

Dramatic Silence in the Plays of Naguib Mahfouz

Prof. Ahmad A. Elsheemi

Faculty of Al-Asun, Beni-Suef University

Abstract:

In the plays of Naguib Mahfouz: "Yumeet wa Yuhyui" (*Death and Resurrection*), "Al-Tarika" (*The Legacy*), "Al-Nagah" (*The Salvation*), " Mashru' Lilmunaqasha " (*A Draft Proposal*)", "Al-Muhemah" (*The Task*), "Al-Mutaradah" (*Chase*). We want to prove that silence in these plays is the main character; the hero; the initiator of all action. Mahfouz treated silence as a very important dramatic element, influenced by a long tradition of using silence in drama since Sophocles to Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett. It is suggested that Mahfouz uses all forms of silence in these plays, we shall concentrate on five main forms: suspension dots, pointed silence, stage direction pauses, and suspension sentences.

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He had not the strength to take irony's vow of silence, not the power to keep it; and only the man who keeps silent amounts to anything . . . He who knows how to keep silent discovers an alphabet which has just as many letters as the one commonly in use. (*Kierkegaard*)

“The insufficiency of language to express strong emotions” is an old statement of those who were in love or suffering deep feelings. They sometimes express their feelings by non-verbal language. Verbal language does not always have the ability to communicate the depths of feelings and emotions. It is silence which comes in all kinds of non-verbal expressions.

As a concept silence is more than just the absence of speech and sound. It can relate a silence that is purposeful or one that is forced. Silence is bound to time, as silence is used to measure the length of sound and vice versa and its duration is thus connected to its power.⁽¹⁾

Silence's meaning is no longer the absence of language, it is another type of non-verbal language sometimes stronger than the verbal one. In ancient times they said: speech is silver, silence golden. And we have in our folk tradition girls who are proposed to for marriage, when asked for her agreement she refuses to silence which means agreement, a positive decision. Silence does not mean lack of communication; it is a communicative strategy. It sometimes means submission, feeling of oppression, deciding, future planning, inability to react for the moment, a decision to

react after, powerlessness, silence makes room for thinking, taking a decision, revision. Silence is a strategic tool by the author to run a dialogue between him and the reader, the audience. The silent space is left for the viewer or the listener or the reader to act.

Silence has been a rich field of analysis in psychology, linguistics, philosophy, and also in literature. Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter are well known for their excessive use of silence in their plays to refer to the alienation of modern man. There is an immense literature dealing with silence in dramatic works; because silence was extensively used by playwrights since the Greeks whose drama was actually part of their religious rituals, *Silvio Montiglio mentions:*

Marveling at the sudden light that has filled the hall, Telemachus wants to know if it is a divine epiphany. And his father checks him: "Be silent and hold back your thought; don't ask: these are the ways of the gods who hold Olympus" (Odyssey 19.42–43). Telemachus is taught to silence not only his tongue, but also his mind. Yet this block of speech and thought is not a spontaneous response to the appearance of an ineffable god; on the contrary, its very quality of interdiction betrays a concern for the dangers—that is, for the power—of language, which must be kept under control in the presence of the gods.⁽²⁾

Naguib Mahfouz is a master of using silence in his creations. He used silence in his novels and short stories. In the opening of the *Al-Harafish* (1977), the silence of the newly born infant (Ashour Al-Nagi) not responding to the call of Sheik Afra Zeidan, together with the silence of the group of sophists who were listening to them and they were not answering him. The opening scene of silence paves the road towards a whole epic based on creating a whole world of humans and conflicts. In the opening of his novel entitled "*Children of Al-Gabalawy*" we notice that the silence of the Grandfather (The Gabalawy) plays a very important part in the novel. The narrator describes this seminal situation:

I found, and still, talk about him interesting. This encouraged me go round his big house; perhaps I could win

a look from his eyes but in vain. Many a times I stood in front of his big door looking at the embalmed crocodile fixed over it, many a times I sat in el-Moqattam desert not far away from the big fence of the house, seeing nothing but the heads of berry, sycamore, and palm trees engulfing the "House", closed windows without any sign of life. Is it not sad to have a grandfather like this without seeing him or seeing us? Is it not strange to hide in this big closed house, and we live in the dust? And when I ask about what this strange of affairs I hear stories and tales.⁽³⁾

Naguib Mahfouz (1911 – 2006) a Nobel prize winner (1988) wrote about 36 novels 19 Collections of short stories and six plays: "*Death and Resurrection*", "*The Legacy*", "*The Survival*", "*A Draft Proposal*", "*The Task*", "*The Chase*". Perhaps there are some others on which critics are still confused about their belonging. Mahfouz wrote these plays after the June 1967 defeat, and the uncertainty which dominated the minds in the late sixties and the early seventies. In that context, language seemed exhausted, and the best thing to do was to keep mute as possible as it could be. It was natural for Mahfouz to share his fellow citizens that state of pessimism which prevailed during that period of Egyptian history.

