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Narrative Structure and Postmortem Consciousness in Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*: An Existentialist Perspective

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Abstract
The current paper examines how Elif Shafak's 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World (2019) transforms the postmortem consciousness of the novel's protagonist, Tequila Leila, into a place of existential affirmation rather than despair. Leila, a murdered sex worker, maintains neural activity for exactly 10 minutes and 38 seconds after clinical death, during which fragmented sensory memories reconstruct her violated life in nonlinear waves. While his body lies in the belly of Istanbul, his dying mind performs a radical act: it says "yes" to every moment attack, exile, prostitution, friendship without resentment. The study is qualitative; data is derived through close reading of the primary text, supported by secondary sources from existentialism, narratives, and hermeneutics (postmortem consciousness). Leila's 10:38-minute journey of self-mastery is explored through a three-pronged theoretical (tri-theoretic) framework: a) Friedrich Nietzsche's existentialism (eternal recurrence, amor fati, will to power, non-resentment) as the content of consciousness each memory wave is a test of recurrence; b) Gerard Genette's narratives (anachrony, iterative summary, prolepsis, internal focalization, pause) as the form that enacts repetition the boomerang of self- blame "For years to come," (Shafak, 2019, p. 48) and the tangled web of time (Shafak, 2019, p. 56); c) Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics (Mimesis$_{1-3}$) as moral consequence the previously perceived trauma (M_1) is organized in death (M_2): "She, too, blamed herself," (Shafak, 2019, p.99) and reorganized for the reader (M_3): "Free at last," (Shafak, 2019, p. 30). The results show that Tequila Leila transforms herself not in life but in the space between heart and mind, transforming the

moment that broke the child into the story that liberates the woman. The corpse becomes the Übermensch, the water family becomes the communal master, and the Bosphorus becomes the salt that preserves the "yes." This study redefines postmortem consciousness as a narrative act of existential mastery, offering a new lens for foundational texts in literature, philosophy, and trauma studies.
Keywords: *Postmortem Consciousness, Nietszhean Affirmation, Existentialism, Eternal Recurrence, Genettian Anachrony, Ricoeurian Mimesis, Narrative Self-overcoming, Übermensch*

Introduction and background

In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* by Elif Shafak, the consciousness of the protagonist is introduced in a unique perspective as it is a long-term memory of the events in life that come back to the mind of a person even after death. The study presented in the present paper seeks to explore the way in which the fragmented narrative format of the text conveys the ideas of existentialism and breaks the traditional linear notions of existence and time. The book provides a groundbreaking conceptualization of the postmortem consciousness through the experiences of the main character (protagonist) Tequila Leila which culminates into providing meaning to the meaninglessness. Even the very title is related to the scientifically suggested theory that the human brain could be active during a short period after being physically dead which would be permitting any residual thoughts and partial memories *(News-Medical, 2019).* Shafak transforms this notion into an extended literary exploration, depicting how Leila's consciousness persists in a liminal state as she revisits significant moments of her life.

The present study employs Friedrich Nietzsche's existentialist theory with its vibrant applicability on the given text. The key elements of this theory is explored in Friedrich Nietzsche's masterpiece *Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883)*.

Radical Individual Freedom and Self Becoming

Nietzsche's existentialism philosophy begins with an autonomous individual who is not bound by the will of God or universal principles *(Lampert, L., 1986).* Being is against nature: humans have no nature and must create their own values and meanings through their own innate creativity *(Owen, D., 2007).* This radical freedom demands constant self-questioning, passionate affirmation of life, and rejection of passive conformity.

Rejection of Traditional Morality and Religion

Nietzsche proclaimed the *"death of God,"* dismissing Christian morality and metaphysical teleology as life-denying illusions *(The Gay Science, 1882).* Traditional values, rooted in resentment and herd mentality, stifle individual creativity *(On the Genealogy of Morals, I 7-8, 2006; Nehamas, A., 1994).* The task is to transcend these slavish moralities through reassessment, to develop new pills of value suitable for earthly existence *(Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, 2002).*

The Will To Power

The desire for power is the fundamental drive of all life - a creative, expansive force that manifests itself in self-control and growth *(Han-Pile, B., 2011).* Far from mere domination, it expresses the instinct to affirm, expand, and interpret existence, leading radical freedom into continuous becoming *(The Power to Will, 1901).*

The Ubermensch (Overman)

The Übermensch embodies the highest affirmation of life: a future ideal that overcomes nihilism *(Richardson, 1996)*, creates new values, and happily accepts eternal repetition. Not a biological superior but an existential achievement, the Übermensch represents the self-realization of humanity beyond resentment and degradation *(The Gay Science, 1882).*

The Existential Nihilism (Absurdity of Existence): Nihilistic Abyss (Amor Fati)

The death of God plunges humanity into meaninglessness and worthlessness *(Reginster, 2006).* Yet Nietzsche transforms this crisis into opportunity through the amor fati: loving one's fate *(Ecce Homo, —Why I am So Clever p.10, 1888; Ansell-Pearson, K., 1994).* By desiring the eternal return of all events, the individual affirms life in its fullness, transforming nihilism into a creative, life-enhancing existential force. *(Cameron, E., 2019)*

Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology and hermeneutics of memory *(Memory, History, Forgetting, 2004)* frames memory as an active, interpretive process rather than a passive store. Distinguishing memory (reminiscence) from recollection, he highlights the fragility and distortion of memory through emotion, trauma, and social forces. Memory pursues *"faithful"* truth but still deviates subjectively, serving as both a cognitive process and a moral imperative for identity, justice, and testimony. Importantly, Ricoeur highlights the structure of narrative: individuals shape experiences into coherent life stories, constructing narrative identities in the past, present, and future in all possible ways. His dialectic of memory and forgetting suggests the idea of forgetting as a possibility for forgiveness. For existence and consciousness after death, this suggests a true story enduring after death through the testimony of stories and relics, reconciling life with enduring meaning through ongoing interpretation.

