

LOVE, MYSTICISM AND SPIRITUALITY: TRANSFORMATION IN ELIF SHAFAK'S THE FORTY RULES OF LOVE

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Abstract

The study examines how Elif Shafak's The Forty Rules of Love (2009) represents love as a vehicle for mystical knowledge and spiritual transformation. Focusing on the twin narratives; the thirteenth-century story of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz and the contemporary plot of Ella Rubinstein, the study argues that Shafak uses Sufi concepts (especially the rules attributed to Shams) to stage inner metamorphosis, ethical reorientation, and a reimagining of selfhood that crosses cultural and temporal boundaries. Using qualitative textual analysis and thematic coding, the paper traces recurrent motifs (love as gnosis/ishq, rupture and fellowship, annihilation/baqa, pilgrimage and interior journey) and shows how Shafak negotiates theological, psychological, and feminist concerns. The findings indicate that transformation in the novel is layered: personal (Ella's awakening), relational (Rumi-Shams), and communal (the diffusion of Sufi ethics). The study situates Shafak's novel in recent work on contemporary Sufism in fiction and argues that the novel functions both as literary re-telling and as accessible pedagogy of mysticism for global readers.

Keywords: Love, Mysticism and Spirituality, Transformation; personal (Ella's awakening), relational (Rumi-Shams), and communal (the diffusion of Sufi ethics)

Introduction

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Elif Shafak is contrasting two chronicles and genres: an epistolary/metatextual contemporary plot of a housewife living in the suburbs who is searching meaning and a biographical, reconstruction retelling of the romance between the Persian poet Rumi and the wandering mystic Shams of Tabriz. The novel has been praised as a introduction of Sufi philosophy into modern popular fiction, a presentation of mystical concepts in a conversational, narrative way, and as a source of scholarly debate on the issue of representation, authenticity, and also appropriation of religious concepts to a worldwide audience. Since its first publication, the novel received both popular and scholarly attention, and it has been the subject of analysis that addresses its preoccupation with love, suffering, transformation, and the teacher-disciple relationship as a topic of its theme. The question that this article poses is as follows: how does Shafak model the idea of love as an existential and soteriological force? And what is her narrative structure contributing to the change of characters and readers? The paper makes two connected assertions that: first that *The Forty Rules of Love* prefigures *ishq* (mystical/divine love) as a form of destabilizing of egoic identity and generating ontological change; and second that Shafak, in her novel, reforms classical Sufi teachings: teacher-disciple relationships, spiritual intoxication, annihilation of the self (*fana*) into a contemporary idiom ethical and socially resonant. This work is presented in the form of a narrow literature review, description of a theoretical framework that is based on Sufi principles and the current theories on narrative identity, description of procedure and data analysis, and a closing discussion.

Significance of the Study

The relation between literature and religion has been an interest of over the last twenty years, especially in the role of modern fiction in mediating spiritual practices to an unreligious and international audience. *The Forty Rules of Love* by Shafak stands in a fruitful place to ask such a question: it projects medieval Sufi instructors via twenty-first-century issues (gender, domesticity, cultural pluralism), and as such, is amenable to interdisciplinary research taking place at the crossroads of literary studies, religious studies, and cultural sociology. The work will be of value to ongoing discussions in the field, (1) by mapping the role of mysticism as a narrative-driven device to psychological and moral change; (2) providing an empirical based

thematic analysis to the current body of critical discourse and stylistic analysis; and (3) evaluating the pedagogical value of the novel as a means to understand complex spiritual doctrines without sacrificing theological presuppositions. Modern literature indicates that recent works are focusing more on Shafak Sufi representations and the psychosocial consequences of the same and this analysis is timely and applicable to both the readers and the academicians.

Research Questions

1. How does *The Forty Rules of Love* represent love (both human and divine) as a mechanism of spiritual transformation for its principal characters?
2. In what ways does the novel adapt classical Sufi concepts—especially the teacher–disciple relationship, *ishq*, *fana*, and the notion of spiritual rules—into a contemporary context that enables ethical and identity transformation?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze textual strategies Shafak employs to depict love as mystical knowledge and transformative practice.
2. To evaluate how classical Sufi concepts are reworked in the novel to address contemporary issues of identity, gender, and cross-cultural spirituality.

