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The Far-reaching Effects of Antithesis in Humanity as Represented in Elif Shafak's *An Island of Missing Trees*

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Abstract

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* presents a profound exploration of the human condition through the lens of antithesis. The novel juxtaposes love and conflict, memory and forgetting, belonging and displacement, and human and non-human perspectives to illuminate the multifaceted nature of identity and societal interactions. Set against the backdrop of Cyprus during the 1970s inter-communal conflict, the narrative intertwines historical trauma with intimate personal experiences, employing a sentient fig tree as both observer and symbol of resilience, continuity, and ecological consciousness. This paper examines how Shafak's strategic use of antithesis enhances the representation of humanity, highlighting the moral, psychological, and cultural implications of her storytelling. By analyzing character dynamics, narrative structure, and symbolism, the study reveals how oppositional forces shape the human experience and how memory, identity, and environmental consciousness intersect in complex ways. The research contributes to literary scholarship by offering a comprehensive examination of antithesis as a deliberate narrative and thematic device, emphasizing its relevance in understanding historical trauma, ecological awareness, and human resilience.

Keywords: Antithesis, Humanity, Identity, Memory, Conflict, Displacement, Ecological Consciousness, Cyprus

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Introduction

Elif Shafak, a prominent Turkish-British novelist, is renowned for her ability to intertwine personal narratives with socio-political realities, often highlighting cultural and historical tensions through layered storytelling. In *The Island of Missing Trees*, Shafak situates her narrative within the fraught context of Cyprus, a Mediterranean island divided by ethnic, religious, and political conflict. The novel centers on Kostas, a Greek Cypriot, and Defne, a Turkish Cypriot, whose forbidden love challenges entrenched societal divisions. Their story unfolds alongside the silent witness of a fig tree, planted in the garden of Kostas's family tavern, which serves as a living repository of memory, trauma, and resilience.

At the core of Shafak's narrative strategy is the concept of antithesis, or the deliberate juxtaposition of contrasting elements to illuminate complex truths about humanity. The novel's exploration of antithetical themes, love versus conflict, memory versus forgetting, belonging versus displacement, and human versus non-human perspectives provides a nuanced understanding of the human experience. These contrasts are not merely literary devices but serve as critical tools through which Shafak interrogates social norms, historical trauma, and moral responsibility.

The fig tree embodies this antithesis in multiple dimensions. As a natural entity, it contrasts with human fragility and mortality, highlighting the enduring presence of life even amidst destruction. Its transplantation from Cyprus to London mirrors the human experience of displacement and the search for identity in foreign contexts. Through the fig tree's perspective, the novel explores ecological consciousness, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds. In doing so, Shafak challenges anthropocentric assumptions and

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encourages readers to consider the ethical implications of human actions on both social and environmental systems.

Furthermore, the novel's non-linear narrative structure, alternating between the 1970s and contemporary London, reinforces its thematic dualities. By juxtaposing past and present, the story illustrates how historical events shape personal identities and intergenerational relationships. Ada, the daughter of Kostas and Defne, becomes a lens through which the long-term effects of trauma and cultural division are explored. Her navigation of dual cultural identities exemplifies the tension between inherited histories and self-determined identity, underscoring the novel's central concerns with belonging and displacement.

This study aims to examine the far-reaching effects of antithesis in *The Island of Missing Trees*, exploring how Shafak's use of contrast serves as a narrative and thematic strategy to illuminate human complexity. The research focuses on the intersections of identity, memory, trauma, and ecological consciousness, investigating how opposing forces are employed to convey moral, psychological, and cultural insights. By analyzing the interplay of narrative structure, character development, and symbolism, this paper seeks to demonstrate that Shafak's antithetical approach not only enriches literary aesthetics but also provides a profound understanding of humanity in its historical, social, and environmental contexts.

Literature Review

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* has been the subject of increasing scholarly interest, particularly within the domains of trauma studies, postcolonial literature, identity formation, and ecocriticism. Existing research has predominantly examined the novel's treatment of memory, displacement, and the

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human-environment relationship, yet there remains a critical gap in exploring how antithesis as a deliberate narrative device shapes these themes. This review synthesizes relevant scholarship while situating the present study within the broader discourse on literature and human experience.

