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THE ELIF SHAFAK MANIA IN THE GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET: *THE FORTY RULES OF LOVE*

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Abstract:
This article proposes a rereading of Shafak's fiction in the light of the debates surrounding World Literature and the global novel. It takes stock of the findings of World Literature critics to envisage Shafak's texts as market commodities, cognizant of the dilemmas and stakes involved when writing for a global audience. The paper further examines *The Forty Rules of Love,* and probes to what extent it is constructed as a consumable narrative/text designed for a Western cosmopolitan readership, while showcasing the way it flirts with global tastes to comply with the imperatives of the mainstream literary market.

Keywords: World Literature; Elif Shafak; market commodity; global audience; *The Forty Rules of Love*

1. Introduction

> *"I respect novelists who see their mother tongue as their primary source of identity but I sincerely believe my own homeland is none other than Storyland: a vast expanse where static identity is replaced by multiple belongings and the boundary between dream and reality is fluid. This is what keeps me going despite my broken accent and enduring foreigness. I believe that if we can dream in more than one language then, yes, we can also write in more than one language."* (Elif Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love*)

Once upon a time, there was a novelist who wrote stories in her native tongue, Turkish, acquired fame in her native land, but wouldn't rest content with being a local celebrity. Elif dreamt of international recognition, prizes and a place under the sun. Once upon a time, there was Elif Shafak, an inhabitant of Storyland/ Disneyland, the land of the fetish par excellence, where 'static identity' dissolved into the fluid vortex of 'multiple belongings', where dreamers crossed all borders including linguistic ones, and writers detoured the local to embrace the global. Once upon a time, there was a 'nomad', a

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'commuter' between cultures and languages who dreamt in more than one language, and wrote likewise, in her indefatigable pursuit to be a 'global soul'.

The above-paragraph might understandably be faulted for the inappropriateness of its register and diction, as it manifestly sounds like a violation of critical and academic decorums, yet my design in starting this paper with a parable-like is to set the tone for the line of reasoning buttressing the present article, and which will progressively unfold along the argumentation. Indeed, Elif Shafak's career as a fiction writer and her choices- be they aesthetic, linguistic, generic or thematic –bespeak central concerns to today's World Literature, while highly problematizing her location as a global writer in the international literary arena. Not only does her itinerary disclose her early engagement with the exigencies of the book industry, and the dilemma of negotiating her position as a 'minor' writer authoring her fiction in a 'minor' language (Turkish), but it also demonstrates her alertness to the worldwide hegemony of English as a linguistic medium, and the duress for any writer eager to retain the attention of the international readership to indulge in the process of translation into English. Actually, this linguistic frustration of sorts seems to be the kismet of most World Literature authors whose works are compelled to travel out of their respective contexts into new literary systems, and to survive the complex and cruel trafficking of literary goods across the planetary circuits of dissemination. If we agree with Rebecca L. Walkowitz that "*The novel today solicits as well as incorporates translation, in substantial ways"* (Walkowitz 2015, 4), and if we further concede that:

> *"In Born-translated novels, translation functions as a thematic, structural, conceptual, and sometimes even typographical device. These works are written in the hope of being translated, but they are also often written as translations, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed."* (Walkowitz, 2015 5)

Then, the queries begging an answer at this stage are: How does Shafak's awareness of the deep impact of translation on the circulation of her fiction shape her artistic production, or else how far does targeting an international readership translate in designing border-crossing, translation-friendly texts? Does the sequel bear the imprint of anxiety about global marketability, and ultimately how does Shafak's fiction, being presumably the epitome of a newborn genre- the 'Dull New Global Novel' (Tim Parks 2010)- negotiate its status within the world market since: "*From the moment an author perceives his ultimate audience as international rather than national, the nature of his writing is bound to change. In particular, one notes a tendency to remove obstacles to international comprehension*" (Tim Parks 2010). In fact, the adjustments a World Literature writer is called to enact stretch from ideological and discursive compromises to linguistic and thematic ones, with the concomitant risk of not only marketing a palatable cultural alterity but of yielding literary works with low aesthetic caliber. Tongue partly in cheek, Tim Parks again deplores the mediocrity of global literary production in the international marketplace where 'high brow' writers in the stature of Shakespeare: "*would have eased off*

the puns" (Parks 2010) or "*A new Jane Austen can forget the Nobel*" (Parks 2010). Such a romantically past-oriented dismissive critique is situated by Karolina Watroba within the wider scope of the debate about World Literature and literary value; and in attempting to address the vexed question: is 'Global' the new 'lowbrow', she maintains that the debate is definitely:

> *"Fashioned as a materialist narrative about cultural hegemony in the globalized world, these critiques turn out to be motivated by a much older concern to preserve a literary elite: 'the global' and its opposite, 'the local' start to sound like code words for 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow', and seen in this light, the whole critical debate about the new global novel appears as an attempt to sidestep a direct engagement with the ever-elusive question of literary value."* (Karolina Watroba 2017, 53)