Gerard Genette's Narrative model (1980) analyzes reoccurring of thought on the time of death explained in 12 chapters within the novel *Ten Minutes 38 Seconds In This Strange World* by Elif Shafak, aiming to identify the narrative techniques utilized in the text. The theoretical framework guiding this research is Narrative Theory, which has developed as an independent field within structuralism. Narrative theory seeks not only to interpret. Individual stories but also to understand the nature of storytelling itself. According to Genette (1980), there are six elements in which the narrative process can be analyzed. These six elements, as outlined in Peter Barry's *Early Theory (2009)*, are narrative mode, narrative focalization, person or narrator, narrative time, narrative package, and narrative vocabulary. The meaning of the narrative mood is whether the story is 'mimetic' or 'diegetic', 'Mimetic' means to 'show' or to 'dramatize' *(Berst, C. A., & Turco, A. 1990).* It is 'slow- talking' in which what is said is staged for the reader. 'Diegesis' means to 'tell' or to 'relate'. The part of the narrative that is presented in this way, more fast in which the narrator simply says what happens, without trying to show it. Narrative focalization is related to the point of view from which the story is told. And the category it falls into,

whether it is 'external', 'internal', or 'zero focalization' *(Zahrah, E., Shabbir, A., & Saif, M. 2025).* The person or narrator deals with the voice of the character, whether it is 'hidden' or 'overt'. The narrator can be homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, intradiegetic or extradiegetic. In extradiegetic, the narrator is "above" the story. While in heterodiegetic story, the narrator does not participate in the story. Characters become intradiegetic when they become the narrator *(Anam, S., Ajmal, M., & Sharif, H.R., 2024).* Moreover, ontological instability appears when the narrator exists but does not exist at the same time. The narrative time discusses the time of storytelling which sometimes includes 'flashbacks', 'analeptic', or 'proleptic' *(Mlynář, J., & Paulíček, M., 2020).* The narrative package focuses on how the story is told. Whether it is a 'frame narrative' (primary narrative), an 'embedded narrative' (secondary narrative), or a 'meta-narrative' (narrative within a narrative). And finally, the narrative of words deals with How words are presented. A narrative can be presented in a word in two ways one is known as The traditional narrative theory and the other is known as the modern theory *(Pier, J., 2014).*

The novel captures Leila's post-mortem consciousness unfolds through a structured recollection of sensory experiences and memories, revealing how her identity was shaped by love, trauma, and marginalization. The image of wavering thoughts of Leila as presented by Shafak provides a different perspective of existentialism, unlike classic literature on existentialism, which often regards death as the cessation of existence *(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*. In this perception, memory is a container of a long life after physical death. It is not an exception to the idea of Heidegger about the so-called abyss of nihilism where the sense of mortality determines human experiences, irrespective of absurdity and prudence *(Heidegger, M., 1927).* Leila is conscious of death but only in the sense that her consciousness is closely connected to her past relationships and Istanbul social political institutions at this moment of posthumous reflection and not in an abstract nothingness. The novel challenges the definitiveness of death by demonstrating how human relationships can surpass physical death and include existential values in interpersonal relationships as opposed to solitude of life.

Nietzschean existentialism, however, often emphasizes extreme freedom of choice *(Bigelow, G. E., 1961)*, and responsibility in the confrontation of the absurd to produce the self and become overman *(Britannica; Loeb, P. S., 2010)*. In addition to that, post-mortem consciousness manifests itself in the disoriented narration structure of the novel. The fragmentation and complex connection of human experience is brought to the fore through the associative as opposed to the chronological sequence of all the memories. This device is brought into employ by Elif Shafak in order to emphasize the existential paradox of memory: while it offers continuity beyond death, it is also ephemeral and ultimately dissolves as Leila's consciousness fades. Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) features a radical narrative experiment: the consciousness of a murdered sex worker, Tequila Leila, persists for exactly 10 minutes and 38 seconds after clinical death, during which her life is reassembled in non-linear, sensory-triggered fragments.

Although critics have noted the novel's feminist resurgence of marginalized voices *(Öğütcü, M. 2020; Yilmaz, S. 2021; Lee, R. L., 2004)*, no study has yet examined how this postmortem narrative structure functions as a deliberate enactment of existentialist philosophy. Repetition, Gerard Genette's formal mechanics of anachronism and focalization that is what is known as narrative structure theory (narratology), and Ricoeur's

tripartite mimetic reconstruction of identity in the face of death. Moreover, the studies are found on the thematic analysis of existential quest on the same text but the present research is an attempt to look into the protagonist's existential quest who gave meaning to meaningless regardless how miserable the circumstances were. Therefore, the central problem of the given thesis is twofold presented below:

1. ***Theoretical Gap:*** Current readings treat the 10:38 minutes as a metaphor or archive of trauma, but fail to recognize them as a structured philosophical performance in which the dying mind narrates its becoming of the Ubermensch.
2. ***Formal Gap:*** The temporality of the novel's fragmented, wave-like, boomerang-like form is described but not analyzed through Gerard Genette's narratives to show how prolepsis, analepsis, and iterative summaries operationalize Friedrich Nietzsche's eternal return and Ricoeur's moral renewal.