He tried to adopt the techniques of the absurd dramatists who appeared in Europe after the Second Great War (1939 – 1945), especially Eugène Ionesco (1909 – 1994), Samuel Beckett (1906 – 1989), the Russian Arthur Adamov (1908 – 1970) and even Harold Pinter (1930 – 2008). Mustafa Riad observes:

A graduate of the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Mahfouz is familiar with existentialist concepts that provide the starting point for the theatre of the absurd. In an interview with Mohamed Barakat, Mahfouz reveals his admiration for Beckett and Ionesco among other European and American writers (209).⁽⁴⁾

Narrow places, limited time and limited number of characters are among the main features of absurd plays. However, Mahfouz tried his hand in theatre to prove that he can be a

playwright of the first class if he decides to do. The eight plays he wrote can be easily matched, sometimes outrun those plays written by Beckett, Pinter or even Albee. His relationship with a historical moment does not negate the universality of his plays; all literary works are 'closely linked with a historical moment', critic Mustafa Riad writes:

Though Mahfouz introduces certain features of existentialist philosophy and the theatre of the absurd in his plays, his achievement is far from being purely universal as it is closely linked with a historical moment: the June 1967 defeat. In an interview with Fouad Dawara, Mahfouz gives an account of the effect of that severe shock on him. [I passed through certain circumstances when I lost my balance. I wrote a number of works that were apparently absurdist. However, my commitment to a sense of belonging ruined their absurdity. It seems that I have not completely surrendered to the absurd; I rather presented it while fully desirous of going beyond it. (240).⁽⁵⁾

In the six plays he wrote in the late sixties and early seventies, he portrays the state of the Egyptian mind at that time. Ostensibly, he did not want to be a dramatist in the strict sense of the word, he knew that he was mainly a novelist, and a short story writer in the second place. Mahfouze uses silence extensively in these plays, and makes it a main character in the plot, and main technique besides the use of time and place.

This paper attempts to investigate the poetics of silence in these plays to know how he used this strategy as a dramatic tool for achieving the purposes of the dramatic structure in his plays. It is known, since Aristotle, that silence is an important dramatic element. Leslie Kane Writes:

Historically, then, silence has been employed by playwrights to evaluate, censure, or support an act. to indicate manipulative relationships, to increase or release dramatic tension, to make words more significant by their contrast with silent response, to reveal interior states of being, and to make thematic statements. In addition to

these traditional functions of nonverbal symbolism, the modern playwright, reducing the role of speech and increasing that of silence, has employed the latter as a metaphor for evanescence and entrapment.⁽⁶⁾

Naguib Mahfouz was a master of technique, a master of using silence in fiction as well as in the six plays he left us. The audience generate meaning through the silence aspects Mahfouz uses in his writings. He could employ all forms of silence to suggest the hesitations of his character, to express their fears and apprehensions. His characters sometimes use silence to enforce authority over the other characters, to impose respect, or even to express their helplessness and inability.

It can be said that silence and sound are the main tools of expression in the writings of Naguib Mahfouz in general and in his plays in particular. His pauses, especially his stage direction pauses, are not empty, but filled with suggestions. There is an attempt here to demonstrate that silence, in all its various aspects, is a main participant with the characters in the six plays, and that Mahfouz has learnt the power of silent communication in an early stage of his literary career. If we follow Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence, we can say that Mahfouz has benefited from a long tradition of using silence in drama, from Sophocles to Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, and Edward Albee. He benefited from Beckett his fragment language, incomplete thought to express anxiety. Silence sometimes means death or lack of existence.

The six plays which Mahfouz has written in the late sixties and early seventies of the twentieth century are so entwined together with the silence metaphor, the reader of the six plays get the impression that they are one long play of six acts. They are united by the use of silence in its various aspects and forms. The six plays also have something in common: the mute character in each play. In "Yuhyui wa Ymeet" (*Death and Resurrection*) the speaking characters are attached to the mute elements he described in the stage direction pauses at the beginning: the *pharaonic Mastabah*, the palm tree, the waterwheel, and the lying dead

people inside. Man faces a real challenge by these mute elements, until he imagines a man laughing mockingly at him:

Man: Do you hear his sarcastic provocation!?

Woman: a violent storm in which misery is reveling.

Man: He challenges me!

When *Giant* enters, *Man* discovers that he is a relative of the laughing mute character. He seems to be pursued by the two characters: *Giant* and the laughing *Man*. In "Al-Tarikah" (*The Heritage*), we shall notice that the boy is answering an invitation by the father who is the mute character of the play, to come to take his heritage. We connect between the Gabalawy of *Awald Haritina* and this speechless father. In "Al-Nagat" (*The Pursuit*), muteness is represented by the vagueness surrounding the characters and the events. In "Mashrou' LI-Munaqashah" (*A Draft Proposal*) we don't have mute characters, but there is muteness about the play which is not existent in its full. In "Al-Muhemmah" (*The Task*), there is a half mute character who follows the young man wherever he goes.

By his use of silence in these plays Mahfouz could be enlisted among the great playwrights who employed this metaphor, who could reflect the horror of the void, the sudden suspension of the naturel course of life, expressing anxiety and bewilderment. Silence and darkness are usually associated in these plays; to express man facing the unknown, while the unknown controls his life. The mythic forces attack man's privacy and corrupts his life. Mahfouz concentrated on the past which entered into fierce dialogue with the present after the defeat. The past was enforcing itself on the present, but what past? and how to invite it from the distance?