Literature Review

The literature of Sufism results in the focus of *ishq* (divine love) as the knowledge of experience and transformative power. Rumi and Shams have been studied, and it has been emphasized how the teacher-disciple dyad promotes spiritual break and re-birth (see studies of the jalal al-din-Shams relationship). In recent interpretations, it is claimed that the reinterpretations of these motifs in modern retellings are usually adapted to secular audiences; nevertheless, the philosophical essences of submission and pity remain. Recent articles interrogate the question of the translation of Sufi lexicon into narrative ethos of *The Forty Rules of Love* in order to make the topic of *Ishq* amenable not only to specialist readers.

The number of scholarly materials on *The Forty Rules of Love* has increased significantly in the past ten years, which testifies to the popularity of the novel globally and its capacity to disseminate Sufi discourse into the modern literary, spiritual, and sociocultural contexts. Mixed media Lots of early critiques have been given on how the novel portrays Sufism, especially how Elif Shafak reinvents an Islamic mystical tradition to a global, and at times secular, audience. This so-called Rumi phenomenon, as it is so infamously termed by Furlanetto (2013) can be seen as the tension between the fascination of Orientalism and cosmopolitan spirituality. Western readers and consumers, according to Furlanetto, often approach Rumi and Sufi symbolism via the prism of spiritual universalism and dehistoricize and decontextualize them. Shafak claims that this process, in which he is engaged in his novel, is introduced in the form of a spiritually inclusive, transnational narrative frame, which addresses a globalized readership (Furlanetto, 2013).

Equally, Gray (2020) focuses on classical Sufi spirituality and its relationship with contemporary Western appropriations, suggesting that *The Forty Rules of Love* serves as the medium connecting the Islamic mysticism and the modern readers who are interested in the non-institutionalized versions of spirituality. Gray argues that the re-interpretation of Rumi used by Shafak is representative of Western Sufism, which is a movement where the mystical doctrines have been re-packaged as a general wisdom that no longer has any connection with the official religious systems. The novel creates a spirituality in this perception that is met with the global markets of self-help, mindfulness, and therapeutic literature but still points to real practices of Sufi (Gray, 2020).

Another significant field of scholarly significance is intertextuality. Amna (2018) identifies the textual stratification of the novel, its stories within stories, manuscript fragments, embedded

narratives, and Shams rules, which the narrator attempts to teach. According to her, such an intertextual design establishes a dialogic relation between the past and the present that allows the readers to observe that mystical wisdom can move through time, cultures, and genres. Not only does the structure recreate the world of Rumi in the thirteenth century but spiritual transformation is presented as a process of literature itself, whereby texts communicate, remake, and eventually remodel each other (Amna, 2018).

The novel is also examined by a substantial literature on the topic of postmodernism. Akbar et al. (2019) believe that metafictional methods, fragmentation, multiplicity of voices, and ontological instability help Shafak to situate the novel in the postmodern literary traditions. Changes in viewpoints of the narrative, they argue, enable readers to challenge the binary truth and adopt the pluralistic, shifting worldview one, which is analogous to the postmodern state of uncertainty and identity fragmentation (Akbar et al., 2019). Akbar et al. (2020) develop this point of view later, saying that Shafak uses postmodern means not only as stylistic flourish, but as an analogy of the narrative to Sufi metaphysics, in which truth is perceived as layered, paradoxical, and experiential, but not as linear and doctrinal.

The critical discourse analysis has added more insight into the way spirituality is manifested in the novel. Sherwani (2020) shows that Shafak has created an Eastern spirituality that is palatable to the Western sensations by highlighting the themes of universal love, tolerance, and humanistic ethics. In a critical discourse analytic approach, Sherwani arrives at a conclusion that the representation of Shafak is more inclined to simplify the practices of Sufism and romanticize them while relying on their symbolic capital to question adamant forms of religious dogmatism (Sherwani, 2020). In their study of the first six rules of Shams Tabrizi, Tariq and Abdi (2023) hold that these maxims advance a philosophical perspective on the world based on mystical wisdom elevating inner change above ritualized obedience. According to their results, the instructive rules in the story serve as moral guiding posts that influence the character development and the perception of the reader (Tariq and Abdi, 2023).

Thematic and philosophical essence of the text, love, has been addressed widely by scholars. Faiyaz (2019) prefigures love as the driving force of transformation in the novel, stating that Shafak redefines Rumi to the readers of modern times, mainly using an ethical pedagogy of love and human solidarity. His study on character asserts that Shams is the personification of unconditional love and Ella and Rumi experience spiritual renewal by engaging with this unconditional, boundary-free love (Faiyaz, 2019). This fits into the rest of the research on the contemporary relevance of Rumi, in which love has been described as epistemological basis of mystical knowledge and moral personality.