This study addresses the issues by asking: How does Shafak's postmortem narrative structure transform a space of biological extinction into a space of existential self- mastery, using Genette's formal tools to stage Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and Ricoeur's mimetic circle? And to what extent the protagonist Tequila Leila's postmortem consciousness challenges traditional existential quest? The absence of such a tri-theoretic framework cannot test the novel's most audacious claim: that a corpse can say *"yes"* to every moment of a violated life.

An Existentialist Perspective of Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World:* Friedrich Nietzsche's Existentialism

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes and 38 Seconds in This Strange World (2019)* serves as the primary text for this study, analyzing the protagonist's postmortem consciousness as a place of meaning-making rather than existential dread. The novel's representation of Tequila Leila's posthumous awareness challenges traditional existential assumptions and suggests that significance persists beyond physical death. This reading is contextualized by Friedrich Nietzsche's existential philosophy.

Structurally, the novel is divided into three parts: mind, body, and soul. The opening section, equivalent to ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds, unfolds through fragmented episodes marked by *"minutes"* in which Leila's consciousness remains active after death. Each part functions as an independent narrative memory while collectively reconstructing Leila's life through sensory memory and emotional reflection.

Elif Shafak used postmortem consciousness to criticize moral reductionism and social judgment, prioritizing life experience over moral binaries. Leila's memories expose systemic oppression, including gender-based violence, displacement, economic deprivation, cultural and religious barriers, and exploitation, which situates the novel within a feminist discourse on patriarchal power structures. However, suffering is not presented as meaningless. Rather, it becomes the basis for existential affirmation.

This approach is closely aligned with Nietzsche's existentialism, particularly the concepts of radical freedom, self-becoming, rejection of traditional morality, and the Amor Fati. Leila's postmortem consciousness transforms existential crisis into an existential quest, affirming life despite pain and marginalization. Through this framework, Shafak expands on Fredrick Nietzsche's philosophy by presenting postmortem awareness as an active force that resists nihilism and emphasizes individual meaning beyond death.

Individual Freedom and Self Becoming

The story begins with the protagonist Tequila Leila's time of death when she recalls her life events with pain and joy; the amalgamation enforces her to exactly figure out what she has gained from life. Her death moment especially her self-realizing time is presented in a literary as the writer who is the narrator uses the words 'ebb', and 'tide' which depict her ending time on earth that is a true representation of 'Mimesis' (imitation of something). Through Nietzschean existentialism, Leila's emerging consciousness affirms life despite biological decline. Genette's narrative explains temporal fluidity through the internal focalization and anachronism of the disintegrating past and present. Ricoeur's mimesis-III morally refigures this postmortem memory, transforming the fading perception into a narrative continuity that preserves identity and meaning beyond death.

"In the first time following her death, Tequila Leila's consciousness began to ebb, slowly and steadily, like a tide receding from the store. Her brain having run out of blood, were now completely deprived of oxygen…Time became fluid, a fast

flow of recollections seeping into one another, the past and the present inseparable." (Shafak, 2019, p.11)

Leila recalls her birth memory obliterates time through internal focalization, where embodied feeling initiates the formation of identity, transforming fear and blood into existential awareness and making the first claim to self, with flashback technique (analepsis) in which the protagonist is feeling the pain in the present while recalling her past with ontological instability approach.

"She saw herself a baby-naked, slick and red. Only a few seconds earlier she had left her mother's womb and slid through a wet, slippery passage, gripped by a fear wholly new to her, and she was now in a room full of sounds and colours and things unknown…blood trickling down her forearm." (Shafak, 2019, p.11)

Similarly, Tequila Leila recalls an incident similar to the death of a newborn, who was brought back to life by a midwife, symbolizing rebirth and renewal of existence.

"Underneath the sheath of the salt, the baby opened her eyes and stared into the milky nothingness. It felt lonely in here but she was used to loneliness. Curling into herself as she had done for months she bided her time." (Shafak, 2019, p.20)

Moreover, Leila's early consciousness affirms free will over 'Kader', privileges individual agency, and constructs meaning beyond religious commitment and scholarly authority.

"The old woman wondered. It was better if the baby found her own way at her own pace…were they cowards or were they as wise as the great Solomon himself? Who could tell?" (Shafak, 2019, p. 19)

The utterance affirms existence through expression, framing tears as ontological evidence. Leila's family waits for her cry to prove her existence. Internal focalization connects emotion to existence, connecting life, identity, and recognition through embodied response rather than silence.

"What took you so long? Cry, my dear Never be ashamed of our tear. Cry and everyone knows you are alive." (Shafak, 2019, p.20)

The statement enforces patriarchal determination, reducing motherhood to substitution. Through Nietzschean criticism, it presents the fate, emotional disposition, and initial negation of the individual that shape Leila's existential trajectory.