Mahfouz expresses these forces through silence which comes in various ways, in the stage direction pauses and suspended sentences, the mute characters, as well as in the suspension dots or ellipses scattered in his texts. Table (1) indicates Mahfouz's distribution of silence in the six plays:

(Table 1)
Distribution of silence in the six plays:

Forms of silence						
The Plays	SDP (Stage Direction Pauses)	PS (Pointed Silences)	MC (Mute Characters)	SS (Suspended Sentences)	SD (Suspension Dots)	Total
" <i>Yumeet wa Yuhyi</i> " (Death and Resurrection)	40	6	5	-----	76	127
"Al-Tarikah" (The Legacy)	35	11	2	12	36	96
Al-Nagaa (Survival)	36	18	1	6	68	129
A Draft Proposal "Mashrou' LI-Munakashah"	40	23	-----	5	36	104
The Task "Al-Muhemmah"	56	18	-----	6	69	150
The Chase "Al-Mutaradah"	69	36	1	6	90	202

"Yumeet wa Yuhyi" (Death and Resurrection)

In the first play entitled "*Yumeet wa Yuhyi*" (*Death and Resurrection*), silence is the main governor of the dramatic action starting with the title in which the silence of death comes prior to the boisterousness of life. The play opens with the stage directions having six silence indicators: the planted palm tree, the silent waterwheel, the Pharaonic '*Mastabah*' (steps) engulfed in darkness, and the lying ghosts, or dead bodies. This silence is broken by the sounds of a quarrel coming from outside. The first character is a young maid wondering when these sounds will disappear from this universe, which means that this universe will be better without these sounds. We read in Nehad Seleiha's translation:⁽⁷⁾

Woman: God in heaven! will these sound never be still?
Will your sun never shine on a tranquil contented earth?

(listens with growing anxiety)

Is it some old sin that I have to expiate? an affliction inherent in my blood? Or simply errors that we have lacked the honest to put right?

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(A man is flung backwards violently on the stage from one wing, and falls unconscious at the foot of the palm tree. The Woman bends over him attentively and pats his cheeks gently. He opens his eyes, looks at her, then closes them once more, murmuring:

Man: Father!

(The woman continues stroking his cheeks. He opens his eyes for a few seconds then closes them murmuring:

Man: Mother!

(She goes on patting his cheeks and he opens his eyes again for a few moments and closes them murmuring:

Man: My wife!

Woman: Bear up.

(She rubs his cheeks and he opens his eyes, coming to and fro and looks at her long and mumbles:

Man: It's you!

Woman: Thank God... Come on... get up... Lean on my arm...

(She helps him up... wipes his forehead with a handkerchief, and tidies his hair... He gradually recovers his balance and becomes steady on his feet):

Woman: Are you better now...

(The man does not answer, but looks his normal self), (Seleiha, 134 – 135).

In this short encounter we have fourteen silences: 6 stage direction pauses and 8 suspension dots, 5 pointed silences (the palm tree, the waterwheel, the 'Mastaba', the lying dead bodies, and unconsciousness). The suspension dots establish silence as a governing dramatic metaphor for unfinished thought, nervous way of thinking, confusion and restlessness. They actually refer to a delay in giving answers, thus stressing the role of silence in the text. With the other silence aspects (the pointed silences and the stage direction pauses), suspension dots help in revealing the characters' image; they are moving in dangerous, unpredictable world. The world of the characters is engulfed in obscurity and darkness. The role of these silence effects is enhanced by the role

of the mute character in the play. Sometimes short pauses express a reluctance to stop speech and break silence. This is different from the role played by long stage directions pauses which paves the way towards expressing the atmosphere in which the characters move. Mahfouz uses mute spaces in his dramatic texts to go hand in hand with the speaking parts.

The real hero of most of the plays is not these characters which appear and disappear, it is the unknown, the absence, the speechless character who produces voices and threatens, only Man hears him. It is the voice of the silent past which governs the present, it is clear from Man's confessions to *Woman* in which he refers to a mute character that is the secret of all suffering, sometimes the silence of the mute becomes very oppressive to the other characters in the plays. Nehad Selaiha comments on the play:

Death and Resurrection was written in the aftermath of the 1967 war with Israel, referred to sometimes as defeat, sometimes as 'setback' in the political jargon of the media. Giant is a transparent symbol of the U.S.A., or, simply, the Western powers; the aggressive mocker in the wings is an embarrassingly oblivious theatrical objectification of Israel, the 'Plague' is a metaphor in the tradition of Camus's *La Peste* of Nasser's dictatorship, with Nasser himself as the ironically doubtful benevolent dictator .. the new head of the institutions from which the Tiresias-like blind beggar escapes, sacrificing security and comfort for freedom.⁽⁸⁾

According to Selaiha, the Mahfouz could not help disguising his hostile attitude towards Nasser's regime in vague language and uncertain dialogues. Muteness is a strategy he could use with high dexterity and skill. The young Man hears the voices of his dead ancestors, addressing them, seeking their help as we read in Selaiha's translation:

Man: (addressing the steps).

Can you hear what we say?

(After a while a voice echoes: 'Can you hear what we say')

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Man: How did you cope with death, and how did he treat you?

(A voice echoes his question).

Man: (as if to himself, his eyes still on the steps)

They are echoing me ... You!... There's a deep meaning there that no intelligent man can miss. There! They're beginning to move!

(The recumbent figures are completely still throughout)

They are presenting me with an old precious image ... See! The battle is thickening .. Martyrs are falling !... The fighters are sealing the walls of the fortress in swarms like ants ... The fortress has surrendered... Hark! the cries of victory are thundering, piercing the walls of hundreds of years! (Turning to the Woman) ... Did you see? Did you hear?