Sufism as a psychological and therapeutic aspect of the novel has also been dealt with. Mehdi et al. (2021) analyze the text in terms of the cognitive and existential systems, suggesting that by depicting Sufism as a means of achieving psychological and emotional well-being and meaning-making in a disintegrated contemporary world, Shafak tries to show that Sufism serves as the way to restore order in the chaos of modernity. Their analysis shows that characters like Ella and Rumi undergo significant psychological change struggling against existential anxiety, loneliness, and identity crisis that Sufi practices make them overcome (Mehdi et al., 2021). Their research confirms the growing scholarly movement that places spiritual or mystical literature in the role of therapy to give the reader examples of resilience, acceptance, and inner harmony.

All these works point to the fact that *The Forty Rules of Love* functions in a crossroad between spirituality, postmodern literary form, intercultural dialogue, and the psychological transformation. Though critics mention the danger of using a Sufi tradition as oversimplified or commodified to Western people, the general academic opinion supports the statement that the novel by Shafak is instrumental in rejuvenating the conversation around the subject of love

and mysticism among modern readers. The literature manifests itself in a certain thematic disposition: the novel is perceived not only as fiction, but as the spiritually oriented literature that makes an amalgamation of the poetic mysticism and postmodern aesthetics as well as the global cultural flows to create a certain accessibility and ethical charged storytelling. Shafak novels, particularly *The Forty Rules of Love*, are involved in some kind of worldwide Sufi renaissance through popularizing mystical themes. According to researchers, cross-cultural positioning and Shafak being bilingual allows her to translate Eastern spiritualities to Western readers which is usually focused on pluralism and humanist morals. Critical discourse analyses demonstrate both positive or negative appraisal of accessibility, simplicity, or commodities of sacred teaching (e.g., recent CDA studies and stylistic analyses). The RumiShams relationship has long been an area of radical transformation: a scholar turned ecstatic poet by the innuendos of a wandering dervish. Shams as the catalyst that tears down the textual religiosity of Rumi and awakens embodied experience. Recent studies have identified parallel plot and narratives in a story within a story format in Shafak as method of producing the effects of echoing the past and present and highlighting that spiritual conflicts are relevant to all time. According to scholars, the manuscript device (a modern authors manuscript on Rumi) is the possibility of commentary on the reading, interpretation, and appropriation of mystical traditions reflexively. The pedagogical tone of the novel is emphasized in stylistic studies in which Shafak alternates between didactic rules and lyrical episodes. An emerging literature views the novel as therapeutic, its themes as advocating a psychological health, sense-making, and physical fortitude. Cognitive and existential readings indicate that mystical narratives are useful to assist the readers to reorganize self-narratives and address existential loneliness. Empirical and theoretical research on the relationship between reading spiritual literature and subjective well-being and ethical reflection is recent. Most works have applauded Shafak as a humanist, but critics are questioning authenticity and representational fidelity. Is there a danger of popularizing the Sufi doctrine, and making it shallow? This is also questioned by the feminism critics, how Shafak portrays female spiritual agency: the awakening of Ella is empowering, yet there are interpretations about the need to deeply question systems (patriarchy, institutional religion), which limits women in the narratives. The tensions are represented in recent corpus and critical discourse analyses, and both emancipatory gestures of the novel and its simplifications are evaluated.

Research Gaps

Despite the proliferation of researches, there are two gaps, one being (1) a relative lack of studies that offer a mix of close textual reading and a sustained theoretical framework that helps unite Sufi theology with modern narrative identity theory, the other being (2) the pedagogical issue, how the novel can educate the non-Sufi reader about mystical practices, has not been theorized extensively. The present work attempts to fill both of these gaps by examining the rhetorical tools used in the novel, as well as the tools of conceptual Sufi.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives are used in this study:

Sufi Conceptual Tools: Key Sufi ideas frame the reading - *ishq* (divine love) as transforming agency, *fana* (annihilation of ego) and *baqa* (subsistence in God), the relationship between teachers and disciples as method of conveying knowledge, and spiritual "rules" as ethical and contemplative guidelines. These notions allow perceiving not only psychological but also spiritual maturation in characters, which is their inner movement. This read is informed by foundational thinkers of Sufism and contemporary commentators (as embodied in the current commentaries).

