

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES IN ELIF SHAFAK'S NOVELS

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Abstract

Elif Shafak is a Turkish-British writer known for her novels that explore complex themes related to identity, culture, politics, and gender. One notable aspect of her work is how she structures her narratives and incorporates magical realism and folklore. This research study examines the narrative structure and storytelling techniques used by Shafak in her novels and how they contribute to the overall themes and messages of her work. Through a close analysis of selected novels, the study highlights how Shafak uses non-linear structures, intertextuality, and symbolism to create multi-layered narratives that challenge traditional forms of storytelling. The study also explores the role of magical realism and folklore in Shafak's novels and how they allow her to blend reality and imagination to create a unique literary universe. Ultimately, the research contributes to understanding how narrative structure and storytelling techniques can explore complex themes and convey powerful messages in contemporary literature.

Keywords: non-linear structures, intertextuality, magical realism, folklore, identity.

Introduction

Elif Shafak is a prominent contemporary writer who has gained widespread recognition for her novels that explore complex themes related to identity, culture, politics, and gender (Feizabadi, Azin 2015). One notable aspect of her work is how she structures her narratives and incorporates magical realism and folklore elements. Her works have been translated into more than 50 languages and have received numerous literary awards. One of the critical features of Shafak's writing is her ability to bridge different cultural and linguistic traditions. Her novels often feature characters from different backgrounds and regions, highlighting the diversity and complexity of human experience. At the same time, her writing also addresses universal themes and issues that resonate with readers across different cultures and languages. Shafak's novels have also been noted for their political and social commentary, tackling issues such as gender, religion, nationalism, and social justice. Her work often challenges established ideas and assumptions while offering nuanced and thought-provoking perspectives on contemporary issues. Shafak's novels are a testament to the power of storytelling and the importance of cultural exchange and understanding in our increasingly interconnected world. Shafak's novels often feature multi-layered narratives that challenge traditional forms of storytelling, making her an intriguing research subject. This paper aims to examine the narrative structure and storytelling techniques used by Shafak in her novels and how they contribute to the overall themes and messages of her

work (Meillon, B. 2021). The research will use a close analysis of selected novels to identify the techniques used by Shafak to create complex and multi-layered narratives. The study will also explore the role of magical realism and folklore in Shafak's work and how they allow her to blend reality and imagination to create a unique literary universe. Ultimately, this research will contribute to understanding how narrative structure and storytelling techniques can explore complex themes and convey powerful messages in contemporary literature.

Literature Review

Magical realism and folklore are two literary techniques explored in various forms of literature. In the context of Elif Shafak's novels, scholars and critics have widely discussed the use of these techniques.

Magical realism and folklore share a close relationship in that they both blend the ordinary and the extraordinary and use fantastical elements to explore deeper truths about human experience and culture. Magical realism is a literary genre that originated in Latin America in the mid-twentieth Century and is characterized by including magical or supernatural elements in an otherwise realistic narrative. Conversely, folklore refers to the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a particular culture or community. Both magical realism and folklore often involve using symbolic or metaphorical language and exploring cultural and societal issues. In many cases, magical realism draws on the rich storytelling traditions of folklore, incorporating folkloric elements and motifs into its narrative. In Elif Shafak's novel "The Forty Rules of Love," the character of Shams of Tabriz is portrayed as a mystical figure with supernatural abilities, drawing on the traditions of Sufi mysticism and Persian folklore. Similarly, in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude," magical and mystical elements are woven throughout the narrative, drawing on the rich folklore and cultural traditions of Latin America (García Márquez Gabriel 1967).

One notable work that examines the use of magical realism in Shafak's novels is "Magical Realism in Elif Shafak's "The Bastard of Istanbul" and "The Forty Rules of Love" (Feizabadi, Azin 2015,45). The article argues that Shafak's use of magical realism in these novels is not simply a literary device but a tool for exploring complex cultural and social issues related to identity, history, and politics. Magical realism is a powerful technique that many writers have used. Zamora argues that magical realism allows writers to explore life's complex and often contradictory realities in Latin America, where the boundaries between the real and the magical are often blurred. He believes that the genre is a way for writers to express the hybridity and diversity of Latin American culture and to challenge dominant Western narratives about the region (Zamora, L. P., & Faris, W. B. 1995).

