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## MAGIC WITHIN THE ORDINARY – A PROBING OF ELIF SHAFAK’S THE GAZE

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### Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to explore magical realism in Elif Shafak's *The Gaze*. It is a qualitative research. The researcher substantiates that the novel's characterization, fluid time zones and landscape, the inexplicable metamorphosis, use of mythology and stylistic feature of metafictional writing contends that the novel is not mere fantasy. *The Gaze* incorporates reality but in an amplified manner which renders it to be magical realism. Shafak's own autobiographical liminal dwelling is interpreted as an unconscious elemental drive to mix the real with the magical in this novel. The research further develops the notion of hybridity by employing attributes of Self and the Other through stylistic and thematic features. The significance of the human gaze is also expounded upon as a tool of magic in the realm of the real. This study depicts how the banal sight of man renders creation and destruction. In this way, the penetrating gaze of humans is denoted as a tool of metafiction which can undo and re-create. Thus, the eyes perform everyday magic because sight precedes existence. Consequently, this research explores the contradictory need to be seen yet to be concealed from sight. Lastly, this study highlights the traumatic influence over one's psyche brought on by the unseen gaze.

### Keywords

Magical Realism, Metafictional Writing, Gaze, Trauma, Hybridity, Amplified Reality, Shafak, Numbers.



### **1. Introduction:**

Elif Shafak is an acclaimed Turkish writer whose works have been translated into more than forty languages. Shafak was born in Strasbourg, France in 1971 and raised by a single mother. "Life has always been very nomadic for me" (DLD Conference, 2014) she reckoned in an interview once. She has lived throughout the world starting from spending her teen hood in Madrid then returning to Ankara, Turkey. Then ensued her journey to the United States of America, Germany, Turkey and United Kingdom. Currently, she is dwelling in two zones; Istanbul and London. Having resided throughout the world, Shafak has imbibed a spirit of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism which is evident in her work. Consequently, she raises a vehement voice against identity politics.

Shafak's endearment for Istanbul is prevalent in using the city as a motif in her works. Many have lauded Shafak for her eccentric writing style which is always a canvas of juxtapositions. She fuses East and West, feminism and tradition, the local and the global, and Sufism and rationalism. Shafak pens down in Turkish and English just like she dreams in both languages. The author's writing technique entails of an amalgamation of the Eastern and Western style. She also paints a picture of a plethora of customs owing to her vibrant residing in multifarious places. She is also a strong champion of LGBT rights. Put simply, Shafak's autobiography substantiates that she dwells on the border space. This serves as an unconscious elemental drive for the author to

blend juxtapositions in her work. Therefore, it allows the application of magical realism on *The Gaze* in this study.

*The Gaze* was first published in Turkey in 1999. Its Turkish title is "Mahrem". Later on, an English translation was published in 2006 by Marion Boyar Publishers. It was translated by Brendan Freely. *The Gaze* is a historical fiction about the nefarious effects of one's judgmental gaze. The story revolves around a couple of dwarf, B.C and his partner who is obese. Both are gawked at when in a throng of crowd due to their abnormalities. Nevertheless, the gaze of onlookers is accepted differently by both. B.C faces the penetrating gaze with audacity and even pens down his own Dictionary of Gazes. On the contrary, the woman is enveloped in a complex at the hands of people's judgmental eyes. Underpinning this theme are sub plots of other tales set in different landscapes and time periods. This thought provoking work of art has been deemed by many to be literary fiction.

Magical realism is a relatively recently evolved literary phenomena also known as marvellous realism. This genre found its roots in art in 1925. The demise of expressionism lead to the advent of New Objectivity, the era of Post Objectivity. This in turn paved the way for magical realism.

Magical realism was a term coined by German art critic, Franz Roh in 1925 for paintings which he fathomed to depict the enigmatic yet mundane reality under the ideals of New Objectivity. Soon this art movement crept onto paper and ink. In retrospect, this theory had been slightly explored

by the German writer and philosopher, Novalis. He described sensitivity towards and acceptance of the prevailing magic of our reality as a quintessential element to decipher absolute truth. Perhaps, he inspired Roh to coin the term magical realism in “Nach- Expressionismus, Magischer Realism” in 1925.