Narrative Identity and Transformative Reading: Current theories of narrative Identity (how people make selves by narrating) and transformative reading (reading is a practice that

transforms the reader) are used. The metafictional form in the novel encourages the readers to observe, engage in, and transform by the tales. This system enables one to examine transformation at various levels: textual (the way narrative creates an insight), characterological (the way the identities of protagonists change), readerly (the way narrative challenges one to ethical re-orientation).

Methodology and Data Sources

Qualitative textual analysis and thematic coding are used in this research. The article of primary data is the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* (Shafak, 2009). Secondary sources are academic articles and critical essays (peer-reviewed and respected academic sources) that discuss the way in which Shafak addresses Sufism and mysticism; the review of the literature presented above uses sources published between 2008 and 2025 in order to be up-to-date. Method steps: Reading of the corresponding chapters and the forty pieces of rules to find the examples of Sufi ideas (mentions of *ishq*, *fana*, teacher-disciple relations, fire, ocean, mirror, annihilation, unity metaphors).

Thematic coding: extracts got coded into themes, including love as gnosis, rupture and rebirth, teacher as catalytic agent, female awakening and ethical comportment.

Intertextual mapping: the similarities amongst Rumi-Shams episodes and the modern path of Ella were gathered and used to explain the structure of the similarities.

Comparative cross-check with recent scholarly interpretations to locate findings in current debates.

The research proposed here does not assert an empirical generalization, rather it presents an approximate, theory-oriented interpretative description, which may inform additional empirical or comparative studies.

Data Analysis

The chosen text of *Exit West* instantly predetermines the main concern of the novel, precarity, and change and the contradiction between the state of normality and the state of approaching ruin. Mohsin Hamid places Saeed and Nadia in a city that is overcrowded with refugees, a term that is used to indicate a demographic strain, political instability and the initial phases of displacement even prior to the magical doors being opened. But even with this impending instability, the characters are still attending an evening course on corporate branding, an ironic contrast that shows that man wants to cling to the everyday routine even when the world is disintegrating under the feet. This sharpness is a significant thematic basis, which demonstrates that migration and crisis are not defined by a sudden moment but enter our lives slowly and progressively, and that individuals tend to hold on to the fantasy of the permanence.

Hamid takes this initial experience to develop identity and perception especially in terms of clothing. The initial message given by Nadia is that she is a conservative religious person; her black robe that covers all parts of her body, including the tips of her toes to the bottom of the jugular notch. Yet, when she answers aggressively, like, I do not pray, and then wears a motorcycle helmet instead of a headscarf, the writing comes to redress the balance in Saeed and shows the ineffectiveness of physical looks in determining personality. By this, Hamid shows how people in very controlled or conservative communities have to bargain on performative identities and the choices they make of outward signs that do not necessarily reflect their inner thoughts. Instead of being a symbol of religion, the robe of Nadia is an armor that transforms her into an early representation of the theme of identity in the novel to be flexible, adaptive and strategic in a weak political environment.

Not only is Saeed attracted to Nadia due to physical description e.g. her beauty mark that moved with her pulse, but interest and misunderstanding, showing how human bonding is formed in the presence of fear and miscommunication. Hamid takes advantage of their stilted communication to demonstrate how intimacy turns out to be a form of resistance in a city facing

imminent war. The dialogue between Saeed who asks her to have coffee and she questions him on the issue of prayer is an indicator of the multi-layered relationship between gender, religion, and cultural values. Their connection is more of a negotiation of assumptions rather than love at the start which shows that love in the novel is intertwined with social and existential uncertainty at all times.

The narrative process, which includes long and flowing sentences, omniscient point of view, and slight foreshadowing of magic-realism, supports an impression of sweeping inevitability. The theme of abrupt discontinuity, which leads both the personal and world travels in the novel, is brought in by the fact that the narrator reflects how within seconds one is attending to their own errands... the next moment one is dying. Hamid always puts personal scenes in their context of a larger philosophical reflection about mortality and fate and sets the reader up to the more dramatic changes that would come with the entrance of the black doors.