1. Trauma, Memory, and Intergenerational Effects

One of the dominant strands of scholarship addresses the portrayal of trauma and its enduring effects across generations. Ramzan et al. (2023) highlighted that the novel foregrounds the psychological and emotional consequences of historical conflict, particularly the intercommunal violence in Cyprus during the 1970s. They note that characters like Ada inherit not only the tangible legacies of her parents' choices but also the intangible weight of historical and cultural trauma (Ramzan et al. 473–483). This scholarship emphasizes that trauma in Shafak's narrative is not isolated to individual experience but is embedded within social, familial, and cultural networks, reinforcing the significance of dualities such as personal versus collective memory and forgetting versus remembering.

Similarly, Fottouh (2025) examines trauma through an ecofeminist lens, emphasizing how gendered experiences intersect with historical violence. In this reading, the fig tree functions as a silent observer, chronicling both human suffering and resilience across generations. The presence of the tree allows Shafak to explore the tension between witnessing and forgetting, a clear manifestation of antithesis that bridges natural continuity and human vulnerability (Fottouh 112–128).

2. Identity and Belonging

The theme of identity, especially in diasporic and postcolonial contexts, is another critical area of scholarly focus. Küçük and Öztürk (2022) argue that Shafak's

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alternating narrative perspectives oscillating between the viewpoints of Kostas, Defne, Ada, and the fig tree reflect the fragmented nature of identity in societies divided by ethnicity, religion, and politics. This multiplicity of perspectives serves as a narrative antithesis, illustrating the tension between the self and the social environment, as well as between inherited and constructed identities. Ada's experience in London, navigating her Greek-Turkish heritage, exemplifies the struggle to reconcile conflicting cultural legacies, highlighting the broader human experience of negotiating belonging in a fractured world.

Elgamal (2024) further explores identity through the lens of intergenerational displacement. She notes that Shafak's narrative strategy juxtaposes the rootedness of the fig tree with the dislocation of human characters, providing a structural metaphor for the interplay of stability and flux in identity formation. This duality underscores the novel's thematic concern with belonging versus displacement, a recurring antithesis that illuminates the psychological and emotional complexities of diasporic existence.

3. Ecocriticism and Human Nature Relationships

Ecocritical scholarship has increasingly recognized Shafak's contribution to exploring human-nature interconnectedness. Ramzan et al. (2023) emphasize that the fig tree, as a non-human narrator, offers unique insights into the ecological and ethical dimensions of human action. By contrasting the permanence of the tree with the transient nature of human lives, Shafak foregrounds human fragility versus natural resilience, a profound antithesis that enriches the novel's thematic depth. From this perspective, the narrative challenges anthropocentric frameworks, urging readers to reflect on environmental ethics, continuity, and intergenerational responsibility.

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Fottouh (2025) complements this view by arguing that the fig tree mediates the ecological and cultural dimensions of trauma, linking the human and non-human worlds through shared histories of endurance and survival. The tree's perspective allows for a critique of human destructiveness while highlighting possibilities for regeneration, reconciliation, and ethical reflection. This aligns with broader ecocritical concerns about environmental sustainability and the ethical responsibilities humans have toward nature and future generations.

4. Narrative Structure and Antithesis

While prior research emphasizes thematic concerns such as trauma, identity, and ecology, relatively few studies focus explicitly on antithesis as a central literary strategy in Shafak's work. The alternating temporal and spatial narratives, the interplay between human and non-human perspectives, and the tension between past and present all exemplify a structural and thematic reliance on contrast. By situating antithesis at the heart of the analysis, this study aims to bridge the gap in existing scholarship, illustrating how Shafak employs juxtaposition to represent the multifaceted dimensions of humanity.

Moreover, the narrative's structural antithesis is mirrored in character development. Kostas and Defne's love story embodies unity amid division, tenderness amid violence, and hope amid despair. Ada's journey, in contrast, highlights the ongoing negotiation between inherited trauma and personal agency, reflecting how human experience is shaped by opposing forces. These dualities underscore the didactic and ethical dimensions of Shafak's narrative, emphasizing the interplay between moral responsibility, historical awareness, and human resilience.