"Let Suzan raise her. She'll do an excellent job. You and I will make more children." (Shafak, 2019, p.22)

There still remains an identity lost problem that never satisfied Binnaz and, later on, Leila about whom to call *"Mummy"*: Binnaz or Suzan. As Haroun stated, Binnaz will be Auntie for Leila in social dimension. Internal focalization highlights the speaker's relational phenomena, and postmortem consciousness, demonstrating how memory and surrogate characters maintain meaning beyond physical absence.

"And who will my daughter call "Mummy?" What difference does that make? Suzan can be Mummy. You'll be Auntie." (Shafak, 2019, p.22)

Haroun named his baby girl Leila on name of her mother's name; he expected her to be pious, and virtuous like her mother depicts self-creation.

"I will give you my mother's names. Your nine was an honourable woman; she was very pious, as I am certain you will be one day. I will name you Afife- "Chaste, Untainted". And I will name you Kamile- "Perfection". You will be modest, respectable, pure like a water…" (Shafak, 2019, p.26)

Leila recalls maternal love, nurturing care, and biological exploration, using memory to create personal meaning.

"If your aunt sees us enjoying ourselves. She might feel bad, Mother said. You shouldn't kiss me in front of her." (Shafak, 2019, p.30)

"But Why? ", "Well, she never had children. We don't want to break her heart, do we?" (Shafak, 2019, p.34)

"She tried to consider what more they had in common, but the thought she kept returning to was this: all these years she had been scared of make-believe Gypsies who kidnapped small children and turned them into hollow-eyed beggars…May be it was they who had snatched her from her mother's arms." (Shafak, 2019, p.43)

In addition, Leila was found in an unresolved trouble; a riddle that was to solve but difficult to do so. She survived panic, bore a fear of being scolded by her beloved ones.

"Leila began to panic…everything was the same. And nothing would be from now onwards." (Shafak, 2019, p.44)

In a fifth-minute childhood flashback, Leila celebrates the birth of her brother the joy shattered by the arrival of her abusive *"uncle."* Postmortem consciousness uniquely focalizes her, transforming the trauma into reality itself.

"She seeing him scrutinize her like that, Leila was overcome by a wave of anxiety…Oh, bless her! She is jealous of the baby." (Shafak, 2019, p.79)

In *"Six Minutes"* Leila's postmortem consciousness recalls Baba's warning of divine retribution for her transgressions. This gives rise to her self-discovery: an existential quest for self-realization and the creation of meaningful meaning with homodiegetic focalization, revealing her temporal projection across years.

"She, too, blamed herself and would continue to do so for years come… everything she did and thought tended towards an all- pervasive guilt." (Shafak, 2019, p.99)

Leila finds true love in D/Ali, a light that leads her to freedom and self-realization. Rejecting everyone for survival, he guides her to her inner freedom, teaches her mad love in the midst of oppression, and fosters all-out resistance. Through internal focalization and mimesis that configure her death with homodiegetic voice, postmortem consciousness transforms personal pain into collective solidarity, offering hope for the future.

"D/Ali had taught her that rebellion wasn't just about shouting in the streets; it was about loving fiercely in a world that tried to break you." (Shafak, 2019, p. 156)

Rejection of Traditional Morality and Religion

Tequila Leila named herself 'Leyla' instead of 'Leila' to present herself as the Western or exotic because she traded 'y', of yesterday, for the 'i', of infinity. The quote illustrates internal, homodiegetic focalization with temporal projection and character defining function; and postmortem in the formation of one's identity, showing relational, moral, and ontologically enhanced consciousness.

"She was to be Leyla Afife Kamile…one eternal love and many clients as Tequila Leila. Why she insisted on spelling „Leyla‟ as

„Leila‟, and whether by doing so she was trying to make herself seem western or exotic, she would laugh and say that one day she sent to the bazaar and traded the „y‟ of „yesterday‟ for the "i‟ od

„infinity‟, and that was that." (Shafak, 2019, p.28)

Likewise, in her dying moments 'two minutes', Leila dreams of becoming a famous belly dancer-coin skirts swaying, sequins sparkling, finger cymbals clanging, darbuka daring as they move to the rhythm. Defying societal mores and religious restrictions, she longs for a self-chosen life free from external pressures.

"She longed to become a famous belly dancer one day. It was a fantasy that would have appalled her father…But Baba always said that dancing was one of Sheitan's myriad, time-honoured, tactics to lead humans astray. With heady perfumes and shiny trinkets, the Devil seduced women first, weak and emotional as they were, and then, through the women, he lured the men into his trap." (Shafak, 2019, p.33)

Leila faced restrictions from both parents. Her mother opposed the dance as her father. Inner conviction collided with painful hurt, as family boundaries swallowed her personal choices. She remembers that agonizing moment.

"Because her father was opposed to dancing, so was her mother- although Leila noticed that she seemed to waver in her convictions when there was no one else around." (Shafak, 2019, p.33)

Patriarchal regime constrains women. Homodiegetic focalization reveals Baba's misogyny, damaging reputation, and son Tarkhan. Leila flashbacks to seeking narrative identity, transcending the chaos of the past for self-created purpose.