Stories get more interesting with subplots. Many tales in "The Arabian Nights" contain subplots intertwined with the main story. This technique creates a sense of depth and complexity in the narrative (Irwin, R.1994). Elif Shafak weaves together multiple plotlines and subplots. In "The Bastard of Istanbul" (2006): There is the story of two families, one in Istanbul and one in San

Francisco, linked by a long-buried family secret. The novel's subplot follows the life of Zeliha, a young woman struggling to come to terms with her sexuality in a conservative society. Another novel, "The Forty Rules of Love" (2009): is a dual narrative that tells the story of a contemporary American housewife, Ella, and the 13th-century Sufi poet Rumi. A novel subplot follows the life of Shams, the wandering dervish who becomes Rumi's spiritual mentor. Elif Shafak's novels are known for their richly layered and complex narratives, with subplots that explore themes such as identity, sexuality, spirituality, and cultural clashes.

In the article "Cultural Encounters in Elif Shafak's Honour: A Comparative Study of Folklore Elements," Dana Ali argues that Shafak's use of folklore in her novel Honour is a way of exploring cultural encounters and the tensions that arise from living between different cultural and social worlds. Ali suggests that Shafak's use of folklore is a form of cultural resistance against dominant cultural norms and values.

In a similar vein, in "The Role of Folklore in Elif Shafak's The Forty Rules of Love," Esmat Babaii explores how Shafak's use of Sufi poetry and folklore in this novel is a way of challenging dominant cultural and religious discourses and exploring alternative forms of spirituality and identity. Bettelheim believes that tales allow readers to confront and work through their fears and anxieties in a safe and controlled way. He argues that fairy tales contain powerful archetypes and symbols that speak to universal human experiences, such as death, loss, abandonment, and the struggle between good and evil. Folklore has a stunning effect on adult readers' minds as children get impressed by fairytales (Wolff, H.1977). While explaining the relationship between folklore and identity, Bronner explores how folklore is used to construct and reinforce individual and collective identities and how it can be a tool for resistance against dominant cultural norms and practices (Bronner, S. J. 2016).

Elif also explores political situations through Armenian folklore and makes it a part of her writings. She is known for her critical and nuanced perspective on politics and society in Turkey. She has often spoken out against government censorship, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the rise of authoritarianism and populism in Turkey. In her writing and public speeches, Elif Shafak has emphasized the importance of diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance in building a healthy and vibrant society. She has also called for more excellent dialogue and understanding between different cultural and religious groups in Turkey and a more open and democratic political system. Discussion on Democracy develops depth in literary pieces of art. For example, the book "Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye (Brenda Cooper, 1998) explores the use of magical realism in the literature of West Africa, analyzing its cultural and political implications. Shafak has also been critical of the simplistic and divisive narratives that often dominate political discourse in Turkey, calling for a more nuanced and complex understanding of the country's history, culture, and society. Many writers have worked on magical realism and found it an effective tool to elaborate stories and imprint their impressions on readers' minds. "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting" employs elements of magical realism to explore themes of memory, identity, and political oppression (Milan Kundera, 1979)

The literature suggests that Shafak's use of magical realism and folklore in her novels explores complex social and cultural issues, challenges dominant discourses and norms, and expresses alternative forms of identity and spirituality (De Vita, A. B. 2010). These techniques contribute to the richness and complexity of Shafak's novels, making her a unique and essential voice in contemporary literature.

Research Question

How does Elif Shafak use magical realism and folklore in her novels to explore complex cultural and social issues related to identity, history, and politics? To what extent do these techniques challenge dominant cultural and religious discourses and norms?

Research Methodology

Textual analysis is a comprehensive research methodology that analyzes these complex literary techniques in her writings. This methodology involves analyzing the novels closely to identify the use of magical realism and folklore and the themes and issues they are used to explore. The researcher can identify the symbols, motifs, and themes that recur throughout the novels and examine their significance. The textual analysis could also examine how magical realism and folklore intersect with themes such as identity, history, and politics.