The scene at the place of work also shows how Saeed is living his normal life as the disaster looms over his head. The agency of billboards suffers at the hands of the recession economy as the city is falling into anarchy. The fact that Saeed is unable to concentrate, his obsession with the hawk building its nest and the distracted attitude of the boss all make the atmosphere of anxiety a bit less obvious. The symbolism of the hawk itself is vigilance, existence, and instinct preparation to change things in a jump--symbolic of the migrant status to be directly addressed in the novel. Hamid takes this instance to hint at the fact that the characters, just as the hawk, will soon have to fly through danger and abandon their well-known scenery.

The scene in which Hamid first uses the magical doors is the parallel scene in Australia, when the characters do not realize them but also are already aware of them. The man who comes out of darkness into a middle-class bedroom is characterized in the terms of extreme physical activity, displacement, and fear, which stresses upon the unnatural and urgent character of migration within the magical-realist context. His physical fight to get into the room implies the mental and philosophical violence of forced migration. The fact that he does not even make a sound when he decides to crawl through the window instead of killing the sleeping woman also disrupts simplistic accounts of migrant danger, as the act of him not killing the sleeping woman and instead acknowledging his own defenseless state also makes him humanized: "He knew how easy it was to reduce a man into meat. This sentence symbolizes the frailty of migrant bodies and the insecurity of living in the unfamiliar and even hostile environment.

Through the contrast between the humble domestic coming home of Saeed and the enigmatic worldwide migration of an unnamed migrant, Hamid connects the local with the global because it shows that migration is never a singular event but a component of a greater system of human movement, fear, and boundary crossing. The story is presented with valence in the home life that Saeed leads which includes an authoritative mother, a father who has a slightly lost air. However, even here Hamid is able to indirectly condemn the socio-political situation that has placed low regard on respectable professionals and disrupted generations. The life of Saeed parents is a life of many educated individuals in the problematic countries: they are diligent, pursue decent careers, and are, however, ill-treated with their nation. This fact alludes to the processes of displacement by which the structural forces operate and leaves the readers in mind that migration is never a failure of an individual but in many cases the effects of political and economic degradation.

In general, the excerpt preconditions the development of the theme of love, loss, displacement and silent origins of disaster in the novel. The beginning of the relationship between Saeed and Nadia is opposed to foreshadowing of national ruin and worldwide migration, and this is what Hamid intended to communicate all along: that despite the fact that the borders unite and the world breaks, the human relationships will remain, change, and evolve. They do not start their narrative with a crisis but with minor misunderstandings, glancing shyness, and daily routines

- a message to make people realize that even before they turn into a migrant, they are nothing but people, with lives that are easy to recognise.

Shafak sprinkles the novel with rules, which are credited to Shams. These statements of aphorism serve as didactic fulcrums: they reduce Sufi doctrine to digestible theses and appear at storylines where the characters are forced to take a moment of self-reflection. The rules have two levels: a plot level (moving Ella or Rumi towards insight) and an epistemic one, that is, epistemic claims about reality, love and the self. As an example, some are rules that restate how suffering and rupture is required in order to experience authenticity (a typical Sufi motif) with a reconceptualization to address the psychological pain of the present day. The pedagogical structure, thereby, transforms thick mystic teachings into narrative morality. Such approach is similar to the observations of recent stylistic researchers regarding the open-minded approach of mysticism that Shafak takes. One of the most dominant findings is that love (ishq) is represented as an eros which breaks the boundary of the ego. Characters in each of the timelines experience love as a destabilizer to the past certainties: the scholarly certainties of Rumi are shaken by the provocations of Shams, the domestic complacency of Ella by the manuscript and her own letters with the author Aziz. Shafak makes this dissolution textual by using the same metaphors many times, fire eats, sea swallows coasts, mirrors reflect the self as someone who already is not. These photos are consistent with Sufi logic in which annihilation (fana) comes first before subsistence (baqa). The more recent criticism has emphasized the way Shafak renders fana into the present (psychological surrender instead of necessarily theological annihilation) and renders it ethically and existentially readable to a wide audience.

Shams acts as an anti-authoritarian instructor and his pedagogy is confrontational, improvisational. He is not so much a doctrinal educator and more of a disorienter-shaker of the certainties of Rumi in order to compel experiential knowledge. This relationship of performative pedagogy is introduced in the novel: the performance by Shams, the provocations to the crowds, the tests to himself, the radical intimacy, compel Rumi to be converted to the embodied, ecstatic practice. Aziz and the manuscript stand in a similar position within the plot as they are both catalysts of the intellectual and emotional reorientation of Ella in the modern plot. In the novel, teacherly provocation scaffolding stands out as the main tool of spiritual initiation. This emphasis on the catalytic role of the teacher in the narrative design by Shafak is supported by recent critical works.