Woman: There was nothing to see, or hear!

Man: their triumphant cheers soaring above the bodies of the martyrs have shaken me to the core.

Woman: These are but wild fancies churned by our passion for blood.

Man damn the lolling indolence in the rose-arbours.

Woman: Alas for the wisdom of the soft, happy days!⁽⁹⁾

Man is challenged by a mute character, there is at least one mute character and some mute sources that send voices from the left and right. The mute elements practice their oppressive activity on the characters, especially on the young boy. The mute practices his oppressive silence on **Man**; by producing sarcastic laughter towards him, and **Man** is threatened by this audible silence. This oppression is made observable by the ten suspension dots in the following exchange: inability to understand, confusion and frustration and most importantly; fear:

Man: His sneering laugh turns the air in my lungs to dust.

Woman: The best thing to do is to stop your ears.

Man: But I was given ears to listen with.

Woman: Listen to my passionate cooing.

Man: And what cooing that has been .. It has aborted my resolution .. Goodbye.

Woman: You can't ever do without me.

Man: Well, you'll be a hope I shall put off for later when everything is right.

Woman: Nothing will be for you if you leave my arms.

(A distant echo of mocking laughter).

Man: Farwell.

Woman: Ignore the noise and sleep in peace.

Man: No. I have go silence it before I can sleep.

Woman: Just one more word .. that I may not despair.

(He puts his fingers in his ears. She gives him a long look, then withdraws off stage right. The man directs is gaze to the steps at the back).

Man: Only, the dead can reveal to me the truth about life. Only the dead.

Echo: The dead.

Man: She's gone ... but won't go far ... I can never be totally free of her... nor do I want that ... But I need to know the truth ...

Echo: *The truth.*

Man: Speak plainly ... Don't talk like rocks.

Echo: *Rocks.*

Man: Tell me of death and life.

The echo: *life.*

Man: Who is a hero?

Echo: *Hero.*

Man: Is he a warrior?

Echo: *Warrior.*

Man: Or a man of peace?

The echo: *Peace.*

Man: Damn .. Damn .. Damn ..

(Turns away from the *steps and shouts*).⁽¹⁰⁾

When **Woman** leaves, **Man** becomes face to face with silence; the **mute** and his sarcastic laughter, the **echo** and its meaningless repetitions, and finally with the "*steps*" with its lying dead bodies. His despair leads him to seeking truth from the mouths of the dead. But the dead does not answer except with the

echoes which he hears inside himself. In this encounter alone we have four stage direction pauses. All are related to **Man's** attempt to escape the oppression of the characters around him: the mute, the echo, and **Woman**. Together with the suspension dots, silence adds to **Man's** dilemma, and enhances his critical situation between the past and the present.

We have four mute characters in addition to the mute absent character who threatens the speaker with his sarcastic loud laughter. The scene of the soldiers destroying the tower, and the martyrs falling, the cheers of victory, with the mute threatening character, are all images of the past trying to enforce itself on the present. **Man's** critical situation between the past with its gone glories and the miserable present with its dangers drives **Man** to near-madness. The dramatic conflict is gradually drawn from outside to the depths of the character's mind. While **Woman** is an invitation to life, the muteness and silence around **Man** invite him to transience. The echo of silence, which is death is louder than the real sounds of life. **Man's** conversation with the echo results in inviting **Doctor** whose answer to **Man's** pretension to be enthusiastic to science is to refuge to silence with shaking his head in doubt. This silence is the best reaction towards the speaker's pretense, it is made certain when the speaker looks to the "*Mastabah*" engulfed in darkness, adhering to the past. The encounter runs as follows:

Doctor: This definitely shows that you have no confidence in science.

Man: On the contrary. I am very enthusiastic about science...

(The doctor shakes his head doubtfully)

Man: (pointing to shadowy steps at the back) I come from an old stock renowned for their conquests in the field of science. They were its first champions.

Doctor: Pointing to dark, coupled with boasting, constitutes the third symptom.

Man: But I'm not one of those who .. I am all for the modern age.. I am fanatical about it.

Doctor: Fanatical?!

Man: What I mean is, I am no enthusiastic about it. I only turn my ancestors in moments of stress, when I absolutely have to.⁽¹¹⁾

But **Man's** love of the past, and his inability to shake it off is evident in pointing to the silent darkness, and in the three suspension dots, which mean that he cannot get rid of the past inside him, and that his bewilderment between the old and the modern is his real sickness, or his real plague which means that it is a general epidemic. **Man's** encounter with **Doctor** does not result in any kind of cure, but **Man** refuges again to the silent "*Steps*" which includes the dead lying bodies, and the silent voices. He has another two encounters left, the first with a giant, the second with a beggar. The beggar seems to come from the place where the silent bodies lie down after **Giant** and **Woman** leave him:

(The **Giant** and the **Woman** exit separately through two doors on the right. The **Man** ponders for a while, then looks back at the "*Mastabas*" lying in the shadows).

Man: It is time you spoke.

Echo: You spoke.

(He waves his head at them angrily ... and paces up and down in thought. A blind man enters, feeling his way with a stick; he bends his head in the direction of the man, straining his ears).

Beggar: Anyone there?

Man: Yes.

Beggar: Was it you who called me?

Man: No.