By calling into question the high/low brow divide, global writers, in reality, carve out new discursive spaces for their narratives, while simultaneously playing the faultline between minor and major literary topographies, via transcultural and translinguistic movements that deeply interrogate fixed categories of nation, identity, belonging, canonicity and so forth, besides further demarcating themselves from postcolonial aesthetics because of its inadequacy to engage with "*global crises that exceed the national and anti-colonial*" (Tim Parks 2010). Such an endeavour mobilizes aesthetic concerns, the most salient of which are the crisis of form, generic affiliation and translatability. So, what is the profile of 'the Dull New Global Novel'? what are its lineaments? Is it an identifiable 'category'? As a matter of fact, Karolina Watroba establishes a set of distinctive features based on Parks' diagnosis:

> *"The texts belonging to this new genre have two characteristic features. They are written by non-Western authors, but become very successful on the Western literary market- that is because, the story goes, these books are 'eminently translatable': they eschew the idiosyncracy of the local for the interchangeability of the global'. In other words, the authors of the' dull new global novel' choose to write in a neutral style that is easier to render in translation rather than engaging creatively with the resources of their native languages. Moreover, they avoid references to the intricacies of their own cultures and local literary traditions, and instead use motifs and narrative strategies familiar to the Western reader."* (Watroba 2017, 53)

To recapitulate, global fiction is, first of all, mostly written by non-Western authors with market valence in the West, second it is designed for foreign consumption or export, third it encompasses works that readily lend themselves to translational transfer, fourth these works flirt with global tastes as well as with Western techniques and forms, while shunning the peculiarities of their own respective cultures. Such a gestalt could perform as a procedural benchmark to gauge the solvability of the works which form the substance of this study, and more particularly, the present chapter's focus, into the portrait sketched out both by Parks and Watroba. Accordingly, one can reiteratively ask:

does Shafak's fiction respond to Parks' profiling? Are her texts constructed with the imbedded anxiety of a cosmopolitan reader? and if it is the case, how far does this angst contribute to fashioning her texts both on the linguistic and formal levels, while materializing in collaboratively translatable and consumable narratives?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Elif Shafak and the dilemma of Linguistic Choice

In 1997, Shafak published her debut novel *Pinhan* (The Hidden)- originally written in Turkish and actually never translated into English- yet winning her the 1998 Rumi Prize, followed by *Sehrin Aynalari* (1999) (Mirrors of the City), then by *Mahrem* (2000) (The Gaze) consecrated as the 'Best Novel' by the Turkish Writers' Union in 2000, followed two years later by *Bit Palas* (The Flea Palace) shortlisted for Independent Best Foreign Fiction in 2005. In 2004, Shafak released her fifth opus, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities,* for the first time composed originally in English. This cursory survey across a time-lapse of seven years documents how Shafak has made her way into the global book market first as a 'local' author penning her texts in a peripheral language- or in one of the 'remote languages of the third world' to borrow from Nobelized Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk- winning her acknowledgement in the Turkish market, besides a gradual infiltration into the wider international scene, then as an English-language writer with global market valence, which astonishingly surpasses by far her Nobelized fellow citizen. Clearly enough, there is no ambiguity about the decisive role that language choice has operated in Shafak's career, for the compromise to shift from Turkish to English evidences the writer's deep cognizance of the global stakes of English as a major vehicle of literariness, whereby reaching out for an anglophone global elite becomes synonymous with an engagement with the realpolitik of the global book industry.

This compromise actually stamps the consciousness of the majority of, if not all, World Literature authors, yet, Shafak's case retains its own particularities. In this respect, Rebecca Walkowitz draws an interesting analogy between Shafak and Nabokov in instantiating what she inventively chooses to label 'preemptive translation', a strategy whereby writers try: "*to mitigate the need for translation by choosing to write in a dominant language, if they can. We could call this strategy preemptive translation*" (Walkowitz 2015, 10). Walkowitz convincingly argues that: "*Shafak follows a path- and a rationale- traveled by mid-twentieth century writer Vladimir Nabokov, who composed his early novels in Russian but began producing novels in English, starting with Lolita, so he could publish in New York*" (Walkowitz 2015, 11). What this 'translingual writing' or 'self-translation' (Walkowitz 2015) wherein the writer functions both as author and translator- indicate is not only linguistic renouncement, but an authorial choice which strategically positions itself in linguistic exilic spaces in "*an embrace of the global, in lieu of the local*" (Walkowitz 2015, 13). The legitimate wish to move from small to large-scale audiences emphasizes the international lineage of 'minor' authors in the age of globalization, by claiming membership in the world cultural and literary landscapes. One important detail that should by no means be overlooked is what I would term the passport text or 'gateway text' to borrow from

Walkowitz; the one narrative that ensures a peripheral author access to the global market, and If *Lolita* happens to be Nabokov's gateway text, then Shafak's *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* unmistakably inaugurates her entry into the anglophone arena. If it is true that the critical accolade the novel was met with attests to the genius of the author and her immense talents as an exceptional storyteller, it mainly gestures towards the hegemony of English and its power to recuperate authors from the periphery by luring them into more visibility and prestige.