"Baba took Tarkan's condition personally, certain that he had done something terrible to draw God's ire…Whatever life he had left, he would dedicate it to spreading the fear of God because he bore witness to the blows that on humans when they stopped fearing Him." (Shafak, 2019, p.83)

"His two wives could take care of his children. Baba was done with marriage, and done with sex, which, he now realized, just like money, had a way of complicating things… And as the years went by, those expectations and frustrations multiplied." (Shafak, 2019, p.84)

Gaining self-confidence, Leila confronts Baba: the freedom of the past is now forbidden. Defying conventions, the flashback illustrates, she follows her heart, fearlessly confronting his warnings against "pointless" pursuits - later recognizing their importance.

"And this how Baba waged a holy war in the house. First, he instituted a new rule. Leila was no longer allowed to go to the house of the Lady Pharmacist… swimmers and gymnasts in their skintight outfits were provoking lustful thoughts in pious menfolk." (Shafak, 2019, p. 86)

"But you used to enjoy sports, Leila reminded him…One day you'll appreciate it." (Shafak, 2019, p. 86)

The text shows Leila's violation of traditional ethics and religious principles, emphasizing existential freedom and rejecting inherited values. Through second-person narration and internal and external focalization, the story describes her consciousness and relational perspective, while childhood memories and symbolic details (such as the free betta fish) highlight the temporal layer of the experience. From a postmortem perspective, her burial, guided by Sinan, Jameela, and Zaynab, maintains identity, kinship continuity, and moral resonance, transforming personal struggle into enduring moral and existential significance.

"Leila did not want to be buried, said Zaynab." (Shafak, 2019, p.292)

The Will to Power and Leila's Struggle

Through internal focalization and temporal layering, Leila decided to overcome all the fatalities of life; and by using her will power to bearing marginalization, exploitation, and abuse and constructing meaning for her existence. She did not surrender against the obligations and restrictions of her family, also refused to accept the limitedness of her life and went beyond her boundaries that is what her postmortem consciousness let her to do so now.

"13, April 1963. Age sixteen. Leila had fallen into the habit of following the world news closely-both because she was interested in what happened elsewhere and also because it helped her not to think too much her own limited life." (Shafak, 2019, p.84)

In the same way, the narrator recounts Leila's struggle for meaning amidst her uncle's inevitable abuse. Sipping samovar tea with him and his wife, enduring his demonic gaze, the consciousness of the postmortem ignites her nihilistic willpower for self-overcoming.

"Leila felt her heart constrict…Never in life had she felt as lonely as she did now." (Shafak, 2019, p.95)

In the opening chapter titled *"The End",* Leila's dying mind recalls the fragmented experiences of the past, presenting her life with purpose. Presented in a blocked, non-chronological sequence at the moment of death with temporal complexity, and mimesis of her thoughts masks death, making the events singular. Although his body is helpless, his active consciousness examines mistakes, transgressions, and futility believing that deliberate self-control can break through meaninglessness.

"There was so much she wanted to know… time could not be unravelled as though it were a ball of yarn." (Shafak, 2019, p.1)

Leila defies Baba's restrictions, emotionally twirling her hula hoop despite being called a Yazidi asset or a trick of the devil. Flashbacks with internal focalization and homodiegetic voice now empower her to reclaim freedom and meaning.

"How could the same shape that separated and trapped one human being become a symbol of ultimate freedom and sheer bliss for someone else." (Shafak, 2019, p. 101)

"The circle, the shape of captivity for an old Yazidi…sad memory for a girl in an Eastern town." (Shafak, 2019, p.103)

Leila is moving toward revealing her uncle's bloody secrets that have long been buried in her chest his abuse triggers her soil-eating, signaling an impending pregnancy.

"You told me about this woman in your village, remember? You said she ate sand, broken glass…even gravel. " Yes, but that poor peasant woman, she was pregnant", Auntie sad haltingly." (Shafak, 2019, p.102)

Leila defies patriarchy by asserting her rights in a tense, constrained world. Internal homodiegetic focalization sheds light on her flashback: a deviant stance for survival reveal temporal projection of future epitomizes the role of postmortem consciousness in existential agency beyond religious boundaries and external pressure.

"In the eyes of Allah, a religious marriage is enough" (Shafak, 2019, p.108)

"And what if I refused to marry Tolga?" (Shafak,2019, p. 108)

Leila uncovers Baba's deception: Auntie was her real mother. Courageously facing the chaos, she triumphs in the moment of death.

"Which aunt? I thought she was my mother. I she or is he not? No one answered. This house is full of deceptions. Our lives have never been normal. We are not normal family…Why are you always pretending?" (Shafak, 2019, p.109)

Leila once asked relatives to gently resolve her uncle's abuse. The flashbacks fuel her independence, defying the false patriarchy. Self-advocacy turns pointless resistance into a life purpose.

"Enough, Leyla! Mother said, her frown deepening, "We all are trying to help you here" Leila spoke slowly. "I don't think so". I think you are trying to save Uncle." (Shafak, 2019, p.109)

Leila recalls revealing her uncle's long-standing sexual abuse to her family, who had long dismissed her as a victim. In silent agony, she later freely revealed every detail, fearing no consequences.