5. Gap in Scholarship

Despite the wealth of research on trauma, ecocriticism, and identity in Shafak's work, the explicit role of antithesis in shaping the human experience remains underexplored. Most existing studies treat dualities implicitly rather than analyzing them as deliberate narrative strategies with ethical, psychological, and ecological implications. This study addresses this gap by integrating discussions of trauma, identity, displacement, and ecology through the lens of antithesis, highlighting how contrasting elements enhance readers' understanding of human complexity.

The literature indicates that Shafak's novel engages deeply with themes of trauma, memory, identity, displacement, and ecological consciousness. However, antithesis as a central literary and thematic device remains underexamined. By foregrounding oppositional forces—love versus conflict, memory versus forgetting, belonging versus displacement, and human versus non-human Shafak creates a nuanced representation of humanity that resonates across personal, cultural, and ecological dimensions. This study situates itself within these scholarly conversations while filling the critical gap in understanding how contrasts and juxtapositions structure both narrative and meaning in *The Island of Missing Trees*.

Background Study

1. Historical Context of Cyprus

The Island of Missing Trees is set against the backdrop of Cyprus, an island in the eastern Mediterranean historically marked by political, cultural, and ethnic divisions. Throughout the 20th century, Cyprus experienced complex intercommunal tensions between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots,

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culminating in the violent events of the 1960s and the Turkish invasion of 1974. These historical developments left enduring scars on the island's social fabric, fragmenting communities and fostering a climate of mistrust and fear (Hadjipavlou 45–68). Shafak situates her narrative within this fraught historical period, allowing readers to understand the personal and collective consequences of sociopolitical strife.

The novel captures the human dimensions of these events by exploring the lives of ordinary people navigating extraordinary circumstances. The interplay between historical trauma and intimate relationships reflects how large-scale political conflicts infiltrate the most personal aspects of life, shaping identities, choices, and emotional landscapes. By embedding the story within Cyprus's tumultuous history, Shafak creates a powerful lens through which readers can examine the ethical, psychological, and social ramifications of division, violence, and reconciliation.

2. Character Profiles

Kostas and Defne

At the heart of the narrative is the forbidden love story of Kostas, a Greek Cypriot, and Defne, a Turkish Cypriot. Their relationship symbolizes the potential for unity amid entrenched social and political divisions. Kostas is depicted as sensitive and introspective, often grappling with the expectations imposed by his family and community. Defne, in contrast, embodies resilience and independence, navigating the constraints of societal norms and historical legacies. Their love is fraught with obstacles, yet it demonstrates the enduring power of human connection to transcend conflict and prejudice (Ramzan et al. 475).

Ada

Ada, the daughter of Kostas and Defne, represents the second generation of Cypriots navigating the complexities of cultural duality and inherited trauma. Born in the diaspora, she negotiates a fragmented identity, oscillating between her Greek and Turkish heritage while adapting to life in London. Ada's experiences highlight the psychological and social challenges of displacement, illustrating the tension between belonging and alienation. Her perspective provides critical insight into how historical and familial legacies influence contemporary identity formation, offering a lens through which the novel's central themes of memory, trauma, and reconciliation are explored (Fottouh 118–123).

3. The Fig Tree as Symbolic Entity

One of the most distinctive elements of Shafak's narrative is the fig tree, which serves as both a literal and symbolic presence. Planted in Kostas's family tavern garden, the fig tree witnesses the unfolding events of the novel, from love and joy to violence and loss. Its presence introduces a non-human perspective that allows the narrative to explore broader ecological, ethical, and philosophical questions. The fig tree's longevity contrasts with the fleeting nature of human life, creating a dynamic tension between permanence and transience, memory and forgetting, resilience and vulnerability (Küçük & Öztürk 102).

The fig tree also embodies intergenerational continuity. Its transplantation from Cyprus to London mirrors the human experience of migration and adaptation, while its capacity for growth and renewal symbolizes hope amidst trauma. Through the fig tree, Shafak explores the interplay of human and non-human agency, suggesting that ecological consciousness and empathy for the natural world are integral to understanding human identity and resilience. The tree's

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perspective bridges past and present, homeland and diaspora, underscoring the thematic dualities central to the novel.