Indeed, in many interviews, Elif Shafak- at her twelfth novel so far with the recent publication of *10 minutes and 38 seconds in this Strange World* (2019), and *The Land of Missing Trees* (2021) has confessed that: "*Turkish is my(her) emotional language, whereas English is my (her) rational one*", or "*Oddly, sorrow, melancholy, lament…. These are easier to express in Turkish. Humour, irony, satire, paradox… much easier to express in English. Each language is equipped differently (….)".* In answering a British interviewer if she felt that she wrote from a global perspective, she affirms:

> *"I believe it's possible to have multiple, flowing belongings, instead of a singular, solid identity. I am an Istanbulite, for instance, and I am also a Londoner. I am from the Mediterranean, the Middle East, The Balkans, Asia Minor, and Europe. Inside my soul reside stories from the East and stories from the West, and I don't know exactly where the boundary lines. I feel attached to cultures, cities, and peoples, always plural. There is a strong local element in my novels, and at the same time, a strong global element. To me, these things are not mutually exclusive. They can co-exist."* (http://britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine//elif-shafak-writing-english-brings-me-closer-turkey)

In addition to advertising for literary experimentation with a polyglot flavour and brandishing the double banner local/global, Shafak is unequivocally claiming her Sufi affiliation by echoeing Rumi's words and philosophy, besides aligning herself with the Sufi tradition upon which a lot of her project as a writer draws, an affiliation she has incessantly acknowledged in her fiction and non-fiction works.

Two years ensuing the success of *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004), Shafak is charged by the Turkish government for 'insulting Turkishness', and hence 'violating the article 301 of the Turkish penal code' in her novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), wherein she tackles sensitive issues in Turkey namely the Armenian genocide and the incumbent responsibility on the Turks in the decimation of the Armenian minority, and their exilic scattering around the world. Apart from winning her a long-listing for the Orange Prize, the critical acclaim Shafak's sixth text received, not only confirmed her credentials as a distinguished novelist, but also introduced her to the international readership as an anti-establishment voice. It is no wonder that Turkish scholar Arzu Akbatur argues that *The Bastard of Istanbul*: "*is without doubt the novel that has truly made Elif Shafak an internationally recognized writer*" (Akbatur 2011, 171). On the other hand, Turkish critic Alev Adil, in trying to comprehend the success of this type of novels in the West, convincingly argues that the Turkish novel "*is caught between the Scylla of the commercial forces of Orientalist*

banalisation in global publishing and the Charybdis of political persecution in Turkey, Turkish literature inhabits a very restricted imaginary indeed" (Adil 2006, 5). Tethered, as it stands, to what she calls "*the cramped space of political signification*" (Adil 2006, 5), Turkish novels are thus constrained to 'signify politically', to match the Western agenda incarnated by the global publishing conglomerates who are, more often than not, interested in "*banalised Orientalist local colour*" (Adil 2006, 5) or in Turkish writers as martyrs of "*an eternal and unchanging despotic Orient*" (Adil 2006, 10). Such reductionist views motivated by what Alev ironically calls "*the pitypolitics of European liberals*" (Adil 2006, 10) cast Turkish literature within a circumscribed space, laying it bare of its "*complexity and contradiction*" (Adil 2006, 6). The result is that Turkish writers in particular -and third world authors in general- are left with very limited imaginary and aesthetic scopes, wherefore they can either game and titillate the system, or stretch its confines to meet larger concerns.

This dilemma is a familiar scenario to writers like Shafak who, by physically moving to the West, had to start with the preliminary and telling compromise of Westernizing her last name to make it more accessible to Occidental ears, she thus documents her anguish in *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004): "*As names adjust to a foreign country, something is always lost- be it a dot, a letter or an accent… It is the cutback a foreigner learns first. The primary requirement of accommodation in a strange land is the estrangement of the hitherto most familiar: your name*." (p. 6). If losing a dot is no real debate to a Westerner, it is revealing of a deep paradox which locates third world authors in the territory of compromise as Alev Adil argues:

> *"Jonathan Heawood, director of English PEN, misreads fertile issues of cultural debate as mere hysterical extremism. 'When brilliant young novelist Elif Shafak' he writes, 'who has Turkish roots but now lives in Arizona, first wrote in English, there was outrage back home. Worst was the fact that she began spelling her name phonetically, 'Shafak' for Americans, and omitting an accent 'you lost the dot' screamed her detractors in Istanbul' (Heawood, 2006). The loss of a dot is no big issue to Heawood; anyone who raises the issue is surely a frenzied fanatic? Yet the debate about the diasporic transformation of names is a topic with which afak (Shafak) herself engages in her novel."* (Alev Adil 2006, 6)

> *"Apart from renaming, what other compromises do 'minor' authors have to indulge in? how do they manage the precarious and delicate tightrope walking on which their literary journey embarks them? is there any margin of intellectual and creative integrity left for them, or are they forsaken, under the grips of the capitalist machinery, with no free power of choice? do they just rehearse the self-othering, self-exoticising gimmicks designedly dictated by Western literary patronage or are they accomplices of the capitalist apparatus rather than the victims…"* (Huggan 2001).