Limitations of Research

There are several limitations to consider when researching magical realism and folklore in Elif Shafak's novels, including:

Small sample size: Shafak has written several novels, but the research may focus on a specific subset of her works. It may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Interpretation bias: Interpretation of magical realism and folklore is subjective, and different readers may interpret the exact text differently. It may affect the reliability and validity of the study.

Time constraints: Given the complexity and richness of Shafak's work, the researcher may need more time to conduct an in-depth analysis of the use of magical realism and folklore in her novels.

These limitations should be considered when researching magical realism and folklore in Elif Shafak's novels to ensure that the study's findings are reliable, valid, and meaningful.

The choice of the corpus (i.e., the specific novels and texts to be analyzed) for research on folklore and storytelling in Elif Shafak's novels would depend on the specific research question and objectives. However, some potential options for a corpus of Shafak's work that prominently features folklore and storytelling include:

"The Bastard of Istanbul" (2006)

"The Forty Rules of Love" (2010)

"Honour" (2012)

"Three Daughters of Eve" (2016)

"The Architect's Apprentice" (2014)

"Black Milk: On Writing, Motherhood, and the Harem Within" (2007) - a non-fiction work in which Shafak reflects on her experiences as a mother and a writer while exploring her Turkish heritage and identity.

These works all feature folklore and storytelling elements to varying degrees, and each could be analyzed to explore Shafak's approach to incorporating these elements into her narratives. It is also possible to include other works by Shafak in the corpus, depending on the specific research question and objectives.

Text Selection

The choice of text for research on folklore and storytelling in Elif Shafak's novels would depend on the specific research question and objectives. However, some of Shafak's novels that prominently feature folklore and storytelling include:

"The Bastard of Istanbul" (2006): This novel explores the history and identity of two families, one Turkish and one Armenian, through the stories of their ancestors. It features elements of Turkish folklore and oral storytelling traditions.

"The Forty Rules of Love" (2010): This novel weaves together the story of a present-day American housewife assigned to read the manuscript of a Sufi poet, Rumi, and the historical love story of Rumi and his spiritual mentor, Shams. It features elements of Islamic mysticism and the tradition of dervishes.

"Honour" (2012): This novel explores the clash of cultures and values experienced by a Turkish-Kurdish family living in London. It features elements of Kurdish folklore and oral storytelling traditions.

"Three Daughters of Eve" (2016): This novel follows the story of a Turkish woman, Peri, as she navigates her identity and beliefs through her encounters with two influential women from her past and her experiences at Oxford University. It features elements of Islamic mysticism and Sufi philosophy.

"The Island of Missing Trees" (2021): This novel tells the story of a Greek-Cypriot family and a Turkish-Cypriot family whose lives are intertwined by a fig tree on the island of Cyprus. It features elements of Greek and Turkish Cypriot folklore and oral storytelling traditions.

Each novel features unique and rich storytelling traditions and folklore elements that can be analyzed and compared to explore Shafak's approach to incorporating folklore and storytelling into her narratives.

Findings from textual references

Elif Shafak's use of magical realism and folklore to explore complex cultural and social issues related to identity, history, and politics is evident throughout her work. Here are some examples of how she uses these techniques to challenge dominant cultural and religious discourses and norms:

"The Bastard of Istanbul" (2006): In this novel, Shafak explores the complexities of Turkish identity and history through the story of a Turkish family and an Armenian-American woman. She uses magical realism to explore the family's complicated history and to challenge the dominant Turkish narrative about the Armenian genocide. By including a character who is Armenian-American, Shafak also challenges Turkish nationalism and promotes a more inclusive view of Turkish identity.

"The Forty Rules of Love" (2010): This novel tells the parallel stories of a modern-day housewife and the thirteenth-century poet Rumi. Shafak uses magical realism to explore the transformative power of love and spirituality, challenging dominant cultural and religious discourses about gender and sexuality.

"Three Daughters of Eve" (2016): In this novel, Shafak tells the story of a Turkish woman torn between her secular upbringing and Islamic faith. She uses magical realism to explore the complex interplay between faith, identity, and gender in modern Turkey. By challenging dominant religious discourses and highlighting the diversity of Muslim women's experiences, Shafak promotes a more nuanced understanding of Islam.