4. Interplay of Place and Memory

Place, as depicted in Cyprus and London, functions as both a physical and psychological landscape. Cyprus represents roots, history, and collective memory, while London embodies displacement, adaptation, and the negotiation of new identities. The contrast between these settings exemplifies antithesis in the novel, highlighting the tension between stability and flux, belonging and alienation. Through her vivid depiction of place, Shafak emphasizes how geography shapes memory, identity, and emotional experience, reinforcing the central role of antithesis in structuring narrative meaning.

5. Social and Cultural Divisions

Shafak's novel examines not only political divisions but also cultural and moral contrasts. Characters navigate the dichotomies of tradition versus modernity, public versus private morality, and individual desire versus communal expectation. These social and cultural tensions enhance the thematic richness of the novel, illustrating how human experience is continually shaped by opposing forces. By situating her characters within these layered conflicts, Shafak presents a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of humanity, highlighting the moral, psychological, and social consequences of division.

The background study establishes the historical, social, and cultural contexts essential for understanding *The Island of Missing Trees*. Cyprus's complex history, combined with the richly developed characters of Kostas, Defne, and Ada, provides fertile ground for exploring antithesis in human experience. The fig tree, as a symbolic and narrative bridge, reinforces the tension between human

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and non-human, memory and forgetting, and belonging and displacement. Together, these elements illuminate the far-reaching effects of antithesis, setting the stage for detailed methodological analysis and discussion.

1. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on literary analysis to investigate the far-reaching effects of antithesis in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to exploring textual nuances, thematic contrasts, and symbolic representations, allowing for a deep understanding of how narrative strategies shape meaning and reflect human experience. The research prioritizes interpretive and critical engagement with the text, emphasizing the relationships among character development, narrative structure, and thematic oppositions.

2. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework is structured around antithesis as a central lens for examining the novel. Antithesis, in literary studies, refers to the deliberate juxtaposition of contrasting elements to highlight differences and reveal underlying complexities. In the context of this study, antithesis is operationalized across four key dimensions:

1. **Love versus Conflict** – The tension between personal relationships and societal or political barriers.
2. **Memory versus Forgetting** – The interplay of historical trauma, recollection, and the human desire to suppress painful experiences.
3. **Belonging versus Displacement** – The negotiation of identity across cultural, national, and generational contexts.
4. **Human versus Non-Human Perspectives** – The contrast between human experiences and the symbolic agency of the fig tree.

This framework allows for the systematic identification and interpretation of

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antithetical structures within the narrative, connecting thematic contrasts to broader cultural, historical, and ecological implications.

3. Data Collection

The primary data source is the novel *The Island of Missing Trees* itself. All textual passages relevant to the research questions are identified through close reading, emphasizing:

- Character interactions and dialogue that reveal moral, emotional, or social tensions.
- Descriptive passages that depict the setting, historical context, and cultural milieu.
- Symbolic and ecological elements, particularly the fig tree, which provide non-human perspectives on human experience.

Secondary sources, including scholarly articles, critical essays, and ecocritical studies, are incorporated to contextualize the analysis within existing literary discourse. These sources provide theoretical grounding in trauma studies, diaspora and identity studies, and ecocriticism, allowing the analysis to connect textual observations with broader scholarly perspectives (Ramzan et al. 474–480; Fottouh 115–130).

4. Data Analysis

The study employs **thematic and textual analysis**, a method that enables a systematic examination of recurring motifs, contrasts, and symbolic structures within the novel. The analysis proceeds in three stages:

1. **Identification of Contrasts** – Key passages exemplifying antithetical relationships are highlighted, including scenes of love and conflict, memory and forgetting, belonging and displacement, and human and non-human interaction.
2. **Interpretation of Meaning** – Each identified contrast is interpreted in relation to the narrative, character development, and symbolic elements,

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considering historical, cultural, and ecological contexts.

3. **Synthesis and Integration** – The findings are synthesized to demonstrate how antithesis functions as both a literary and thematic device, shaping readers' understanding of human experience and identity.