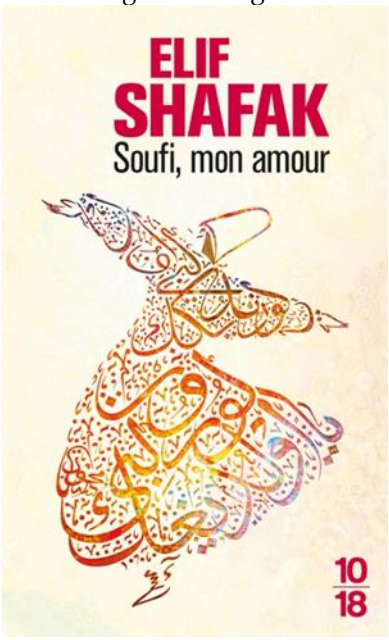
3. Methods and Materials

3.1 The Forty Rules of Love as a Fetishicized Market Commodity

Released in 2009, *TFROL* is Elif Shafak's eigth novel, and by far her most hailed one. Published in Turkish under the title *Ashk,* or *Soufi Mon Amour* in French (documented evidence is appended hereafter), the novel displays from the outset a real awareness of marketing strategies through a dexterous handling of the politics of titling, besides an acute sensitiveness to cultural nuances. In one of her interviews, Shafak, in trying to account for these subtelties, declares that:

> *"In Turkey, we have at least two different words for 'love'. I like the sound and depth of ashk very much. It can be very passionate and mundane, yet at the same time, it can be spiritual and otherworldly. The Turkish ashk and the English 'love' do not sound exactly the same. That is one reason why I wanted to have a different title. The second reason is that in Western societies, the word love has been used more frequently to name books, movies, etc. Whereas for us Turks, to name a novel Ashk is still out of the ordinary. In other words, the perceptions are different. Therefore, in English, I wanted to name the novel The Forty Rules of Love. In French, it is even different, Soufi Mon Amour (Sufi, my love). I think each and every language has its own rhythm and melody, and in general, I like to pay attention to these differences when naming my novels. I do not believe in a one-to-one, absolute, cement-like translation. I believe in flexible transformation."* (Journal of Turkish Literature, issue 6, 2009).

Figure 2: The French version featuring a whirling dervish



Source: https://i.grassets.com/images/S/compressed.photo.goodreads.com/books/1237239242i/634149

Figure 3: The Turkish version capitalizing on the Turkish word for love Ask

Source: https://images-na.ssl.images/amazon.com/images/I/71jH4O0GJWL.jpg

The critical kudos *TFROL* earned hardly match the international fervour that ensued its publication, winning the author Prix ALEF –Mention Spéciale Littérature Etrangére, a nomination for the 2012 international IMPAC Dublin literary Award, besides featuring on the BBC's list among the One Hundred Books that Shaped Our World. More explicitly and in crude market terms, the exponential sales the novel recorded worldwide, attest to the huge commercial success and massive large-scale marketability of *TFROL* with unprecedented sales figures - 750.000 sold copies in Turkey and France alone- as well as translations in more than fifty languages; all this concurred not only to consecrate Shafak as a World Literature writer, but also to entitle her to the status of intellectual celebrity in the 'World Republic of Letters'. This place on the pantheon, along with a parade on the walk of fame whereby Shafak became the pet of the media, and incidentally the keynote speaker in a number of conferences and prestigious venues (a TED Global speaker twice), paradoxically cast shadows on her potential complicity with the Western demand for a consumable alterity, packaged in reader-friendly versions. This, in turn, compromises her ideological and artistic choices as a high-profile author entangled within the Western book market machinery, and incidentally raises questions about her margin of agency and intellectual integrity. It is worth noting, though, that despite all her commercial success, Shafak has not been listed for the Booker Prize until very recently with the release of *10 Minutes and 38 Seconds in this strange world* - shortlisted in 2019, a reality which in fact raises questions about the resistance of the Western gatekeeping institutions to her potential canonization, thereby positing her works within the 'middle brow' category.

The narrative, quite familiar to most readers now, recuperates the story of Sufi mystic Jalaleddine Rumi and the momentous encounter with his spiritual guru، Shams of Tabriz, in thirteenth-century Konya. Through an artful 'mise en abime', Shafak juxtaposes Rumi's tale to Ella's story, a twenty first century unfulfiled Jewish American housewife, who out of sheer bourgeois ennui, gets a job as a literary reviewer, whereby she comes to discover the world of Sufism through Aziz and his novel *Sweet Blasphemy*. In examining the paratextual elements of the novel, we are first struck as readers by the titular apparatus and more specifically by the numerological component; if *Forty* or *The Forty* - with more marketing assertive exclusiveness conveyed through the definite article- unequivocally refers the reader to Rumi's *Mathnawi* by capitalizing on explicit intertexuality with this latter's legacy, it nonetheless stands in contrast with Sufi cautiousness to claim absolute and final knowledge. Mark Sedgwick notes that: "*when asked about the origin of these rules, Shafak responded that they were shaped as I (she) kept writing the novel. It was the characters in the novel that inspired them*." (Muro 2010; Sedwig 2017, 68), he further concludes that "*The rules are available on various websites, in English and in Arabic, having been extracted from the book by enthusiastic readers*" (Eclectic Sedwig 2017, 68). The significance of 'forty' in various cultural and religious contexts is commented upon by Aziz when learning about Ella's fortieth birthday:

> *"Happy birthday! Forty is a most beautiful age for both men and women. [……]. And we are in love we need to wait for forty days to be sure of our feelings.*
> *[……] You have reached a most auspicious number. Congratulations !...."* (*TFROL*, 115)