Beggar: It was your voice. My ears never deceive me.⁽¹²⁾

(The sarcastic laughter swells)

Man turns round and advances intently towards it. The **Giant** leaps at him. The **Man** pushes him away. The **Giant** holds him by the shoulders and flings him in the direction of the '*mastabas*'. The **Man** disappears in the shadows for a moment then

springs back like a ball that had hit a wall; He falls headlong on his face, then stands up swaying.

It appears as if his movement has woken up the sleeping figures and drawn them out of their inertia. The first rolls down the steps until he reaches the front of the stage and pulls himself up slowly and heavily like someone waking up. Another follows, repeating the same movement sequence, and he is followed by many others, male and female, all repeating the same movements until the stage fills with them.

The Giant retreats slowly until he disappears in the direction of the mocking laughter, stage left. The sleepers are now fully awake, they hold themselves up straight, and their faces wear a determined look. The whole scene is conducted in mime. The man marches in the direction of his enemy with firm rhythmical steps. The rest march behind him resolutely until all disappear, and only the sound of their steps is heard. The **Woman** removes her hands from her face, listens sadly, then looks far away). The End

The researcher can deduce that silence represents the past, and that speech represents the present. The vocal parts of the play enter in conflict with the silent spaces in the text. The struggle between **Man** and the mute elements as made known by the stage directions pauses, ends in a partial victory of **Man** over darkness. **Man** seems to help others to wake up and move towards his goal.

Al-Tarika (the Legacy)

The Legacy recalls Mahfouz's well controversial novel "Awlad Haratina" or "The Children of Gabalawy" in which silence plays an important role in determining the destinies of the important characters. The play starts with **Man Woman** being confronted by silence which acts its role upon them as an oppressive character. The house is silent as a tomb, and when **Woman** advises Man to clap he doesn't do because he knows the character of the father. Then the exchange is followed by a short silence, the scene runs as follows:

(A young couple enter. They look around curiously and examine the room as if they are seeing it for the first time, then stand in the middle.)

Man: The house is so silent, like a graveyard.

Woman: Clap your hands to let them know you're here.

Man: He doesn't like that. I still remember what he's like (pause).⁽¹³⁾

This dialogue between **Man** and **Woman** takes place in a silent house in which Man's father lives. Although the father's presence is paramount from the beginning to the end, he is engulfed in silence, we know after that that he died, and left a heritage for the young Man. Also from the exchange between **Man** and **Woman** we know that Man recalls the character of Idris in "*The Children of Gabalawy*", this is indicated by the following short dialogue between Woman and Man:

Woman: Perhaps he knows about you ahead more than you think.

Man: If he did, he wouldn't have put that ad in the papers asking me to come home.

Woman: Odd that a man of God could not discover that you were a bar-owner and a dirty adventurer.⁽¹⁴⁾

It is Idris in "*Awlad Haratina*" who owns a bar, also this sort of aggressive conversation fits the character of Idris. If Idris in the novel represents Satan, why does the father invite him in this play? We have 35 stage direction pauses, 11 pointed silences, 2 mute characters (the house and the father), 12 suspended sentences, 36 suspension dots. We have some silence around Woman, who is she? Most suspension dots suggest the baffled silence of confusion and ambivalence. We have more pointed silences than in the first play. Most of these pointed silences are short silences, indicating a feeling of confusion and oppression. falls into short silence when he remembers the character of the absent father. Silence here engulfs this character, his nature, his personality, and even his ideas. Of the eleven pointed silences we have eight transitional ones; which means they take the conversation to new levels of

thinking. In these eight pointed silences the characters move from one area of thought to another.

The 35 stage direction pauses are devoted to consecrating darkness versus light. Darkness is the other side of silence. In "*The Legacy*" the holy man lives in darkness, the narrator muted him to leave the space for the other characters to unfold their encounter with these mythic forces chasing them. These spaces of darkness and silence help the reader to reach to the minds of the characters. Silent spaces become the voice of their minds and hearts. The main characters are drowned in silence and obscurity; when **Man** and **Woman** come to the house of the holy man, an adventurer tie them up in ropes and leaves them helpless. Tying up in ropes means enforcing silence on their bodies, deprive them from movement, leaving them in darkness and void, thinking of a way out of their trouble. Now silence is around them, they want to get rid of it by noise, but nobody will hear them:

Woman: Darkness will come and we'll still be here tied up in this haunted house.

Man: Light or darkness ... It doesn't make much difference.

Woman: We have to find a way out of this hole!

Man: Yell. Your voice is sharper than a bullet.

Woman: No one will bear us.

Man: We have to wait then, haven't we ? Either someone will come unexpectedly and save us, or else death will.

(Pause during which they make unsuccessful attempts to free themselves).

Woman: Why did your father want you to come?

Man: That secret has died with him.

Woman: What did you think?

Man: I thought it was the yearning of an old man's heart.

Woman: But that wasn't all you thought.

Man: And I dreamt of a fortune.

Woman: And he gave you one.

Man: And I have lost it.

Woman: But he wanted you to take over after him, didn't he?