In addition to that, another name attributed to magical realism is that of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. In fact, he is more affiliated with magical realism than Roh. He sought to convey the magic lurking in America. Thus, he termed it as *lo real maravilloso Americano* in his manifesto-essay of 1940 titled “On the Marvellous Real in America”. Carpentier’s geographically limited contribution has rendered a discrepancy in this definition. Many believe that only Latin American fiction is magical realism. Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “One Hundred Years of Solitude” strengthened this notion but it is noteworthy that magical realism has seeped into literature throughout the world. It is merely the disparity of cultures which makes the mundane a sight of marvellous whilst the same fantastical element remains sheer normality for the locals. Thus, the notion of fantastic reality is relative and ambivalent.

The marvellous is seen as embedded in the land of logic. Consequently, the settings of magical realism are from everyday life depicted with utmost accuracy and authenticity. However, the imbuing of fantastic elements in a rational world sets apart this genre from fantasy which employs magical settings. Put simply, magical realism is

the art of uncovering mystery lurking in reality which combines to form a reality that is magical. The facets of magic are adroitly weaved into reality that the reader is forever in a dilemma to decide whether the authenticity of magic superseded that of reality or vice versa.

Unification of paradox is a pre dominant trait of magical realism. The opposing pairs can be of life and death, pre-colonial and post-colonial time, urban and rural, and as Angel Flores remarks, “an amalgamation of realism and fantasy” (Flores, 1995). Thence seeps in hybridity. The plots break through barriers and borders to cause magical realism to exist on the border line, being neither here nor there yet encompassing both. The idea of terror is vital as there is always a character who inflicts misery and torture on others. Time is cyclical and settings are fluid. Plots jump from one setting to another, crossing barriers of time also.

Myths are incorporated in magically realist plots. A mythical mindscape is evident in such literature. “Anything can happen or un-happen” (Royale, 1995) in a magical realist work. This accounts for the use of metafictional writing. It is a technique of writing which makes the art of fiction writing shamelessly evident for the reader. Traces of carnivalesque are an attribute of magical realism. The carnivalesque allows defiance of natural laws. True to form, metamorphosis takes place in plots of magical realism which are beyond comprehensibility through facts and logic.

The most prominent writers of this genre are Ben Okri, Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The scope of this research lies in placing the novel in a new genre and to accentuate the marvellous within the real life of Shafak's world created in *The Gaze*. Following are the research questions which will be answered by this study:

- How is *The Gaze* not outright fantasy?
- Does metafictional writing serve as a tool to mitigate the psychological trauma of the protagonist?

## 2. Literature Review:

The earlier part of the novel has been censured as "maddeningly unfocused" (*Publishers Weekly*, 2006) for a novel exploring the poignancy of focus of human lens. While the latter part of the novel denotes the "unexpected emotional trauma, and (that) the atmosphere of fantastical levity clears to reveal an urgent, human pain" (*Publishers Weekly*, 2006). Consequently, Shafak is labelled to "probe the many ironies of appearance and perception" in daily life. (*Publishers Weekly*, 2006).

This research endeavours to enlarge the theme of appearance via magical realism. It will be explicated in this research that what appears to be "a strange, hallucinatory work" (Kirkus Review, 2006) of fiction in this plot is in fact "an amplification of the scale and categories of reality" (Leal, 1995).

Many view the novel as a befitting example of "magical schizophrenia" (*elifsafak.us*, n.d.). The connotation of *The Gaze* being an exemplary

work of magical schizophrenia renders it to enter the realm of fantasy. This is so because magical thinking is based on fantastical constructs of mind. Patients of schizophrenia create new dimensions for themselves which are sheer fantasy. Such a label inadvertently portrays an image of the book being a work of fantastic literature. Nevertheless, this research paper aims to refute such claims by analysing it under the light of magical realism which is a world of reality intermingled with mystery. The existence of even a single realistic element shatters the façade of *The Gaze* being a fantasy.

A review of 30 June 2006 in "The Independent" rightly remarked about Shafak in the following words: "Shafak is more than a worthy heir to Isabel Allende's brand of magic realism. A quiet intelligence underpins the novel's flamboyant surrealism" (*elifsafak.us*, n.d.). It is felt that the terms magic realism and surrealism are too disparate to be converged in one sentence. They are poles apart because surrealism is a work of the unconscious sphere when unleashed in its unrestrained totality. Whereas, magical realism denotes conscious life. Moreover, unlike magical realism, surrealism employs dream motif. Consequently, this research paper will try to refute this review by exploring conscious reality mingled with magical elements. Effacement of surrealism will be manifest by prevalence of a logical and rational world in this text.