On the other hand, the multilingual book cover designs in different editions attest to the writer's and the publishing house's shrewd drawing on the bulk of commonplace iconography related to Sufism and Islam. While the French edition is marketed with a whirling dervish motif functioning as a fetish for the Sufi Mevlevi order, most editions- if not all- share a luxurious blend of colours, ranging from golden and red with Oriental arcades topping the front cover, and featuring Arabic calligraphy for background decoration: محمد/الله. On the Penguin edition I have been using for the purposes of this paper, one can by no means miss the deliberate alignment of Muslim sacred places of prayer with modern skyscrapers, towering an imaginary city or 'a contact zone' of sorts, in front of which Ella and Aziz stand in spiritual communion, with an open-handed offering Aziz, and a text-holding attentive Ella. The bare-footed couple- clearly joining each other from separate directions- presumably East and West- after what could be assumed to have been a long and arduous journey- seems to be oblivious of the surrounding vestiges of civilisation, while being absorbed in an internal journey within the self, where the suggested possibility of carnal love between a man and a woman is vectorized through a more esoteric type of affection. The flagrant contrast between the protagonists and the background picture, where anachronistic elements are made to rub shoulders with modern ones, actually sets the tone for the narrative. The back cover, on the other hand, abounds in reviews by different newspapers and magazines as prestigious as The Times, The Independent, The Daily Telegraph, Metro… They all publicize *TFROL* as either a "*Gorgeous, jewelled, luxurious book*" (The Times) or an "*Enlightening, enthralling. An affecting paean of faith and love*" (Metro) or else "*a quest infused with Sufi mysticism and verse, taking Ella and us into an exotic world where faith and love are heartbreakingly explored*" (my emphasis), or *"with its timely, thought-provoking message… The Forty Rules of Love deserves to be a global publishing phenomenon"* (my emphasis) (The Independent).

My purpose in foregrounding the peritextual features of *TFROL* is to emphasize the role of reviewing in the consecration of peripheral authors, who practically have no chance to acquire visibility unless their works are read and reviewed; and if 'the translator is a creator of literary value' according to Pierre Bourdieu, the same holds true for the reviewer whose role can be invested with similar significance. In fact, translators, reviewers, and critics are the agents or the gatekeepers of the literary field where capital is constructed and disputed, moreover, they are often "*responsible for the misunderstandings and the misreadings*" (Casanova 1999, 21), since they are "*the legislators of the World Republic of Letters*" (Casanova 1999, 21). Casanova conceives of them as an 'invisible aristocracy' who determines what is literary and what is not, for her it "*becomes possible to measure the literariness (the power, prestige and volume of linguistic and literary capital) of a language, not in terms of the number of writers or readers it has, but in terms of the number of cosmopolitan intermediaries- publishers, editors, critics and especially translators- who*

assure the circulation of texts into the language or out it" (Casanova 1999,21) . With so many 'certificates of literary value' in the bag, Shafak and *TFROL* can navigate the cosmopolitan literary scene with all assurance.

> *"When I was a child, I saw God,*
> *I saw angels,*
> *I watched the mysteries of the higher and lower worlds. I thought all men saw*
> *The same. At last, I realized that they did not see……..*
> *Shams of Tabriz."* (*TFROL,* epigraph)

Although arrestingly fascinating, Shafak's representation of Shams of Tabriz is highly problematic as it is caught between two contrastive poles, as a matter of fact, besides being the most pivotal character in *TFROL,* he stands as the main host of a polyphonic novel where a multitude of points of view compete and intermingle to capture the reader's attention and empathy. Yet, Shams's voice guides Shafak's text while thrusting all its aura on other protagonists to the extent of eclipsing them. Indeed, throughout the narrative, his voice is omnipresent, and the unique energy of his mystical magnitude illuminates the set of characters who populate the narrative. While foregrounding the 'aura' of Shams, Shafak is in reality augmenting the aura of her literary product in the book market, an aura which, in turn, transforms the text into a fetish object which readers compete in acquiring. Therefore, the reach and worth of Shams as the catalyst of transformation and spiritual emancipation encompass not only the inhabitants of the book, but also extend to the readers as well. In one of her interviews, Shafak maintains that *"The Forty Rules of Love is extroverted, it radiates energy from inside out"* (Elif Shafak, roportajlar). Without ever wishing to challenge her view, I invite the reader to have a more circumspect look at the way this character is constructed in the text and to gauge the way this 'energy' permeates the internal fabric of the novel. When encountering Shams of Tabriz for the first time as a character in *Sweet Blasphemy*, Ella, the reviewer, is set to fantasize on the man rather than on the spiritual guide:

> *"Her thoughts turned to Sweet Blasphemy. She was intrigued by the character of Shams of Tabriz. [….] a tall, dark-looking, mysterious man with leather pants, a motorcycle jacket, [….] riding a shiny red Harley-Davidson [….] A handsome, sexy, Sufi motorcyclist riding fast on an empty highway! Wouldn't it be nice to get picked up while hitchhiking by a guy like that?"* (*TFROL*, 36)