"Her heart pushed against her chest… Baba knew who was telling the truth and who was lying." (Shafak, 2019, p.109)

Amidst a lifetime of suffering, shattered memories move forward while Leila's body still lies. Through internal focalization, her autobiographical narrative denies death, framing it as eternal earthly recurrence enabling a Selbstüberwindung (self-overcoming) and Ascension (elevation) to Nietzschean superhuman status.

"By given a half chance, Leila would have testified that, on the contrary, a corpse was brimming with life. She could never believe that her mortal existence was over and done with." (Shafak, 2019, p.2)

Existential reflection uncovers the harsh realities of life as shattered memories flood Leila's mind, revealing the eternal secrets of existence and conceptual reasoning through internal focalization. These memories become

stages of insight, blending heroism and anguish in her amor fati—the embracing of destiny as Nietzsche's Übermensch.

"Perhaps it was not that different when it came to death. People thought you changed into a corpse the instant you exhaled your

last breath… if a border existed between the Realm of Life and the Realm of After-life, Leila decided, it must be as permeable as sandstone." (Shafak, 2019, p.3)

Leila As A Figure of Ubermensch

The text demonstrates a sense of Ubermensch in the protagonist Leila who denied sufferings and considered them a part of recreating meaning of her existence resonated with Nietzsche's philosophy. Through internal and external focalization, the narrative of the novel deemed as a mimesis in which Leila's ending time is presented as a source of accepting the reality and shaping her personality a reflection of superhuman, a woman who is above the conventional values and beliefs but lives according to her own beliefs. she idealized a brave black man who protested against the ill-treatment of his people whom the world knows with the name of Martin Luther King; and embodiment of will power and fearlessness.

"Far away in America a brave black man had been arrested for protesting against the ill-treatment of his people. His crime: holding a march without a permit… He held them gracefully in the air, hi palms curved towards each other as though he were carrying an invisible crystal ball that, though it would not show him how the future would look, he had nevertheless promised himself never to drop." (Shafak, 2019, p. 85)

Shafak's narrative structures memories of Leila's death scene and postmortem, transforming her into an Übermensch. Inspired by a resilient woman who endured pain without surrender, the flashbacks with temporal continuity give rise to mimesis and diegesis, imbuing her life with self-created meaning.

"On the way to school one day Leila saw a Kurdish woman with a traditional tattoo on her chin…. With each push of the needle, she flinched a little but endured the pain, feeling strangely alive with hundreds of splinters under her skin." (Shafak, 2019, p.87)

Defying her father's prohibitions and warnings of harm, Leila decorates notebooks with pictures of famous singers and listens only to Western music, choosing to follow her heart and live authentically. The narrative conveys her consciousness with authority, reveals temporal layering of her developing identity.

"Leila decorated her notebooks with pictures of famous singers, even though Baba had told her that music was haram and Western music even more." (Shafak, 2019, p. 87)

Leila's postmortem flashbacks reveal her deviant struggle for authentic selfhood, embodying the Übermensch. Beyond norms, she embraces smoking, tight skirts, and makeup emotional self-love, mindfulness, and unapologetic self-care.

"Her body had been changing fast. Hair under her arms, a dark patch between her legs; new skin, new smells, new emotions…he didn't expect her to be an exemplary student; he expected her to be a good girl, a modest." (Shafak, 2019, p. 88)

Leila accepts the suffering of life, affirming that meaning is self-created, not given. From the fragments of existence, she forges purpose despite her near death, using flashbacks to confront reality while heartlessly crafting life.

"In the end, meaning wasn't given; it was made. From the scraps… I was here. I mattered." (Shafak, 2019, p.289)

Shifting to a post-mortem focalization narrative, the story reveals Leila's inner feelings: flashbacks transform sorrow and pain into harmony and love. With D/Ali, she forgets the troubles of life, feeling a transcendence deep in her soul.

"First time in her life she felt part of something bigger than herself." (Shafak, 2019, p.166)

Through homodiegetic internal focalization, the flashback spreads eroticism, temporally situating her desire with emotional and relational context.

"She wanted to kiss him, taste him, feel him inside her." (Shafak, 2019, p.167)

After the Taksim Square massacre, shattered memories relive Leila's deepest loss, temporal uncertainty: her beloved D/Ali, killed in an anti-government uprising. In a flashback to the past within the past with homodiegetic internal focalization, she feels his breath on her cheek, sparking a vision of their shared love and future.

"Suddenly she was holding D/Ali's hand anymore. Had she let go of him or had he let go of her? She would never know. One second she could feel his breath on her cheek." (Shafak, 2019, p.168)

Empowered by D/Ali's love, Leila sprouts wings. Her five loyal friends, her aquatic family, anchor her through the storms. From a postmortem perspective, in her final moments, leaving behind the blame and shame beneath the scars, she reclaims her true self. The quote shows existential freedom, with internal focalization reflecting temporal awareness.

"We are all condemned to be free, even in death. To choose what we remember, what we forget, what we become in the eyes of those left behind." (Shafak, 2019, p. 230)

In the final chapter of the book titled *"The Blue Betta Fish"*, Leila enters an aquatic life among beloved objects and loved ones. Through internal focalization and the shallow style of twilight, relying on the reader's imagination, the suffering of the past is transformed into the fulfillment of the eternal present. Overcoming trauma through self-creation, she achieves the status of a Nietzschean Übermensch, affirming life beyond resentment.

