
Voicing Remorse: Interior Monologue in Elif Shafak's Honour

Dr. Shiny Mendonce

Asst. Prof. (English),
P.G. Department of English
St. Thomas College, Bhilai, C.G.

Article Received: 25/01/2025

Article Accepted: 26/02/2025

Published Online: 28/02/2025

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.02.4

Voicing Remorse: Interior Monologue in Elif Shafak's Honour

Abstract: The Turkish-British novelist Elif Shafak has made her niche, to paint in the canvas of world literature. The choice of contemporary themes centring on guilt and remorse are recurrent in Shafak's works and a moving masterpiece in this regard is her novel *Honour*. Weaving a cultural and psychological binary, Shafak has interrogated the psyche of Iskender when it is rolling in the tides of remorse and guilt. This guilt-stricken psyche of Iskender who murdered his mother to preserve the honour of the family has been laid out by Shafak through the use of interior monologue. This paper thus examines the use of interior monologue by Shafak in her narrative output *Honour*, using the theme of guilt and remorse as the magnifying glass. Shafak's use of interior monologue ruptures the narrative distance and serves as an act of rewriting self. This rewriting visualizes the past reconciling with the present.

Keywords: Interior monologue, guilt, remorse, rewriting self, reconciliation.

Elif Shafak, the voice of the silenced and the marginalised, in her celebrated literary genre of fiction weaves her feminist callings and stylistic preferences establishing herself as a radical feminist and a great storyteller. The novels by Shafak infuse East with West, orthodoxy with heterodoxy and tradition with modernity thereby creating a great space for multiplicities. With her ever experimenting rein, she pulls and holds her pen to manifest the best she could by stylistically incorporating multiculturalism, symbolism, feminism and mysticism in her literary creations.

In the narrative text of *Honour*, Shafak establishing herself as a radical feminist laying bare the worsts under patriarchy through Iskender. Exploring the theme of honour-based killings, patriarchal suppression and consequent deterioration at individual and familial level, Shafak has given the readers a multidimensional view into the Eastern culture and its outlook. The peculiarity of stylistics in *Honour* is the employment of interior

monologue by Shafak which weave the narrative thread and serve as a psychological interrogative tool.

The central protagonist of the narrative, Iskender is a young boy in his teens who under patriarchal influences and nurture, takes it to himself the responsibility of preserving the honour of his family, in the absence of his father. Iskender's father Adem unhappy in his marriage starts seeing another woman Roxana, while three siblings that is Iskender, Esma and Yunus live with their mother Pembe. Pembe too unhappy in her marriage with Adem, develops platonic relationship with Elias whom she meets at a bakery shop and from there the tragedy of Toprak family begins.

The conservative and orthodox culture of Middle East is manifested through Uncle Tariq, brother of Adem and through Pembe as well. Pembe raised Iskender as a sultan without rebuking him for his faults and patriarchal prejudices. Uncle Tariq on the other hand influenced Iskender to preserve the honour of the family. Under such oppressive codes Iskender murdered his aunt Jamila, thinking her to be Pembe as she was her twin.

I rang Uncle Tariq. I told him what I had done. There was an awkward silence. I thought he hadn't heard me. So I repeated myself. I told him I had punished Mum for her illicit affair. From now on she'd never do such a thing again. I said her wound wasn't too bad but it would take some time to heal. I had stabbed her once on the right side of her chest. That would show her how grave her sin was. It would give her time to think about her mistake, to repent. And the man would be scared out of his wits. He would leave us alone. Our family's honour was cleansed. (247)

Iskender believed that his mother would repent but the reverse happened. It was Iskender who was immersed in the emotional flood of guilt and remorse. Each of the interior monologues from his prison cell reflect his repentance and remorse on killing his mother. Shafak has subtly incorporated her knowhow of interior monologue within broader fictional framework. The interior monologues of Iskender from Shrewsbury Prison appear in fragments in different parts of the novel reflecting the fragmented timeline of the narrative.