In her attempt to demystify the character of Shams, Shafak takes stock of Ella's imaginary construct, which ironically invokes Rock stars or Hollywood movie icons, whereby Shams sounds more like Elvis Presley or James Dean. Whereas the eccentric and 'provocateur' facets of the character are exploited in such a fashion as to arouse female desire for 'bad boys'; the long-haired, good-looking and sexy Sufi motorcyclist does not look out of place, on the contrary, he is customized to fit Ella's fantasy for a modern unconventional prince charming of sort, who would rescue her from her tedious marital

life. Far from being innocent, the explicit and deliberate Americanisation of Shams catapults him within the consumerist society of Harley-Davidson highway motorcyclists, thus commodifying him for the Western reader who will readily recognise elements of his own culture, and will adopt the narrative for its non-defamiliarizing potential. A technique she similarly uses in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), which is replete with instances of elements of the American culture, drawing, for instance, on country music and more particularly on Johnny Cash's repertoire, whose poster and songs both dramatize and vocalize Asya's rebellious temperament:

> *"Asya was asleep on the other side of the room […….]. There is also a CD case next to Asya's bed- Johnny Cash dressed from head to toe in black, erect against a gray, gloomy sky with a dog on one side of him and a cat on the other, staring dourly at something far beyond the frame."* (The *Bastard of Istanbul*, 216)

A few lines later in *TFROL,* Shams of Tabriz, the awe-inspiring Sufi mentor, is further sketched out only to match a Nostradamus or a Raspoutine with sooth-saying powers:

> *"Ella then wondered what Shams would see if he read her palms. Would he explain to her why her mind turned from time to time into a coven of dark thoughts? [……] Has anything in her life been bright and bold lately? Or ever?"* (*TFROL,* 36/37)

In another instance Shafak introduces Shams of Tabriz as a Dervish / Gipsy, a rootless outcast belonging nowhere:

> *"I have been a wandering dervish ever since, [….]. When hungry, I earn a few coins by interpreting dreams. In this state I roam east and west, searching for God high and low."* (*TFROL*, 39)

Literary critic Elena Furlanetto argues that Shafak has placed *"her American heroine alongside Rumi to catch the attention of the American readership to the utmost since she was fully aware of the recent American fascination with the Rumi phenomenon"* (Furlanetto, 2013, 4). In her article, *The 'Rumi Phenomenon' between Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism*, *The Case of Elif Shafak's The Forty Rules of Love*, Furlanetto discusses the coincidence between *TFROL*'s commercial success and the renewed infatuation for Sufim in the US, after Coleman Barks' translation of Rumi's Mathnawi in 1997- featuring as a major reference in addition to other works cited in the appended source section of *TFROL*-which marks the year Rumi was consecrated the best-selling poet in America. Shafak's endnote is quite telling of her heavy reliance on Western translations of Rumi's poetry: "*While writing this novel, I benefited from greatly from my readings of the Mathnawi by R.A. Nicholson and the autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi by William Chittick. I am indebted to the works of William Chittick, Coleman Barks, Idris Shah, Kebir Helminski, Camille Helminski, Refik Algan, Franklin D. Lewis, and Annemarie Shimmel*" (*TFROL,* sources). This intellectual indebtedness to the

Western translation machine confirms once more and, if need be, the hegemony of Western academia as a mighty and inevitable mediator, both in accessing and in fashioning any understanding of major works such as the Mathnawi.

While Shafak's ackonwledgement evidently points to the intellectual subalternity of the East/Orient vis-à-vis the West in discovering and apprehending its own heritage, it concomitantly signals the potential perils of translation as a process of reconstructing knowledge in a 'one-way traffic', when "*……. English now assumes the mantle of exclusive medium of cosmopolitan exchange*" (Spivak 2003; Mufti 2010, 489). The most salient feature of these perils is 'the deterritorialization' of literature- to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari- which converts all writers in translation into *"…..nomads, immigrants and gypsies*" (qtd in Mufti, 4). Pertinently, if the consumption of Rumi's poetry is a worldwide phenomenon today, it is thanks to translation that the Western readership came to discover the mystic poet and his ecstatic poetry, and "*if the act of translating a Muslim poet is inexorably tied to questions of representation and appropriation*" (Furlanetto 2013), one might wonder to what extent Rumi is lost in translation, how far the commercialized Rumi is emblematic of a re-visited Americanized version of a more humanist apolitical Islam, and to what extent the popular Sufism in the West is faithful to Sufi ethos. In this respect, Petya Tsoneva Ivanova observes:

> *"Such transformation can, for example, be observed in the way she (Shafak) reformulates Sufism, a heterodox branch of Islamic mysticism, into a means of breaking up tightly bordered enclosures of radical religious, cultural and social identities. With this sort of reclaiming a 'spiritual East', Shafak parallels Rushdie's secular translations of Sufism that dissolve it of its explicit religious significance, turning it into a metaphysical version of the inward quest his protagonists undertake in their migrations."* (Ivanova 2018, 168)

What Furlanetto ironically calls 'the New Age Kitsch Sufism' or 'Folk Islam', with all the pejorative connotations these appellations harbour, is in reality a 'domestication' or 'oversimplification' of Sufi philosophy which in fact *"strips the concepts from their Islamic roots"*, she further surmises that Shafak's *TFROL "employs Orientalist strategies in the ways in which she positions the East as instrumental to the West"* (Furlanetto 2013,205). Amira El Zien further corroborates this view when she declares that: *"…the popular (as opposed to the scholarly) perception of Rumi's Sufi tradition in the U.S does not capture the perennial philosophy to which Rumi belongs. Instead, it brings a form of vague spirituality. Rumi's verse is seen as an enjoyable spiritual product to be consumed in order that one may relax and become more productive after listening to it*" (El Zien 2000, 83).