Man: It was a ridiculous idea.⁽¹⁵⁾

The vocal activity of the two characters while tied up in ropes does not negate their inability to move, which means another kind of silence, silence of movement. The conversational flow is running in another kind of silence; the physical silence. The conversation between the two characters does not add to the plot or the sequence of events, it is a conversational pause, a waiting interlude until the coming of the officer, and the resumption of the basic course of events. Darkness, the haunted house, the need to yell, and the death of the father with his secrets, are all auxiliary indicators of silence, the silence found inside the characters, an indication that the unsayable is heavier than what is said. The father's absence, or the father's silence is the main player in the actions of the play. ⁽¹⁶⁾

"Al-Nagat" (The Rescue)

All the characters of the six plays are unidentified, nameless. In "*Al-Nagat*" we have silence around the woman who pushed into Man's house, why? Who follows her? What is her crime? Where does she come from? Who is her husband? Even in the house which received her, we have silence around the owner of the apartment, we don't know who is **Man**. This play has many suspension dots which shed doubt on the ability of the characters to speak out to express themselves directly and obviously. They are surrounded by mythic forces which push them towards silence. In spite of the fact that **Man** and **Woman** has entered into direct conversation with each other the moment she got into the house, this conversational encounter does not say much. In their speech **Man** and **Woman** move from silence to silence, from secret to secret.

Woman's behavior needs interpretation; **Man** needs this interpretation to save himself from the police. After a while, Man's life needs interpretation as well, but they don't have the ability to unfold secrets. At last they agree to live together a kind of threatened life, overwhelmed by dangers. But the real danger facing them is the muteness of the unseen, the hidden, the unforeseeable. In their initial exchanges Man and Woman

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struggled to unfold the silence around their lives, for example in this conversation:

Woman: I meant to treat me like a woman who is in terrible need of ...

Man: Yes?

Woman: Protection.

Man: From what?

(Pause)⁽¹⁷⁾

Woman seeks **Man's** protection from a danger awaiting her, but what is the nature of this danger? She is silent about. When **Man** asks her about this danger she refuges to silence. This silence is what governs the vocal part of the text; it is deep inside and regulates their dialogue and behavior.

Man: But you haven't told me yet who you are.

Woman: That doesn't matter at all.

Man: I think it does.

Woman: No, It's of no consequence whatsoever.

Man: I won't press you. But I have another question. Did you come for me in particular ? I mean do you know me?

Woman: You were the first one to let me in, that is all.

Man: You have tried the other flats?

Woman: Yes.⁽¹⁸⁾

By such conversational spaces the characters struggle to penetrate silence; by asking about the folded, the obscure, the vague and the unsaid. They are threatened by the vague areas of their lives. The man does not know the woman, the woman does not know the man, accidentally some of the **Man's** secrets unfold, and danger increases around the **Man**. Who is this woman? Is she married or single? Why do the police pursue her? What is her crime? What is her character? Endless questions posited by the text without answers. Who is the man? What is his crime? Who is his friend? What is his knowledge? Also endless questions without answers. Silence imposes itself on everyone. The woman does not know what will happen after a while, when she expects she acts

erroneously and kills herself. The man does not know that the woman committed suicide, he carries her outside hoping of a near wake up. Communication is there, but silence hides inside what is communicated. We can easily say that the muted character in this play is the unknown which determines the courses of the lives of the characters. The play ends with the death of the woman who commits suicide, which is another manifestation of silence.

The man turns his back on the woman and faces the door. She fetches a tube out of her bag, takes out a pill and swallows it with what is left in her glass. She staggers, then falls over the table, sprawled on her face. She is dead. The Man does not realize what has happened. He is trying to make up his mind whether to stop where he is or go to the door. He looks back and sees the Woman lying on her face).

Man: Are you so drunk, ... you have fallen asleep?

(He looks at her placidly).

Man: you're such a pretty young woman.

(The bell rings).

Man: We wasted such valuable time arguing!

(Another ring at the door)

Man: You can rest. We met ast strangers, but we are two of a kind.

(He moves close to her and is about to bend, as if to kiss her, when he hears the voice of his friend shouting behind the door, 'open the door'. He hurries and opens the door laughing, the Friend slips in and shuts the door behind him).

Man: You frightened the life out of us, damn you !

Friend: Who is the Woman you have?

Man: You are back to your old jealousy, are you? Despite the siege around me? What is a big fool you are! The idea of betraying you never even crossed my mind.

(The Friend looks at the Woman, then laughs out loud relieved)

Friend: I have wronged you with my suspicious.

Man: You're a fool.

Friend: When did this sweat heart arrive?

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Man: She was already here when you first came.

Friend: Why did you hide her from me?

Man: She's the woman the police are looking for.

Friend: How many drinks has she had?

Man: I didn't count.

Friend: And is the darling now asleep?

Friend: Topsy-turvy, as though it was the end of the world.

Man: While my darling is fast asleep.

Friend: She's quite beautiful. Who is she?

Man: The same woman for whose sake is the world has turned topsy-turvy.

Friend: You're drunk.

...

Officer: Was the lady hit?

Man: No. She's ... She's sick.

Officer: You'll be in danger if you stay here. Leave at once.

(The officer withdraws inside the room. The shooting increases all the time. A bullet hits the electric light, and the room is plunged in darkness. The Man, in silhouette, crawls towards the woman, and shakes her to wake her up)

Man: Wake up ... You have to wake up.

(He shakes her with more force).

Man: I suppose I'll have to carry you; there's no help for it.

(He carries her in his arms and staggers slowly towards the door.

Man: They did not come to arrest you, or to search the flat. You're safe my darling. I am safe too. We're both safe. Despair will be something of the past. You're safe now and I am safe and you will be mine forever.

(He leaves with his burden. The shooting continues).⁽¹⁹⁾

In this short encounter silence is represented in two suspended dots, four stage direction pauses, and a mute body. It is the mute which is recurrent in this encounter more than the other types of silences.