Research proves that magic realism has been used as a metaphor by writers to comment upon the political turmoil of their country. This study will

also try to highlight political motives that compelled Elif Shafak to use the technique of magical realism. Symbols of Ottoman Empire and modern day Turkey will be critically probed to find an apt argument which would justify the use of historic symbolism. Furthermore, the psychological aftermath of the liminality of Turkey and its loss of past heritage will be shown through characters who are deemed to be symbolic of such a phase.

“Throughout the novel, I told stories within stories and then destroyed them one by one” (Shafak, 2003). This technique is prevalent at the end of the novel in its most blatant form. It qualifies as metafictional writing which is an attribute of magical realism. The researcher will try to form a symbolic connection between Shafak’s metafictional writing and erasure of old Turkish word. This will be attempted to suggest a stance regarding Turkish history and politics. Put simply, Ottoman Empire was erased in order to write Turkey onto paper.

Author Salman Rushdie reflected that “you can get at the truth in a different way” (2015) with the aid of fantastic reality. This research will also attempt at the depiction of unveiling truth through enchanting means “grounded in an actual, quite strong vision of the real” (Rushdie, 2015).

### **3. Research Methodology:**

This research entails a content-based, textual analysis of Elif Shafak’s *The Gaze* as the primary text. The applied theoretical framework is Franz Roh’s art theory called Magical Realism. The reviews pertaining to the aforementioned author,

novel and theory form the secondary sources of this thesis. Both, print and electronic media have been utilized as a secondary source. “Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community” (1995) by Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora has also been consulted as a part of the secondary source for this research.

It is a qualitative research with specific focus on the grounded-theory style. It is an inductive study and not an interdisciplinary research. This thesis will open new avenues for the novel as a piece of magical realism. *The Gaze* was narrowed to literary fiction, fantasy and surrealism only but this research has attempted to broaden the horizons associated with Shafak’s novel. The significance of this research lies in the use of magical realism and magical spaces to evade psychological trauma.

### **4. Discussion and Analysis:**

#### *4.1 Thriving on Border spaces*

As the name suggests, Magical Realism mixes two spheres, namely magic and realism. Consequently, a third space emerges. Existence thrives on this border space, neither being overtly on one side nor on the other. Such a liminality is all encompassing as it absorbs two contradictions. By being neither here nor there, it is everywhere; in both regions across the border. Thus, the strip of border space is magical and curtails stark realities simultaneously.

The analyzed novel depicts this liminality through hybrids of humans and animals such as the Sable-Girl. Mingling fiction with facts and realistic

settings with magical tents creates liminal spaces. La Belle Anabelle is seen as a border species for she is inexplicably the product of genetic combination and a ghost from a legend who possesses Madam de Marelle's mind causing the "shameful intercourse" (134).

This study highlights specific words indicating border space. Their recurrence adds to the theme of liminality. The cherry-colored tent is always open "after the evening call to prayer" (111). This call to prayer is of Maghrib when the sun sets and literally depicts a border between daylight and night. This moment of "threshold" (27) is symbolic. The tent's liminal timings brim it with a fantastic reality, a "world of spectacles" (263). Furthermore, this timing is crucial as it links to another recurring pattern of darkness. Darkness is omnipresent in the novel. Spectators of the west side tent close their eyes to bask in darkness, the Sable and young boy undergo spiritual "union" (59) in darkness. Likewise, the couple go out in disguise in the fold of darkness. The novel also begins at night time. Darkness is imperative in order to "not...be seen" (125). The vilest act of the novel occurs in a dark shed immersed in a "terrible fear of being seen" (253). Shafak repeatedly employs a dark time to assert that "some things should remain kept out of sight" (251) based on the intrinsic "right to remain far out of sight" (251). By employing darkness, the author grasps its foil, light. Light is metaphorically shed onto the debate of being seen and the desire to be unseen. The flair of a Human Rights activist is manifest in the author's plea that

humans have a "right to remain far out of sight" (251).