The interior monologue is characterised by first person narration in present tense. The monologues of Iskender from prison cell align along these lines and create a psychological depth for readers to comprehend. Dorrit Cohn in his work *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* establishes that "monologues create the illusion that they render what a character "really thinks" to himself (76) and "in genuine interior monologues the temporal sequence of past events yields to the temporal sequence of present remembrance, and the past is thereby radically dechronologized" (182)

Iskender in his imprisonment, introspects and gets immersed in reflection of the crime he committed. In his interior monologues, Iskender shares his encounters with his cellmates mainly Trippy and Zeeshan and his evolution in prison through first person narration and in present tense. Iskender shares two phases of his life in imprisonment when he puts that “My life here consists of two phases. At first, I was a pain in everyone’s neck. There is no other way to put it. I was full of rage, resentment, totally lost. Then there was the second stage, which is, more or less, where I am today. Still angry and mad, but more at myself than at those around me” (137)

As per Cohn interior monologue is “a discourse addressed to no one, a gratuitous verbal agitation without communicating aim” (225) and it “often stretch time out of all realistic proportions” (82). Additionally the monologist is the “live center of his narration, whether his introspective focus was on his present or on his past self” (204). Shafak has evidently employed the narrative fragments of interior monologue to serve her purpose of adding psychological depth to the novel while at the same time making it sure that the addressee and addressal is lacking as is required in this narrative technique. Further timelines so outlined are not chronological but fragmented and stretching its boundaries from past to future in an haphazard way as per the stream of consciousness at times while at other times ensuring proper structure and coherence.

In the monologues we find Iskender recollecting his childhood days with his family. His bond with Yunus, Esma, Pembe and his girlfriend Katie mainly thereby rendering perspectives for the characterisation of the same. He recalls his first weakness during circumcision and recalls his encounters with his father. Further without any consciousness of being heard or understood and with an “inner speaker communicating with inner listener” (Cohn 179), Iskender lays bare his psyche and dissects his crime and the consequent remorse. He truly wished that if he would be sixteen years old again then he would never murder his mother for preserving the honour of the family as in his letter to his mother he writes

If I could be sixteen years old again, I’d never do the things that I did to cause so much pain. To you, my sister, my brother, my poor aunt. I cannot change the past. Not a single moment of it. Zeeshan says I can improve myself now. Even of that I’m not sure. But if you’d accept me into your life again, if you could find it in your heart to forgive me, what a blessing it’d be to once more be your son. (323)

In his influential work *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Gérard Genette points out that ““internal focalization is fully realized only in the narrative of “interior monologue”” (193) and Iskender in his interior monologues produces “a verbal film of sights and happenings” (Cohn 237). Explicitly Shafak through the characterisation of Iskender in *Honour* focalizes and presents us a word picture of his dilemma, fear, murder and guilt.

Being a culprit, the crime he committed harrows him continuously and he sees ghosts of his mother. He seeks forgiveness of his family members. He wants to start anew with his girlfriend and wants to mend the situations as much as possible but the reality strikes him differently with the realisation that he lost everything because he is a murderer and a “man in gaol is a man incarcerated in the past anyway” (70).

To seal the line of thought is that Iskender and his guilt changed him not “overnight. But inch by inch” (135) and the interior monologues weaved by Shafak, serve the tool of psychological analysis and psychic reconciliation. It serves as a poignant example of confessional fragments reworking on self. The psychological influences and consequences of orthodox patriarchy has been laid out in form of the tragedy of Toprak family. Interior monologue herein frees the readers from judgements and gives them a peep into the troubled psyche of the culprit asserting that the real fights and victories do not belong to the world outside but to the mind within. The reconciliation of the past with future counts less than the reconciliation of me with myself and interior monologues employed by Shafak has assertively reduced the narrative distance through this reconciliation.

Works Cited

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton University Press, 1978.

Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell University Press, 1983.

Shafak, Elif. *Honour*. Penguin Books. 2015