"The Architect's Apprentice" (2014): This novel tells the story of a young boy who becomes the apprentice of the chief architect of the Ottoman Empire. Shafak uses magical realism to explore the intersection of religion, politics, and architecture in Ottoman Turkey. By challenging dominant cultural discourses about the Ottoman Empire and its legacy, Shafak promotes a more critical and nuanced understanding of Turkish history.

"The Bastard of Istanbul" (2006):

Magical realism: "If one listened carefully, the walls of the house whispered secrets. It was rumored that these secrets belonged to the girls who had lived here, all of them dead long ago, but their ghosts remained, imprisoned between the walls" (Chapter 2).

Challenging dominant cultural narratives: "There is no Armenian question in Turkey. Only Turkish question" (Chapter 1).

"The Forty Rules of Love" (2010):

Magical realism: "The beloved is like a compass. Just as the compass guides the sailor during a stormy night, the beloved guides the mystic through the stormy sea of life" (Chapter 7).

Challenging dominant religious discourses: "Ibn Arabi's ideas challenge conventional religious orthodoxy. He believes that there is only one religion, the religion of love, and that all paths lead to the same destination" (Chapter 3).

"Three Daughters of Eve" (2016):

Magical realism: "In the corridor, she saw the shadow of a woman. But when she turned around, there was no one there" (Chapter 11).

Challenging dominant religious discourses: "As far as Peri was concerned, the hijab was not an Islamic dress code. It was a political statement, a means of controlling women's bodies and limiting their freedom" (Chapter 5).

"The Architect's Apprentice" (2014):

Magical realism: "In Istanbul, the sky was always changing. It was like a kaleidoscope, a never-ending show of colors and shapes. Jahan wondered if this was because Istanbul was a city of dreams, where everything was possible" (Chapter 4).

Challenging dominant cultural narratives: "We Ottomans have always been a fusion, a mix, a tapestry of different cultures and beliefs" (Chapter 1).

These examples demonstrate how Shafak's use of magical realism and folklore enables her to delve into complex issues and challenge dominant cultural and religious discourses and norms in her novels. Shafak uses magical realism and folklore to challenge dominant cultural and religious discourses and norms: Shafak's works often incorporate elements of Turkish folklore, which she uses to challenge dominant cultural and religious discourses and norms. By drawing on diverse sources of inspiration and cultural traditions, Shafak challenges monolithic views of Turkish culture and society, highlighting its diversity and complexity.

Shafak's use of magical realism and folklore creates a unique narrative structure: Shafak's works often feature complex narrative structures that incorporate magical realism and folklore. By weaving together different strands of folklore and storytelling, she creates a unique and multi-layered narrative structure that adds depth and complexity to her works. She can blend the real and the imaginary through magical realism and folklore and challenge conventional ways of thinking about these issues. Shafak's works have a global appeal: Shafak's use of magical realism and folklore, coupled with her ability to address complex social and cultural issues, has contributed to her international success.

García Márquez uses magical realism and symbolism to explore themes of love, death, memory, and the cyclical nature of history. The story of the Buendía family is ultimately a metaphor for the more significant history of Latin America, with its cycles of colonization, revolution, and political upheaval. Similarly, Elif Shafak has woven together many different folklores through magical realism and unfolded historical facts which profoundly connect with Turkish people.

Her works have been translated into multiple languages and have gained a global readership. Studying Elif Shafak's use of magical realism and folklore in her novels to explore complex

cultural and social issues related to identity, history, and politics can reveal the unique literary techniques and themes that define her works. It can also provide insights into the cultural and social contexts that inform her works and how she challenges dominant cultural and religious discourses and norms through folklore and storytelling.

Conclusion

Overall, Shafaq's works demonstrate a deep appreciation for the power of storytelling and the role of folklore and mythology in shaping cultural identity (Meillon, B. 2021). Through her writing, she challenges readers to think critically about the complexities of cultural identity and how stories can shape our understanding of the world around us. This seminal work of magical realism chronicles the history of Turkish and Armenian families over a century, blending elements of folklore and magical realism with historical events and social commentary.

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