Admittedly, TFROL exudes a sufi ambience excacerbated by Shafak's extensive use of Sufi tropes and imagery, the most conspicuous of which are the tropes of drowning and the loss of the lover, thus we find throughout the novel instances of Sufi imagery and symbolism whereby drowning is foregrounded not as loss of the self/life but as communion with the divine. The narrative, in fact, starts with Shams's death, drowned by his murderer in a well in Rumi's backyard, the chapter entitled *The Killer* is actually recounted by this latter:

> *"Beneath dark waters in a well, he is dead now. Yet his eyes follow me wherever I go, […..], that very last cry he gave out before his face drained of blood, his eyes bulged out, and his throat closed in an unfinished gasp, the farewell of a stabbed man. The howl of a trapped wolf."* (*TFROL*, 21)

Most importantly, perhaps, is the way Rumi and Shams's relationship is delivered in *TFROL*, artfully oscillating between master/disciple fascination, and suggestions of homoerotic love. For Rumi, the loss of his mentor and twin soul is an unbearable agony which torments him physically and spiritually after Shams had resolved to part with him:

> *"Barren is the world, devoid of sun, since Shams is gone. This city is a sad, cold place, [……]. How can life be the same without Shams of Tabriz?"* (*TFROL*, 288)

Sixteen years after Shams' tragic death, Rumi is still faithful to the memory of his master, and is still grieving his disappearance so bitterly. The fictionalized bond between both men is configured in such a way that: "*The relationship between the two (Rumi and Shams) is projected as an idealized form of a 'humanized 'version of Islam-Sufi Islam. A close reading, however, reveals several contradictions that validate the suspicions of the book 'functioning within a global cultural economy -a bazaar for non-Western artefacts- the category panders to the needs of the global market, producing ever more reified versions of 'other' worlds (Ghosh).*" (Hufaiza Pandit 2018, 199).

The contradictions in the characterization of Shams reveal Shafak's authorial crisis caught between the scylla of credibility and the charybdis of exotica, as a matter of course, Shams is invested with Messianic virtues as a savior in the embedded narrative *Sweet Blasphemy*, thus overshadowing the character of Aziz as eye-opener and initiator in Ella's life. Yet, Shafak jeopardizes the figure of Shams by compromising his masculinity not only through suggestions of ascetism- which in fact fall within Sufi aesthetics, and enhance his status as spiritual guide and 'murshid', but most importantly by obliquely gesturing towards his potential 'queerness'. While Turkish critic Hufaiza Pandit offers an interesting reading of *TFROL* through gender lenses, he explores the relationship between Shams and Kimya and dwells particularly on their marriage night:

> *"After the guests left, I returned to the house and meditated in a quiet corner. [……...].] I felt a strong need to run away from everything, not only from this house, this marriage, this town, but also from this body (emphasis mine) I had been given. Yet the thought of seeing Rumi the next morning held me anchored here. I couldn't abandon him again."* (*TFROL*, 305/306/307)

For Pandit, the scene is unmistakably loaded with Christian symbols such as self-flagellation with Shams' cutting of his own hand to save Kimya's honour in the face of society, while this latter (kimya) is "*the sacrificial lamb at the altar of Shams' and Rumi's friendship*" (*The Mythic and The Miraculous*). In a later chapter, Kimya -in her desperate attempt 'to tame the queer' to borrow from Pandit- uses all her feminine assets (with Desert Rose's assistance, the repented whore) to seduce a recalcitrant Shams, who in clear

self-denial of his sexual propensities as a 'disenfranchised queer' not only shuns her but scolds her for her straightforward manners:

> *"Bold, boisterous, and intelligent, Shams of Tabriz knows a great deal about love. [……..] 'What do you think you are doing?' he asked coldly. [……]. And I couldn't tell which hurt me the most: the sharpness of his words or the blankness on his face."* (*TFROL*, 318/319)

To elaborate on Pandit's interpretation, one can safely argue that this 'ménage à trois' incarnated by Rumi/Shams/kimya and perhaps even Kerra, Rumi's wife, enacts a paradigmatic triangular dynamic with active versus passive, normative versus non-normative poles. While Rumi and Shams are engulfed in an inspired/ inspiring male bond, Kimya and Kerra exemplify disempowered Oriental females in total conformity with Western constructed fantasies of the Orient and its women, as submissive and helpless under the grips of patriarchy and religious dogma, Pandit argues:

> *"The novel reverts back to the Oriental representation of Arab-Islamic cultures, fuelled by the slant of the Christian West and the Islamic East, which provided an added fantasy in the orientalist mind- the 'othering' of the Muslims. Such Orientalist representations of subaltern Muslim women further calcified and institutionalized their subhuman identity and subalternized them to both local patriarchy and their Western sisters."* (Hasan, 2005; Pandit, 2018)

Therefore, the failure of the triangular relationship is most amplified in the narrative by Shams' murder, which, according to Pandit again, is ample proof of the homophobic intolerance of non-heterosexual love.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 *The Forty Rules of Love:* A Resistant Text?

