على المدينة المحاصرة التي تبعد عن
يحدث صدفة، فاستبدت بها الوسوس،

¹⁶ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan
(النوافذ) القصصية(صمت) المجموعة من قصتان

¹⁸ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan

¹⁷ صمت للنوفاذ للكاتب محمود شقير.



واتجهت نحو الصالة، تأملت وجه زوجها: إنه ينام
الآن في طمأنينة قد تمتد بضع ساعات¹⁹.

She hurried to the kitchen, stared at the tap in astonishment, saw it silent with not a single drop of water coming from it, looked into the bowl — it was not full. She turned the tap handle right and left, and became certain that the water had been cut off again. She felt grief and compassion for the besieged city that lay hundreds of miles from her home. She thought that what was happening here was not happening by coincidence, so fears overwhelmed her. She walked toward the living room and contemplated her husband's face: he was sleeping now in a peace that might last a few hours.²⁰

The woman entered the kitchen, but the water had not come. Unfortunately, war and unrest, even when occurring in one corner of a country, spread their malign effects everywhere. The difference between a life beneath a peaceful sky and a life beneath an unpeaceful sky is as vast as the distance between heaven and earth.

غطاء دثرته به، ثم أغلقت المذياع، وسارت نحو أحضرت
الشرفة، وقفت فيها لحظة، ارتاعت للصمت الذي
ما زال يملأ الأرجاء، ثم جلست تتخيل الناس في
المدينة التي يلقيها الحصار منذ شهرين²¹.

He was sleeping peacefully now; this might last a few hours. She brought a blanket and covered him with it, then turned off the radio and walked toward the balcony. She stood there for a moment, frightened by the silence that still filled the surroundings, then sat and began to imagine the people in the city that had been under siege for two months.²²

Although the story's protagonist lived far from the city ravaged by war and siege, she could not sleep peacefully. She pondered the life of the city and the dark clouds hanging over it. Just as with the war between Ukraine and Russia, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict too has an enormous impact on ordinary people.

¹⁹ صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ)
للكتاب محمود شقير.

²⁰ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan

²¹ صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ)
للكتاب محمود شقير.

²² Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan



فجأة رن جرس الباب، وجدت ثلاثة من جاراتها
يتأهبين للذهاب إلى المسجد للاعتصام فيه مع حشد
من النساء، تلبسها الحيرة بعض الوقت، هل توقظ
زوجها لتخبره أنها ستذهب معهن؟ حينما رأت
العجلة مرتسمة على وجوههن، غادرت البيت دون
إبطاء، وقدّرت أنه سينهض من نومه بعد ساعات
بعضاً عن نشرة أخبار أخرى.²³

Suddenly the doorbell rang, and she found three of her female neighbors preparing to go to the mosque to join a crowd of women in a sit-in protest. Seeing the urgency on their faces, she guessed that there would be no room left in the front rows, left the house without delay, and estimated that he would wake from his sleep after a few hours in search of another news bulletin.²⁴

At midnight the doorbell rang; the people were awake, and there had come word about staging a protest against the siege — this is why the women came — for the war and siege had drawn the men into its vortex. Women and children wait with nothing but fear and silence, yet this war is a condition that will not allow a person to sleep peacefully, even with a blanket drawn over them.

غير أن الزوج لم ينهض من نومه أبداً، عادت
زوجته إلى البيت بعد انتهاء الاعتصام، عجبت من
استغراقه في النوم حتى هذه الساعة، حينما هزّته
من كتفه لتوقظه، أدركت كل شيء. صرخت في
ذهول وهي تعتقد أن هذا الأمر لم يحدث صدفة
على أية حال²⁵

But the husband never woke from his sleep at all. His wife returned home after the sit-in protest ended. She was astonished that he was still asleep at this hour. When she shook him by the shoulder to wake him, she understood everything. She screamed in shock, believing that this had not happened by coincidence in any case.²⁶

23 صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ) للكاتب محمود شقير.

²⁴ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan

25 صمت النوافذ قصتان من المجموعة القصصية (صمت النوافذ) للكاتب محمود شقير.

²⁶ Tarjima bitiruv malakaviy ishi muallifi tomonidan



In the story, the woman returned but found her husband dead. War, beyond its physical wounds, also destroys the inner life of a person. The man depicted — who could not leave the house and awaited news on the radio — might well be called disabled, for his condition testifies to this. Had he been well, he would have been the first to go to the besieged city. Unfortunately, war is the very proof of the senseless deaths of innocent people.

“Depicting human character in connection with wartime conditions, striving to give artistic expression to qualities characteristic of life and people, and using this decisive moment in history as an important means of expression — these form the leading leitmotif in a number of his works.”

Indeed, this story, which belongs to the pen of this author, stands apart among stories on the theme of war. It belongs to the category of works that provide information about the social way of life far from the besieged city behind the front lines and that illuminate the character traits of the people of that era.

When one speaks of wartime, the image that comes to mind is of people tormented by hunger and deprivation, living in desperate circumstances.

Conclusion

Mahmoud Shuqair’s story “Silence in the Mirror” depicts the themes of war and siege not directly, but through the minor details of everyday life — a curtain, a radio, water from a tap, grey windows. This approach reveals the author’s artistic mastery and the distinctive stylistic qualities of Palestinian literature.

Through the images of husband and wife in the story, the deep traces left by war — not only on the battlefield but in the life of an ordinary family and in the human psyche — are rendered with profound psychological portraiture. The husband is depicted as a figure waiting for news on the radio, unable to leave the house, grown weak, and who ultimately breathes his last — embodying the shattering of a person’s inner identity and resolve in the face of war. The wife, by contrast, emerges as a figure who, amid external chaos, maintains her composure, covers her husband with a blanket, goes out to the protest, and remains active.

Silence in the story is not merely quietness — it is the symbolic expression of fear, waiting, helplessness, and anxiety. News reports from the radio, whether the water flows or not, the lives concealed behind the drawn curtains of neighboring



houses — all of these show how deeply war has penetrated into the life of humanity.

A comparative analysis of the original Arabic text and the Uzbek translation revealed the lexical, stylistic, and cultural challenges that arose in the translation process. Fully conveying the emotional tension, poetic rhythm, and symbolic layers of the original text in Uzbek presented certain difficulties, which demands separate investigation from the perspective of translation studies.

It is hoped that this research will make an important contribution to presenting Palestinian literature to the Uzbek reader, to the study of contemporary Arabic prose, and to enriching the methodology of translation and analysis of literary works on the theme of war.

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