5. Justification of Method

Qualitative textual analysis is justified for this study because the research focus is on interpretive understanding rather than quantitative measurement. The novel's rich narrative, complex character interactions, and symbolic layers necessitate an approach capable of capturing subtleties of meaning, context, and thematic interplay. Additionally, the use of antithesis as a lens allows for an organized and theoretically informed exploration of the novel's structure and content, connecting literary technique with humanistic inquiry.

6. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis:

- Multiple readings of the novel are conducted to capture nuanced interpretations.
- Cross-referencing with scholarly literature ensures that interpretations align with established analyses while addressing identified gaps.
- Transparent documentation of textual evidence allows for replicability and critical verification of findings.

7. Limitations

While this methodology provides deep insight into thematic and narrative structures, it is limited by the inherently subjective nature of literary interpretation. The conclusions drawn are contingent upon the researcher's analytical lens and theoretical framework. However, by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and scholarly discourse, the study maintains a rigorous and defensible analytical approach.

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This methodological approach combines close reading, thematic analysis, and scholarly contextualization to investigate the role of antithesis in shaping human experience in *The Island of Missing Trees*. By focusing on key dimensions of contrast love and conflict, memory and forgetting, belonging and displacement, and human versus non-human perspectives the study illuminates how Shafak employs literary devices to explore the complexities of identity, trauma, and ecological consciousness. The methodology ensures a structured, transparent, and theoretically informed analysis, providing a foundation for the subsequent discussion section, which will elaborate on detailed examples and interpretive insights.

Analysis

The discussion section examines how antithesis functions as a narrative and thematic device in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. By juxtaposing opposing forces, Shafak conveys the complexities of human experience, revealing the intricate interplay between personal, cultural, historical, and ecological dimensions. This analysis is organized around four primary dimensions of antithesis: love and conflict, memory and forgetting, belonging and displacement, and human versus non-human perspectives.

1. Love and Conflict

At the core of the narrative is the forbidden love between Kostas, a Greek Cypriot, and Defne, a Turkish Cypriot. Their romance exists in a context fraught with ethnic tension, political violence, and entrenched social norms. This juxtaposition between love and conflict exemplifies the antithetical strategy through which Shafak explores human resilience and vulnerability. Love, a force of unity, empathy, and emotional growth, exists in constant tension with conflict,

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which imposes external constraints and ethical dilemmas.

For instance, the scene in which Kostas and Defne share moments of intimacy in the tavern garden reveals how love can flourish in secrecy, resisting societal pressures (Shafak 78). Yet, the looming presence of intercommunal violence interrupts these moments, reminding the reader that human connections are never isolated from historical and political contexts. Scholars such as Ramzan et al. (2023) argue that this duality mirrors the human experience in divided societies, where affection and desire coexist with fear and societal expectations. The fig tree, silently observing these events, reinforces this duality: it witnesses tender moments while also enduring the consequences of violence, embodying resilience in the face of human conflict.

The love-conflict antithesis is further amplified through Shafak's use of alternating narrative perspectives. Kostas and Defne's private experiences are contrasted with communal narratives of division, emphasizing the tension between personal agency and collective expectation. By structuring the story in this way, Shafak demonstrates that love is both transformative and vulnerable, revealing the moral and psychological complexities inherent in human relationships.

2. Memory and Forgetting

The characters grapple with the persistence of historical and personal memories, while simultaneously attempting to forget or suppress painful experiences. Ada, Kostas and Defne's daughter, embodies this tension as she negotiates her understanding of her parents' past while forming her own identity in London.

For example, Ada's recollection of her mother's stories about Cyprus intertwines nostalgia with the trauma of loss, creating a narrative space where memory is both

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comforting and burdensome (Shafak 145). This duality exemplifies how antithesis functions as a mechanism for exploring psychological complexity. Memory preserves identity and cultural heritage, but it also perpetuates the pain of historical divisions. Forgetting, conversely, offers relief but risks erasing the lessons embedded in history.