Mashrou' LI-Monaqasha (A Draft Proposal)

We have 4 stage direction pauses, 20 pointed silences 23 ellipses 36 total 69 silences: if we translate

The director: We should open the season with an appealing production.

The actress: (sighing) art is actually beauty and torture.

The actor: (looking in his watch) when does the author come?

The critic: He is on his way to us.

The director: Theatres increased and competition became stronger to a brutal degree.

The actor: On us the burden of keeping the top lies.

The actress: This is what I meant by 'torture'.

The critic: Do you think the author finished writing the play?

The Director: I don't think he did, but he'll talk to us about the general idea.

The Actress: The season will not start before a month.

(The door opens to the left and the secretary enters)

The secretary: The author comes.

(The author enters, the secretary gets out and closes the door. The author seems somehow aged, but he is of the kind difficult to guess his age. He is a handsome, healthy in spite of ageing. The director, the critic and the actor shake hand. He goes to shake hands with the actress in her sitting. He goes to the office to stand reckoning on its front. The director and the critic move the two seats facing each other in the front of the office. The actor goes back to his sitting beside the actress).

We have two conversational silences in this short dialogue. The first when the actress sighs, a gestic language which takes place in silence. The second silence occurs when the actor asks about the coming of the author, he looks in his watch, a stage direction pause (SDP) which suggests a lot about the character of the speaker (the author): that he is a restless, impatient with the

first sign of arrogance. The third is the second long stage direction pause between brackets in which the author enters. From this moment we read the conversation between the author, the actress, the actor, the producer, and the

“Al-Muhema” (*The Task*)

The young man meets a man in the desert, he thinks that he follows him wherever he goes, a young woman joins a young man and asks him why does the man follow them. The follower is a repetition of the mute in the "Takes and Gives Life". The young man faces silence from the beginning. A man is pursuing him. He seems to be the same man we meet in the last play entitled "*Al-Mutaradah*", the mute with the whip. Even when a young woman enters, the man remains practicing his pernicious task in determining the action of the others characters. The young man and the young woman ask him to fulfill his task, but there is silence around this task. The characters do not know anything related to the task, the reader is not allowed to recognize this task.

Al-Mutarada (The Pursuit)

This play is the longest of the six plays, the richest one of silence: richest of suspension dots and stage direction pauses. It has also one mute character and four other speaking characters: The White, the Red, the Bride, and he Wife. The conversational space is almost left for the White and the Red who practice their game of living surrounded by the dangers represented by the mute character who is described by a stage direction pause as:

(A well-built man, ostensibly strong, wearing a black shirt and a black trousers catching a whip, in spite of his strength and youthful features, no single black hair in his white head.

The two young men give way looking at him cautiously, while he stood erect sending abstract looks in the vacuum moving his feet all the time long in the same place).

The Red: Did you notice?

The White: Yes.

The Red: Do we go to another place?

The White: Let's play if you have really a desire to play.

The Red: While he is looking at us?

The White: Why not?

The Red: (looking at the Man) he doesn't stop moving although he doesn't leave his place.

The White: But it is important that he doesn't interfere in our affairs.

The Red: But he follows us wherever we go.

The White: This is not an interference in our affairs. (Silence)

The mute appears as a powerful presence that haunts the characters with his enigmatic relationship with the other characters, and with the events in general. Most pointed silences are transitional silences, the thought of the characters moves to a new level of thinking. The most important character in the play is silence represented most in the mute character whose speechless movements controls the actions of the other characters. The mute character is usually helped by darkness which consecrates silence and ominousness. The transitional divisions are not transitional in the strict sense of the word; they are just intervals during which the characters change appearances.

In part the two characters (the White and the Red) try to question the mute, but he does not answer. What does this mute and his whip represent? Does he represent these blind mythic forces which haunts people and curb their life movements, barriers between them and progress. Does he represent, if we speak politics, imperialism and its constant attempts to draw the others back to square one. In part three the White and the Red get involved in a marriage relationship with a woman. But they are threatened by the mute, he is an impending danger looming over their lives. All the time they try to avoid this danger. They decide to speak to the him:

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The Red: (addressing the man) What do you want?

The White: (to the man) Sir .. Why do insist to waste your time in vain?!

The Red: (to the man with more severity) Are you allured by your strength? Are you supported by one of highly ranked? Then, you must know that we became related by marriage to one of those highly ranked, the father of this lady, we became three supported by a strong circle of unpretentious families.

The White: (to the man) My brother is severe, but finally we descend from a kind-hearted man who was your friend.

The Red: (with severity) I have no longer forbearance for this ridiculous interference !

The Bride: Neither me.

The White: (to the man) What do you want sir? As if you are not satisfied with anything we do?

The Red: (to the man) Speak out .. you have to speak out.

The Bride: (also to the man) Respect the sacred family life.

The White: Let's invite to our wedding party, what do you think?

(Silence)

The Red: (addressing the wife and the White) No hope!

The Bride: unfortunately!

The White: (with a heard sigh) We have a family anyway!

(The man resumes his movements to and fro whipping the air hearing a loud cracking .. they retreat from him in clear panic).