"He (Mehmet) wanted to melt as soon as possible, to free himself from the rigidity that confined his heart and to become liquid again" "as a drop of wax" (119). Mehmet's birth is an "extraordinary" (34) incident for he is unlike normal infants. "...the smell wafting from the baby was definitely that of wax" (35). Thus, Mehmet enters the list of liminality having been born as a human but made "definitely that of wax" (35). Wax is neither solid nor in gaseous form. It accumulates the space of border as a liquid and "flows" (35). The attribute of flowing connotes an ease affiliated with liminality. Dimensions "flow(s)" (35) into each other forming liminality just like ink mixes with water. Moreover, wax is a symbol for the need of spiritual flexibility ("Wax", n.d.). True to form, Mehmet's tent is reminiscent of Sheikh Fariduddin Attar's seven valleys in "The Conference of the Birds" which were an allegory for a spiritual journey. Mehmet's tent serves the same role of being a means to "purify" (71) oneself. The presence of a fountain and sea nearby connote baptism.

Put simply, Mehmet's urge "to become liquid again" (119) echoes the yearning for liminality. In a way, he has attained liminality due to his "extraordinary" (34) physical composition. His link with wax is felt to be befitting since he becomes a candle of wax lighting the way of others amidst the darkness of his tent. He "purifies the night" (227) through his performers. "The face of La Belle Annabelle was as briskly

fluid as the river” (152). This water imagery testifies to Mehmet’s ability to cause “renewal” (153) of souls of the audience. The “renewal” (153) is a metaphorical spiritual journey which enables not only the audience but also the reader to forsake the “sin” (220) of gazing.

It is consequential that the mysterious Mehmet comes out of the womb of a normal, realistic woman. It is felt that this movement of inception is an emblem of how magic emerges from within our reality according to magical realism. In addition to that, Mehmet’s fantastical composition is accepted, admitted and integrated as a part of Pera’s reality by adjoining characters. His sisters light up lamps to ensure that the room is warm lest Mehmet freezes to death. This acceptance of the unreal as a part of reality enables a magical realist reading of the text as opposed to deeming *The Gaze* to be fantastic literature.

Another character denotes presence of liminal spaces “La Belle Anabelle’s face was a frontier without borders... Her face belonged to neither West nor East” (152). Although a superficial reading intimates “a frontier without borders” (152). The claim of belonging “to neither West nor East” (152) strengthens the notion of her representing border spaces. “A frontier without borders” (152) has a fine line where both borders meet and merge. It is this line of mixture which forms a third space known as the border space. It suggests nothingness as well as everything. “Her face belonged to neither West nor East” (152) like Shafak’s homeland, Turkey, which belongs no

where yet is in both East and West. The area of Asia Minor is a border space akin to La Belle Annabelle’s face which shows marks of human ancestry alongside myths. The real and unreal merges within her to form a third liminal sphere “without borders” (152). As a result, La Belle Annabelle personifies Turkey’s dilemma of existing on a border space on the world map. It lies neither in the European hemisphere nor in Asia and yet it is in both lands.

Magical realism portrays liminality as a construct of post colonialism. Since this form of literature emerged in the postmodern era, it is a rich canvas of pre and post-colonial times. Hence, hybrids exist on border spaces haunted by the pre-colonial ingenious past and post-colonial future as a replica of the Self.

It is striking that Turkey was never colonized yet reeks of the aftermath of colonization. Turkey came into being on 29th October 1923 with a new constitution which annulled the previous Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was defeated in World War 1 alongside Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria. These were the Central Powers which were to be sliced up between the vanquished Allies. Amidst international hue and cry, the Ottoman Empire was being jabbed by its internal conflicts. Kamal Ataturk led a successful rebellion to join the New World of modernization and forego old political mores of the Ottoman Empire. On attaining power, Turkey turned over a new leaf. A Western system of education, constitutions, western attire in lieu of Fez hats, effacing of Turkish words, ban on hospices and

Sufi activities was a step towards modernization. Atatürk asserted that in order to be at par with the ruling powers, Turkey had to learn their ways. (“Kemal Atatürk”, n.d.). This imitation is akin to the mimicry of colonized Indians and Africans. Wilful modernization is not disparate from intimidating colonial rule imposed on natives. Both faced similar consequences of fragmented individuals in society with two opposing factions always at daggers drawn. Thus, the streaks of pre and post westernization of Turkey are tantamount to the outcome of colonial rule. Hence, *The Gaze* can be inferred with the same lens as the ones used for novels on colonialism. Any form of adopting Western trends breeds the same result of liminal existence.