Fottouh (2025) notes that fig tree functions as an enduring repository of memory, bridging human recollection and ecological continuity. By contrasting the tree's long-lived perspective with human frailty, Shafak creates a structural antithesis that underscores the persistence of history and the fragility of individual experience. The tension between memory and forgetting, therefore, operates both thematically and symbolically, revealing the nuanced ways humans process trauma and the ethical imperative to remember.

3. Belonging and Displacement

Belonging and displacement are central to the novel's exploration of identity and human experience. Ada's life in London exemplifies the struggle to reconcile inherited cultural identities with the demands of a foreign environment. Her sense of belonging is continually challenged by her awareness of her parents' history, the diaspora experience, and her dual cultural heritage. This tension between home and exile, past and present, mirrors the broader societal and historical divisions that shape human life.

Küçük and Öztürk (2022) argue that Shafak's portrayal of displacement emphasizes the psychological and emotional consequences of migration. The transplantation of the fig tree from Cyprus to London parallels human displacement, suggesting that resilience and continuity are possible even in foreign contexts. However, the tree's transplantation also underscores loss—the

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severing of roots, the adaptation to a new environment—which mirrors Ada’s negotiation of identity in the diaspora. The antithesis between belonging and displacement, therefore, illuminates the complex relationship between place, memory, and selfhood.

This theme is further developed through secondary characters, such as villagers in Cyprus who remain tied to their homeland despite ongoing violence. Their attachment to place contrasts with the necessity of migration, highlighting the tension between historical roots and the demands of survival. Through these juxtapositions, Shafak presents displacement not merely as a physical relocation but as a multidimensional experience that encompasses psychological, cultural, and ecological dimensions.

4. Human versus Non-Human Perspectives

The fig tree is central to the novel’s exploration of the human versus non-human antithesis. As both a literal and symbolic presence, the tree provides an alternative perspective on human life, offering insights into character motivations, historical continuity, and ecological consciousness. Through its observations, the novel challenges anthropocentric assumptions and foregrounds the ethical and ecological dimensions of human action.

For example, the tree witnesses acts of kindness, violence, and reconciliation, highlighting patterns of human behavior across time and space (Shafak 212). Its presence contrasts with the fleeting nature of human life, emphasizing the tension between mortality and ecological permanence. This juxtaposition also underscores intergenerational continuity: while human lives are ephemeral, the natural world persists, preserving memory and sustaining life across generations. Ecocritical scholarship (Ramzan et al. 478) emphasizes that the fig tree embodies

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resilience and ethical reflection. Its ability to survive transplantation and environmental change mirrors the human struggle for adaptation and moral consciousness. By presenting a non-human perspective, Shafak expands the scope of antithesis beyond personal or societal dualities, incorporating environmental and ethical dimensions into the exploration of humanity.

5. Narrative Structure and Temporal Antithesis

Shafak's non-linear narrative further reinforces the thematic antitheses discussed above. By alternating between the 1970s Cyprus setting and contemporary London, the novel juxtaposes past and present, history and lived experience, continuity and change. This temporal antithesis allows the reader to perceive the long-term consequences of historical events, illustrating how personal and collective memories shape identity, relationships, and ethical understanding.

The interplay of narrative perspectives—shifting among Kostas, Defne, Ada, and the fig tree creates additional layers of contrast. Human subjectivity is contrasted with the tree's impartial observation, personal memory with collective history, and individual agency with structural constraints. This complex narrative architecture exemplifies the deliberate use of antithesis to structure meaning, emphasizing that human experience is inherently relational, contingent, and morally charged.

6. Ethical and Philosophical Implications

The antitheses in the novel are not merely stylistic; they carry profound ethical and philosophical implications. By juxtaposing opposing forces, Shafak invites readers to reflect on human responsibility, moral choice, and the interconnections between personal, social, and ecological domains. Love and conflict highlight the necessity of empathy amid division; memory and forgetting emphasize the moral

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imperative to remember past injustices; belonging and displacement reveal the ethical and psychological consequences of migration; and human versus non-human perspectives encourage reflection on environmental responsibility.