Shafak's enactment of self-Orientalizing strategies further exacerbates the exotic component of *TFROL* by artfully infusing the narrative with appropriate doses to stimulate the metropolitan reader's touristic gaze. Indeed, the use of language in *TFROL* is thus located at the complex conjuncture of conflictual cultural sites and self-exoticising strategies; through a large dictionary of Arabic vernacular, Shafak establishes 'a space of cultural contestation', and in that she does not differ from her fellow citizen Orhan Pamuk as they both:

> *"Employ differing strategies to push at the boundaries of the Turkish language and to forge new ways of saying and seeing (…….) For her part, Shafak reclaims Arabic- and Farsi-derived vocabulary, such as usages, which signify a return of the repressed pre-republic, Middle Eastern and Islamic linguistic memories, at best anachronistic, at worst Kemalist, in order to fashion a post-modern linguistic aesthetic. As a result, her language is at once*

> *an aesthetic and a political challenge to Kemalist secular literary orthodoxies of previous decades, which had insisted on looking to the West for literary inspiration, while 'cleansing' Turkish literature and verse of those rich Arabic and Persian influences that had dominated Ottoman court poetry."* (Adil 2006, 9-10)

Accordingly, the use of Arabic in *TFROL* fomenting a revision of the linguistic legacies in Turkey, and the deliberate recuperation of the constituents of Turkish identity, Alev is pertinently drawing attention to, does rewrite and further confront the official historiography through inaugurating new spaces of enunciation. The novel abounds in Arabic words such as: madrassa, shariah, hadith, maktab, tafsir, zikr, jihad, hamam, ghazal, baraqa, baqa, inshallah, faqih, qibla, tasbih, saqui, ney, tariqa, hafiz….. etc. Still, the appended glossary not only partly belies claims of cultural resistance on the part of Shafak since it is apparently a sign of cooperation to facilitate the Western reader's consumption of the narrative, but also situates the author and her narrative on the cusp of (un)translatability. As such, the glossary operates as a' laissez passer' or an instruction guide in the hands of a spoilt metropolitan reader in approaching an exotically unfamiliar space where he is pampered and spared the painstaking task of negotiating meaning in a foreign literary terrain. Arguably, reclaiming a linguistic legacy such as Arabic functions simultaneously as a self-exoticising/ foreignizing modus operandi in that it stands as a linguistic wink to the metropolitan reader and thus summons this latter's cooperation, and as a tacit invitation to rediscover the riches of an oriental linguistic heritage.

Significantly, *TFROL* retraverses The Silk Road as a transcultural dimension to position Rumi and Shams as travellers across space and temporality, Azra Ghandeharion argues: '*Rumi (…….) travels along the Silk Road in the twenty-first century. With the birth of a Rumi phenomenon in the West, Silk Road artists have rediscovered and adapted him for different purposes'* (Ghandeharion 2019, 71). Thus, the Western fascination with Rumi performs a double take in that it remaps the 'World Republic of Letters' by reaffirming the cultural hegemony of Oriental cultures in the medieval times, stretching from Morocco to India with the free circulation of people, culture, goods and mostly with its spirit of social and religious tolerance when America was not even on the map. This recharting of sorts questions the Eurocentric/Americentric division of the world literary map along a center/ periphery binarism, and re-anchors it in a multiple cultural economy invoking Janet Abu Lughod's *Before European Hegemony* (1989) in which *'Europe stands as a mere sub-system'* and '*a peripheral receiving part of a much rich Mediteranean sub-system that was predominantly Muslim, and that itself interracted (……) with subsystems around the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf(….)*' (Abu Lughod 1994; Theo d'Haen 2012, 10).

Pertinently, Shafak rejuvenates literary space in *TFROL* by championing a 'happy multi-culti' melting pot Konya, which sets Shams of Tabriz to marvel at this Tower of Babel of sorts:

> *"Having settled down, I roamed the street, […..] I ran into Gypsy musicians, Arab travelers [….], Persian artists, Chinese acrobats, Indian snake charmers, Zoroastrian*

> *magicians, [……] barbers with bloodletting devices, fortune-tellers with crystal balls, [……]. I heard people speak Venetian, Frankish, Saxon, Greek, Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Hebrew, and several other dialects I couldn't even distinguish.* (*TFROL*, 109)

5. Conclusion

This 'pot-pourri' with post-modernist flavour celebrates the ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity of the thirteenth century Konya at the crossroads of multiple influences, juxtaposed to ethically evacuated twenty-first century Boston. While acknowledging the spiritual ascendancy of the East over a materialistic consumerist West, Shafak recycles Orientalist cliches which publicize Eastern culture as paradigmatic of unearthly spirituality, and thus, pictures the East as a healing force for the West, in a classical and typical 'subservient' relationship. Fittingly, Furlanetto aptly argues that Shafak utilizes: "*Orientalist strategies in the ways in which she positions the East as being instrumental to the West"* (Furlanetto 2003, 201). Indeed, *TFROL* suggests a remapping of the world cartography, whereby the thirteenth century is emphasized as a major temporal and geographical trajectory preceding the Euro-American centrality. Accordingly, Morocco down to India are thus foregrounded as routes for free circulation of goods, people, cultures, social and religious tolerance, nodding towards Janet Abu Lughod's World systems, and conforming to her rewriting of the world map.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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