"She was happy to be part of this vibrant realm, this comforting harmony that she had never thought possible, and this vast blue, bright as the birth of a new flame…free at last." (Shafak, 2019, p.304)

The Existential Nihilism (Absurdity of Existence): Nihilistic Abyss (Amor Fati)

In the start, the novel depicts her existence busy in giving meaning to her life. She flashbacks the different stages of life she has gone through them and the people's roles she has witnessed. Her fragmented memories profoundly dive her into the realm of her past experiences that she has done, now she realizes how the time changes, and continuously has been. The narrative goes from present to past with the plethora of meaning. The absurdist nature of human beings is reflected from existence. She considers the human beings impatient with the milestones of their existences, in reality their existence turns to non-existence automatically and they

become the story of past. The linear order of the structural narrative clearly portrays the progression of human being from stages to different stages: from marriage to parenthood, jobs to retirement. Her sensory memory proves that life never remains the same, eventually death overthrows it.

"It seemed like Leila that human beings exhibited a profound impatience with the milestones of their existence…only then remembered they no longer had a job. They were still adjusting." (Shafak, 2019, p.3)

The narrative having homodiegetic tome with internal focalization shifts to Leila's early conflicts with family expectations: her father opposes her dream of becoming a teacher, ironically fulfilling a midwife's childhood prophecy. Forced by her elders to wear the hijab as a form of protection, she boldly asks her mother if she can wear underneath. Ultimately, to survive, Leila rejects these imposed values, and prepares herself by defying them. Her long-held yearning for freedom pushes her towards a teaching career yet its fulfillment, amidst societal constraints, drives her to madness; it shows temporal conflict between private and public morality.

"Can I still wear my belly-dancing costume underneath?" (Shafak, 2019, p.38)

Unlike her painful past and former immaturity, Leila now contemplates the deep ambiguity of life: the sourness hidden beneath the sweetness, and vice versa. The riddle of existence remains unsolved, yet she gains wisdom learning that true insight emerges from the depths of madness, for every sane mind bears the mark of madness.

"As the taste of lemon and sugar melted on her tongue, so too her feelings dissolved into confusion …within the depths of madness glimmered a seed of lucidity." (Shafak, 2019, p.44)

As Leila matures, she learns to express love selectively knowing when, where, and to whom. She yearns to show affection for her aunt, but her mother's jealousy forces restraint. Ultimately, she sees maturity in hiding tenderness, revealing it only in private, when away from everyone except her beloved.

"This day she had been careful not to show her love for her mother when Auntie was around…This was the only form of affection she had been learned from grown-ups, and the teaching would come with dire consequences." (Shafak, 2019, p.44)

As Tequila Leila's heart beats, her mind stops three minutes before death. The strong, dark aroma of cardamom coffee floods her senses, connected to Istanbul's brothel streets her years as a sex worker, desperately bargaining for survival money. Amidst this flood of memories, Leila attempts to fashion meaning into seemingly meaningless recollections: easy to store in the depths of the mind, yet difficult to retrieve and interpret.

"Three minutes had passed since Leila's heart had stopped, and now she remembered cardamom coffee-strong, intense, dark…It staggers through a maze of inversions, often moving in dizzying zig zags, immune to reason and liable to collapse together." (Shafak, 2019, p.45)

Leila has sold into a brothel by a notorious couple known to the police. Courted by Bitter Ma, a madam who bears a striking resemblance to her long-lost sister who fled the Balkans, Leila is privileged to live in the brothel's comfortable apartments. Through internal focalization she reflects on her ultimate acceptance of life's absurdities depicts temporal awareness: never regretting the ruthless exploitation of her innocence or the oppression by ruthless sex traffickers who forced her into prostitution revives ethical and relational significance.

"It was a privileged room in many ways, one that revealed Leila's status…Leila was seventeen years old when she had been brought to this street…. she had no intention of reviving them." (Shafak, 2019, p.52)

Leila recalls how Bitter Ma, her brothel madam, coerced her and repeatedly sent her to high-paying clients for profit, even arranging illicit encounters outside government-sanctioned premises.

"You're a little calm, aren't you? Good girl." (Shafak, 2019, p.55)

The narrative with homodiegetic internal focalization moves to Leila's traumatic childhood, marked by the relentless abuse she endured at the hands of her uncle highlighting temporal layering of her past and present emotions. He constantly seduced her, spanked her in her private parts, forced unwanted kisses, and forced her to masturbate until the bedsheets were dirty. Under his coercive pressure, she remained silent, presents guilt-laden moment, unable to confide in her parents despite her overwhelming anxiety and trembling.

"You are a naughty girl, Uncle said. He looked solemn, almost sad. You seem so sweet and innocent, but it is just a mask, isn't it?... A stab of guilt went through Leila, so sharp she could hardly

move… I still love you. His lips pressed on her mouth…But of course she was. She was holding too many secrets in her chest already; this would be yet another one." (Shafak, 2019, p.67)

Devastated by a horrific acid attack, Leila felt stupid, ugly, and her life was worthless. In despair, she asked, *"Why me?"* – only to be answered, *"Why not someone else?"* This self-loathing question temporally linking past trauma into self-awareness, yet deepening her self-loathing.