These layered contrasts provide a holistic understanding of humanity, illustrating how personal experience, social structures, historical forces, and ecological consciousness are intertwined. Shafak's antithetical strategy, therefore, functions as a lens for examining not only the narrative but also the broader human condition, emphasizing complexity, moral ambiguity, and interdependence.

Through careful juxtaposition of opposing forces, Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* illuminates the far-reaching effects of antithesis in representing humanity. Love and conflict, memory and forgetting, belonging and displacement, and human versus non-human perspectives collectively reveal the psychological, social, historical, and ecological dimensions of human experience. The fig tree serves as a symbolic bridge across these contrasts, offering continuity, reflection, and ethical insight. Shafak's narrative demonstrates that understanding humanity requires attention to dualities, tensions, and contradictions, highlighting the enduring relevance of antithesis as both a literary device and a tool for moral and philosophical reflection.

Conclusion

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* demonstrates the profound capacity of literature to reflect the complexities of human existence. By employing antithesis as a central narrative and thematic device, Shafak constructs a rich tapestry of contrasts love and conflict, memory and forgetting, belonging and displacement, and human versus non-human perspectives that illuminate the multifaceted nature of humanity. These contrasts are not merely stylistic; they serve as essential

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lenses through which readers can understand the ethical, psychological, and ecological dimensions of human experience.

The juxtaposition of love and conflict in the novel highlights the enduring tension between personal desire and societal constraints. Kostas and Defne's relationship exemplifies the human capacity for connection, empathy, and resilience, even in the face of division and violence. This tension mirrors broader social realities, emphasizing that human experience is inherently shaped by both intimate relationships and historical contexts. By contrast, memory and forgetting underscore the moral and psychological complexities of trauma. Characters navigate the delicate balance between preserving identity and cultural heritage while confronting the painful realities of history. The fig tree, as a living witness, embodies this duality, reinforcing the interplay between human fragility and ecological permanence.

Belonging and displacement further expand the thematic scope of the novel. Through Ada's diasporic experience, Shafak examines the negotiation of identity across cultures and generations, highlighting the emotional and ethical consequences of migration. The transplantation of the fig tree serves as a symbolic parallel, bridging the personal and ecological dimensions of displacement. This duality underscores the resilience inherent in both human and non-human life, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living systems.

Finally, the contrast between human and non-human perspectives invites reflection on environmental and ethical consciousness. The fig tree's enduring presence offers a unique vantage point, enabling readers to consider the broader implications of human actions on both social and ecological systems. By integrating ecological insight into the narrative, Shafak challenges

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anthropocentric assumptions and encourages an ethical engagement with the natural world.

The novel's non-linear narrative structure and alternating perspectives further enhance the thematic impact of antithesis. Temporal and spatial shifts juxtapose past and present, Cyprus and London, personal memory and collective history, demonstrating how human experience is continuously shaped by competing forces and historical legacies. These layered contrasts deepen the reader's understanding of identity, trauma, and moral responsibility, revealing the interdependent nature of personal, social, and ecological realities.

In sum, Shafak's deliberate use of antithesis enables a nuanced exploration of humanity, illuminating the ways in which individuals navigate the complexities of love, memory, identity, displacement, and ecological awareness. The novel demonstrates that understanding human experience requires attention to tensions, contradictions, and dualities, emphasizing that the forces shaping our lives are rarely singular or linear. This study contributes to literary scholarship by foregrounding antithesis as a central interpretive tool, highlighting its role in enriching narrative meaning, ethical reflection, and our comprehension of human resilience.

Future research could further explore comparative analyses between Shafak's treatment of antithesis and similar strategies in other postcolonial or diasporic literature, examining how contrasts shape cultural memory and identity across diverse contexts. Additionally, studies might investigate the broader ecological and ethical implications of non-human narrative perspectives, expanding the scope of ecocritical inquiry in contemporary fiction.

Ultimately, *The Island of Missing Trees* exemplifies how literature can articulate

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the intricate tensions inherent in human existence, bridging historical, cultural, personal, and ecological dimensions. Through the strategic deployment of antithesis, Shafak invites readers to reflect on the interwoven nature of human life, emphasizing that understanding, empathy, and resilience emerge most profoundly from the recognition of contrast, tension, and interconnectedness.

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