The story of Ella is especially instructive on the subject of contemporary spiritual agency. Shafak revisits the seeker as not so much a man (classical Sufi hagiography tends to focus on men) but as a modern woman, whose role at home, in turn, becomes the goal of enlightenment. The transformation of Ella, in terms of reading, challenging, threatening to lose a husband, points towards the autonomy of spirituality that borders feminist issues. But there is still critical opinion regarding the question: some authors extol the empowering of Ella as a case of spiritual feminism; others warn that the novel sometimes reproduces gendered dichotomies by making Ella successful only through a male-written manuscript and a male counterpart. This friction makes the easy celebratory readings more difficult and reflects recent literature which suggests a more gendered critical approach.

In addition to inner transformation, Sufism taught by Shafak focuses on external ethical change: compassion, hospitality to Other, tolerance and lack of judgment. The regulations tend to focus on perceiving the other as divine and love as service. The story demonstrates that the change within spreads to the social practice- the poetry of Rumi is a channel of community consolation, the life decisions of Ella affect her family and friends. Recent researchers note this ethical dispersion, and place the novel in its context within a larger tendency of literary Sufism in which the expression of social compassion is the beginning to manifest as a consequence of inner awakening.

The manuscript-within-the-story technique and the epistolary interaction encourage the reader to take part in the process of the co-formation. Shafak implies that reading texts or stories themselves can cause change by making it a part of the plot. The novel therefore serves the pedagogical role: the readers are not only informed about Sufi beliefs, but how to implement them in their everyday life by reflecting and making moral choices. Various empirical and theoretical readings indicate that spiritual fiction may have quantifiable impacts on the moral imagination and well-being of readers; although this paper is interpretive, it concurs with those findings and hypothesizes that the story structure of Shafak is scaffolding such a reader change.

Discussion

As it was analyzed, *The Forty Rules of Love* undergoes change in ways that follow intersecting lines:

Existential/Metaphysical: Shafak redefines *ishq* by redefining it as existential epistemology—knowing by loving—there is knowledge and being are related.

Psychological: The story reinterprets the classical Sufi experiences (ecstasy, annihilation, surrender) through the modern psychological terminology (identity crisis, meaning-making), which helps the mystical processes to be familiar to the modern reader.

Ethical/Social: Inner change results in increased empathy and social responsibility; the regulations promote the action that questions cultural biases.

Pedagogical: The teacher-disciple relationship and the textual manuscript forms an instructive atmosphere; learning in the novel a dialogical, experiential, and disrupted process, not necessarily doctrinal.

There are two tensions which are worth mentioning. The first one is the problem of representation and simplification: although Shafak attempts to render Sufi ideas understandable, experts believe that the simplification will lead to cultural homogenization. The Sufi portrait in the novel has become popular and therefore the novel can replace more strict theological studies to many of the readers. Second, agency and dependency: the awakening of Ella is strong, but it is precipitated by male-written texts/figures, feminist readings should thus be able to admit the power of Ella agency and their dependence on narratives.

Conclusion

The Forty Rules of Love is the reinterpretation of medieval Sufi personas as well as the modern-day guide to the spiritual transformation of the self of its reader written by Elif Shafak. The novel recycles classical Sufi principles through its opposing storyline, aphorism-like dictums, and teacher-disciple theatrics to present its ideas in terms of psychological and moral applicability to a worldwide audience. Change in the novel is not only an internal, privatized experience but pedagogical (acts of communication (stories, letters, poetry) brought about change) and ethical which results in compassion and social responsiveness.

The analysis concludes that the merits of Shafak are in the possibility to make complicated mystic notions clear and demonstrate that love disequilibrates and reinvents the identity. Nevertheless, there are weaknesses: some possible over-simplification and the absence of gender conflicts are something that can be questioned. Future studies could take the form of empirical reception studies (what readers tell us about having transformed as a result of reading the novel), comparative studies with other fictionalizations of Sufism in the present day, and more theological readings that engage with classical Sufi texts to make an assessment of fidelity and adaptation.

Altogether, *The Forty Rules of Love* is a worthy addition to the contemporary intervention: it asks the reader to engage in an intellectual, experiential, and ethical practice of love, proving the ability of literature to facilitate the process of spiritual change in the modern world.

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