"Later on, growing up, Leila would ask herself over and again why he had chosen her… asking "Why me? " was another way of saying, "Why not someone else? And she hated herself for that." (Shafak, 2019, p. 67)

The narrative jumps to six minutes with internal focalization as Leila's consciousness remembers her long to celebrate herself as a bride one day, but still sighs at the impossibility; showcasing temporal layering of desire and apprehension. Haunted by the fear of abuse from the groom, she moves forward towards the bitter consummation of wearing the bridal gown reflects tension between desire, autonomy and social constraints.

"A thought came to her unbidden: she would never be able to wear a gown like that…the skin gently under the glint of the blade." (Shafak, 2019, p.92)

The novel opens with Leila's traumatic past: a psychotic client in a brothel poured sulfuric acid on her back. In the eighth minute of her dying consciousness, this horrific event is replayed, highlighting her desperate search for meaning in suffering. Although she felt deeply alone with the guilty stranger, the pain no longer hurt the narrative's nonlinear structure transformed it into a poignant sign of loneliness, giving her endured solitude its former significance.

"Eight minute had gone by, and the next memory that pulled Leila from her archive was the smell of sulphuric acid." (Shafak, 2019, p.122)

In her final moments, internal focalization illustrates Leila's mind drifts to happy days with her beloved D/Ali, her chosen life partner. Amid the long-fought name of the revolution, temporal projection let her memories connect past and future. In her postmortem memory she is helplessly asking him how poor prostitutes with no income could escape their fate.

"Will there be any prostitution after the revolution?" (Shafak, 2019, p. 151)

Conclusion

This study existentially examines *10 Minutes 38 Seconds In This Strange World*, arguing that fragmented memories place identity and meaning beyond death, rejecting nihilistic finality and reinterpreting postmortem consciousness as continuity rather than existential void.

Using Nietzschean existentialism, this study situates Shafak's novel within existential discourse, emphasizing the meaning of memory, self-becoming, and postmortem. Ultimately, the novel renews existentialism through memory, love, and human legacy, offering a profound meditation on the persistence of meaning beyond physical death (nihilistic closure). In the text, Leila's whisper marks Nietzsche's ultimate affirmation of *"free at last" (Shafak, 2019, p. 304).* Her postmortem consciousness rewrites biological extinction into existential autonomy, where Ricoeur's mimetic sphere and Gerard's narratology transform repetition, memory, and suffering into the ultimate *"yes"* to life suggesting that ten minutes and thirty-eight seconds are enough to become an Übermensch.

Blaming herself was the focus of Leila's life.: *"She blamed herself too and would continue to do so for years to come" (Shafak, 2019, p. 48).* This nine-word prolepsis begins a slavish moral loop that will recur iteratively for two decades, compressing twenty years of internalized guilt into a single clause. Yet in the postmortem minutes, Leila catches the boomerang in mid-flight. The same sentence that once condemned her now sets her free because it is tradition, not living. The wave form completes the reversal: *"Memories were like waves, crashing… some gentle, rolling… some fierce, dragging her down" (Shafak, 2019, p. 112).* Every wave is Nietzsche's devilish whisper: It will return forever. Will you do that? Leila's response is amor fati: she loves the fierce waves first as an assault, prostitution, and exile because they lead to the aquatic family. The Dionysian terror of Uncle gaze, *"She seeing him scrutinizing her like this..." (Shafak, 2019, p. 45)* becomes the Dionysian joy of the friends' midnight outing. *"The hood has been removed from the falcon,"* the falcon flies *(Shafak, 2019, p. 78)*.

Genette's formal tools are not decorative; they are weapons of mastery and skill. The novel's double analepsis nonetheless from the 1990 corpse to the 1969 childhood to the 1957 assault that creates a tangled web *(Shafak, 2019, p. 56)* that defies linear fate. The prolepsis for years to come begins the boomerang of eternal return; the iterative summary will continue to do so‖ wraps up the two-decade slave loop in nine words. The pause during Uncle's gaze stretches a 0.3-second moment over half a page, forcing the reader to live the repetition of the gaze. The conch shell *(Shafak, 2019, p. 45)* is the ultimate Genettean object: internal focalization reaches childhood sounds, zero focalization lets the past speak in first person, and a singularize event (one assault) becomes iterative eternity (every wave returns). Shafak thus uses narrative structure as a will to power: the corpse rewrites time in the same way that Zarathustra rewrites values.

Ricoeur's tri-phasic mimesis explores his laboratory in the 10:38-minute postmortem. $Mimesis_1$ embodies the preconceived violation: every girl in the van recognizes the hood, the boomerang, and the wave of anxiety. $Mimesis_2$ actualizes death, as the corpse is traumatized: *"she, too, blamed herself"* and *"water was thicker than blood" (Shafak, 2019, p. 99)*. $Mimesis_3$ re-evaluates the trauma for the reader, enclosing it in a postmortem

narrative. The aquatic family D/Ali, Nalan, Zaynab, Humaira, and Jameela collectively enact an Ubermensch, rejecting the graveyard of companions and transform Leila's body into a mythic form *(Shafak, 2019, p. 301).* The Bosphorus closes the circle: the salt preserves memory, dissolving Leila's body while immortalizing her story *(Shafak, 2019, p. 1)*.

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