Istanbul is an apt example of border spaces. It harbors the Bosphorus Bridge with either sides of Istanbul submerged in two different zones. The protagonist depicts the modern end with her suitcase consisting of western attire. On the other hand, the grandmother represents the rigid face of Istanbul. In an interview, Shafak describes Turkey in a manner which mirrors the aforementioned interpretation. “This in-betweeness...might have given mutually elusive albeit interwoven factions – a rigidly pro-Western elite and as a backlash to them, this other conservative camp. Both gorge on each other’s mistakes and both have a similar simplistic understanding of history” (Shafak, 2003). However the girl is coerced to wear the garb of liminality by cladding herself in eastern attire despite owning “shorts...and hats” (208).

It is felt that her rape is also liminal. The rape does not cause her to lose her virginity in the literal sense but it does figuratively. The East and the sub-continent deem the improper touch of a stranger man as defiling the female body making the victim a non-virgin. Even though the girl does not lose her virginity, she is thrust on the border space doomed to be neither a pure virgin nor a girl who has lost her virginity through rape. Thus, she becomes a hybrid and dwells on border spaces.

#### *4.2 Writing writes itself*

Since magical realism incorporates the unusual, it also entails metafictional writing. Metafictional writing is when the author shamelessly accepts and intentionally depicts the process of writing. Consequently, there is a presence of ongoing writing as is evident by B-C working on his *Dictionary of Gazes*.

Following the trend of other postmodern metafictional pieces, Shafak also blurs the boundaries separating the reader and the writer by directly conversing with the former. “Anyway, if we’re going to see what we could have passed over without looking at, we have to go to Siberia of 1648 now” (46). This adds an affect which swallows the reader into the text as an organic being.

The author usually makes the act of fiction writing evident with the help of parenthesis. Even B-C talks to the readers pulling them into another world of fiction within fiction. He leaves notes for the reader at the end of a few of his entries: “(Research songs sung during the game!)” (181)



and “(Research fatty’s childhood)” (242). These tasks can be surmised to be from Shafak also. Either way, they enliven reality and shatter the façade of the novel being a separate world. She shows it to be a fictional account of the reader’s world. Consequently, she follows Bertolt Brecht who broke the Fourth Wall between the audience and characters. Brecht was also quoted by Roh as a magical realist (Guenther 1995). Even the protagonist is in direct dialogue with the readers in the last chapter. “My stomach is so full that I suspect I might not be alive” (257). It would be an understatement to reckon that the last chapter is a conversation between her and the reader.

Metafictional writing is a characteristic of magical realism since it probes into the deep recesses of our reality where we create a small and fictional worlds mimicking ours with the aid of words, paper and pen. In addition to that, metafiction is an enticing magic arising from within the ordinary life. The novel depicts that anything is feasible in metafiction. True to form, Shafak creates and then destroys the characters of Sable-Girl and La Belle Annabelle. One even conjectures if B-C leaves the protagonist’s life or is erased off paper. This undoing of characters is carried out in the last three chapters. Shafak takes her readers in a different future altogether. “She was curious about this young man and his famous beauty. She wanted to see” (250). “Then, suddenly, whatever it was that passed through her mind, she let go of the box.... She gave birth to rusty-haired colored children....the name of La Belle Annabelle was never encountered” (251).

Similarly, “as the two men moved off into the distance, two souls were about to unite inside the basket” (253). With the process complete, “he was now the tribe’s shaman...the name Sable-Girl never appeared” (253). Both characters were “never born” (253). This undoing of their lives tarnishes the timeline. Changing the past changed the present and Mehmet affirms this when both actresses literally went “missing” (254) as if they had been devoured by thin air.