The mute's negative participation in speech does not mean inactive involvement, or that he does not have a role in action; he regulates the action and dialogue of the other speaking characters. The mute in this play is the center of action. His dumb-show works as a source of dramatic suspense. The reader expects him to speak in any moment. (It is a usual technique used by Sophocles in his plays.⁽²⁰⁾ His silent presence could be treated as having a speaking potentiality. The mute also serves as portraying the impending danger hovering upon the other characters. The mute of this play is described as a " A well-built man, ostensibly strong, wearing a black shirt and a black trousers catching a whip. In spite of his

strength and youthful features, no single black hair in his white head". This description enhances his threatening of the speaking characters. They try to avoid him, to tame him, to befriend him or even to threaten him. Being speaking creatures they used all vocal tactics to get rid of his danger, but their talents of speech does not rescue them from the intimidation of the mute man. His muteness is the source of his strength, in addition to his apparent strength and the whip he catches in his hand. The mute appears fourteen times in the text, distributed along stage direction pauses, suspension dots, and pointed silences. The last appearance of the mute announces the retreat of the two speaking characters, the mute's win of the bride:

(The man hits the air with his whip make a great cracking..).

(The Red and the White come close. They try to leave the place but their feet do not help them. The bride goes on dancing alone. The man's movement is gradually reduced to the minimum until he stands on his feet (in his place). The bride dances alone in front of the mute man). (Curtain)

Muteness in this play proved to be a source of power, not weakness or passivity. Silence practices domination and speaking resists this domination. The vocal characters spend most of their time resisting the impending danger of the mute. Although the speaking characters also have moments of silence represented by the frequency of suspension dots, and suspended sentences. Leslie Kane catalogues a long list of different ways silence communicate on the stage. Some include: the dumb silence of apathy, the sober silence of solemnity, the fertile silence of awareness, the active silence of perception, the baffled silence of confusion, the uneasy silence of impasse, the muzzled silence of outrage, the expectant silence of waiting.⁽²¹⁾

We made a survey of the forms silence in the six plays, and we reached to a fact saying that all kinds of silences could not go beyond the following list:

Pointed silences:

Yuhui wa Yumeet

Losing consciousness /gazing /coyness /cowardliness /protesting
/laughter /surprise /astonishment /compliance /grief/ anger.

Project for Discussion

Silence of pride/interrogative silence/exclamation silence/
silence for waiting/silence of exhaustion/ silence of outrage/silence
of departure/ silence of expectation/ silence of beseeching/ silence
waiting an answer/ silence of justification/ demanding promise/
silence of surprise/ silence of fatigue/silence of indifference/
silence after laughter/ silence of hesitation/ silence of hope (silence
of hope)/ silence of respect.

Al-Tarikah

Silence of remembrance/ silence of feeling insult/ silence of
surprise/ silence of crisis/ silence of anxiety/ silence before
weeping/ silence of darkness/ silence of interrogation/ silence of
expectation.

Al-Nagat

Silence of thinking/ silence of waiting an answer/silence of
anxiety/silence after asking help/ silence of conviction/ silence of
interrogation/ silence of contempalation/ silence of cutting
speech/silence of abstinence from answer/ silence of keeping a
secret/ silence of thinking/silence of Conscience reprehension/
silence of respect/ silence for waiting for an answer/ silence of
surprise/ silence of agreement/ silence of thinking.

Al-Muhemah

Silence of sorrow/silence of fear/ silence of
contemplation/silence of kissing/ silence of embracing/silence of
anger/ silence of indifference/ silence of oppression/ silence of
inability

Al-Muataradah

Before resuming action/sorrow or grief/ remembering/
listening/ before or after telling a lie/ before choice/waiting a
coming/anxiety/before taking a decision/because of age/ regret/
remembering past failures/ surprise/new knowledge/

Suspended dots:

Yuhyui wa Yumeet: Apostrophe/ coyness/ self-addressing / farewell/ hesitation/doubt/hiding one's face/helplessness/over-anger / after a shock / incomplete thought. Al-Tarikah: Suspended speech/exclamation/beseeching/surprise/ before end. Al-Nagat: Suspended sentecnes/intervalling a series of questions/waiting for response/not being there/ self-talk. A project for discussion: Waiting / suspended sentences/anger/blaming / warning/threatening / pride. Al-Muhemah: Objection/threatening / beseeching / waiting / pleading. Al-Maradah: Ignoring / deciding / wishing/condemnation/denunciation/self-answering/between a series of questions/imposed silence/poverty/responsibility / social restrictions / resistance silence/ asserting speech / sensitivity.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the mechanics of dramatic silence in the six plays Naguib Mahfouz has written from 1969 two years after the 1967 defeat, enough reason for him to try his hand in the absurd, especially after the absurd has flourished after the second world war and reached its boom in the sixties and seventies in Europe and the United States, influenced mainly by Jean Paul Sartre and his seminal book "*Being and Nothingness*" (1943). We say dramatic because Mahfouz employed silence as an essential element in the dramatic structure of his plays. The paper tries to conclude that silence is also a character in each play, or a common denominator in the six plays as represented by the mute character which has its representation in each of the six plays.

We tried also to explore how silence is employed in the six plays to produce the sense of illusion, nothingness and futility in this life. We could determine two main forms of silence in the plays: pointed silences, and suspension dots silence. We reached to the conclusion that silence cannot transcend a number of about 60 forms of silence we enlisted their names in the final two pages of the research. Without a close reading of silence in these plays, the reader cannot really reach to a satisfactory understanding of the six plays.

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