This undoing of characters’ lives and altering the apparently unchangeable past mirror reality where men unwittingly enact this magic daily. Adding to a scene when narrating some juicy gossip is a means of changing the past, for your tongue adds new incidents which were hitherto not recorded in history. If the passage of time of all human lives could be noted down in a book then there would be consistent erasing and adding by invisible hands. Man undoes every day without realizing it. This is the magic of reality simply termed as Magical Realism. Ironically, Turkey has a similar past. It is felt that Shafak’s use of metafiction is a scathing remark on how the Turkish alphabet was changed overnight to create Turkey out of Ottoman Empire. The inhabitants saw the erasing of their past and were then compelled to write or enact new lives for themselves as modern Turkish. It is noteworthy that undoing commences in the last three chapters which are also titled differently. Earlier chapters were labelled with the place mentioned before the year. However, the metafictional, or alive chapters which show the pen working are titled vice versa

with the year preceding the place. It is felt to be so to accentuate the meddling of time.

Numbers play a vital role in this art of metafiction displayed by Elif Shafak. Numbers one, two, three and zero are specifically consequential. The first three are harbingers of the protagonists's childhood trauma which she can never seem to "overcome" (263). "When I say "one" you're to close your eyes. When I say "two" you're to open them. The game isn't over until I say "three"" (215). Put simply, one denotes the formation of a scar. Two is the deepening of the "wound" (146). While three was respite in the form of healing. Alas, "she looked directly into the nothingness and saw...the absence of Three" (218). He never uttered number three which ultimately made her live a life in her personal purgatory. "She was constantly staggering between the two (one and two); she diminished because she couldn't reach their sum" (228). Coincidentally, this incident is narrated in chapter eleven. If the two digits, one and one, of eleven are added, they form two. It reiterates that "she couldn't reach" (228) to number three all her life. Nevertheless, after having read B-C's dictionary, she purges herself of the "talismanic power of eyes" (253) just like Mehmet's tent-goers did.

In addition to that, it is felt that the Dictionary of Gazes brings about a similar affect as Mehmet's tent did because the former is a reincarnation of the latter. The surroundings of B-C's flat in Hayalifener Apartments are a double of Mehmet's tent atop the hill near a fountain. In an alternate

and futuristic reality, "his flat was on the top floor" (239) near a hill which also had a fountain.

This study endeavours to prove that B-C is the reincarnation of Mehmet in 1999. Like Mehmet's cherry-colored tent, B-C collects stories in his Dictionary of Gazes. The dictionary means to show and hide "spectacles" (263) just the way it is done in Mehmet's tent. He even echoes Mehmet's words "Do you know, sometimes we get our deepest wounds through our eyes" (236)? Thence, both use the element of gaze in their respective display of a "world of spectacles" (263). Moreover, the protagonist describes B-C's most distinctive feature to be his eyes which is a striking similarity with Mehmet. "His eyes had always been strange" (184) like Mehmet's. "I looked at these two thin slits of eyes that have sworn not to express what they feel" (230) is a reflection of Mehmet's eyes which are "thin slits" (36). Both characters resemble each other and seem to see through "a curtain of wax" (234) over their eyes. Due to such inexplicable similarities, Mehmet is inferred to have "return(ed) to this world at another time" (254), that is one hundred and fourteen years later as B-C. Hence, the protagonist comes to terms with her past trauma after having read B-C's Dictionary of Gazes.

Moreover, in chapter twelve she metaphorically reaches to stage three when it is manifest that the protagonist murdered Else, the cat who was the sole witness of her sexual harassment. Absence of the "archive" (161), that is an eye, will render nonexistence. Hence, the protagonist is compelled to destroy her only "archive" (161) Elsa, the cat

who saw the detestable act in the coal shed. Killing her kills that moment from the past just like the floating balloon “ceases to exist when it isn’t seen” (258). “... our entire existence, as well as our non-existence, is founded on seeing and being seen” (235). Everything “exists when it’s seen, but ceases to exist when it isn’t seen” (258) because there is no proof of its existence. The eye commands presence and absence. Absence of gaze set upon an object nullifies it. Man only dies when he cannot see life with his eyes. “...the eyes may succeed in forgetting all of what they’ve seen...if there are no witnesses a person can forget the past” (227-228). Reversal of memory, which is forgetting, is attached to a witness solely because we see everything through reflection. It is only possible to view oneself in the mirror via reflection. Likewise, even our past is displayed to us when we see it in the mirror of another person’s eyes. We can only see ourselves “through the eyes of others” (175). Hence, closing their eyes impedes reflection which in turn validates void. The girl’s past is recreated by eliminating one memory by closing Elsa’s eyes lest they reflect the “sin that she had...recorded” (220) in her eyes. Without any reflection, the victim cannot see that facet of her past and it slips out of her memory. This exclusion of a moment is magical, immersed in her daily life.

Thence, finally she “overcome(s)” (263) her past nightmare. This is also achieved by metafictional undoing. Since “she couldn’t reach” (228) number three, the protagonist musters up the courage to count back from two – the stage where

she was stuck at. While chapter twelve makes her confront and “vomit out” (264) the past, the next chapter ensures “La Belle Annabelle was never born” (251) because she belonged to the tent of Part Two of the novel and two meant opening your eyes (for the audience and child in coal shed). This chapter is chapter thirteen. Three was already nonexistent so when three was minused out of one, it gave two as a result. True to form, “two never was” (251) in this chapter. This “number... (is) missing” (257) which alters the past. The man does not engage in oral sex with the child. Ensuing, chapter fourteen ensures Shamanhood of the young beardless boy. As a result, “One never was. The number One was missing” (253). One represents part one where Sable-Girl takes the stage so that the women can close their eyes. It also refers to the rapist unbuttoning his pants. With “number One...missing” (253), neither the Sable-girl exists nor the man’s pedophilia. The chapter ends at “Zero!” (254). At last, the descending voyage from three to two to one to zero has been completed.

It is felt that zero denotes metafiction for Shafak who nullifies characters and creates a new past, present and future. Moreover, the Z of zero is redolent of how the Dictionary of Gazes starts with Z too. Numerically speaking, it begins with zero and then follows the right sequence of numbers. Zero’s nothingness creates everything. Zero also effaces the scene of oral rape. The erasing of sub plots is parallel to effacing the past of the protagonist.

Zero symbolizes rebirth (Venefica, 2007). The female protagonist, with the manifest metafictional aid of the author, counts again starting from zero to create a new plot and new life for herself where she has “overcome” (263) the terror of the past. She is no longer the “object of people’s stares” (241). With the story rewritten, she assumes the opposite role as the novel ends at “I hold my breath, and watch very carefully” (264). She has metamorphosed from the one being seen to the onlooker.

A feminist streak is discerned in this metafictional undoing. The character who exercises the mysterious power of nullifying is a female. She reigns supreme over destinies and gives life to new stories akin to a woman bearing life in her womb. Earlier, Mehmet, a male character, had the reins of power in his hands when his inception removed a female being, his mother. In addition to that, he was the master of women like Sable-Girl, La Belle Annabelle and other females. His doppelganger, B-C is also encircled by a male-domineering ambiance. Nevertheless, the female rises high in the end and shows her power by wiping out existences. She is a miniature of divine power in this piece of fiction conferring the female gender an equal or even higher stature than the men of the novel. The phallogocentric world gets dominated by the Other or Female.

## **5. Conclusion:**

This research paper applied Franz Roh’s art movement, Magical Realism on Elif Shafak’s novel *The Gaze*. The novel intertwines various

plots which depict the unfamiliar embedded in banal life. It is a tale depicting the power of orbs known as eyes which can wrench apart a life or even give birth to a new beginning.

Through a thorough critical analysis, it is concluded that Shafak uses magical realism to accentuate reality in its full depth. The mingling of fantasy and reality are a means of unearthing a bigger truth that sight ensures existence.

It is evident from this research that an object only persists because it is in the reach of one’s gaze. It ceases to exist the moment it averts the eye. Therefore, the eye is synonymous to a metafictional piece. It harbors the power to undo and re-create.

Furthermore, elements of subversion, juxtaposition, political allegory, supernatural presence, inclusion of myth, fluid time and space attest to this novel as being a piece of magical realism. The inexplicable magical reality results in an ambiance infused with perplexity where the real and the unreal are relative terms.

Shafak’s autobiographical hybridity is deciphered as an unconscious elemental drive for sewing the alphabets of this novel with magically real threads. Shafak is torn between two languages, belongs to Turkey which exists at the point of threshold, and is a vehement cosmopolitan herself. Her free spirit leaps and breaks boundaries of all opposites forming a new and all-encompassing sphere akin to magical realism. Thus, it is felt that Shafak unwittingly blends the hidden mystery with overt reality in her captivating novel *The Gaze*.

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