

Julia Kristeva's Concept of Intertextuality in the Analysis of Elif Shafak's Novel *The Forty Rules of Love*

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Abstract

This study analyzes Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* within Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, exploring its multilayered, postmodern, and intercultural structure. *The novel weaves together* classical Sufi texts, Western literature, and modern narrative techniques into a single narrative fabric. The discussion also draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, Gérard Genette's notion of palimpsest, Linda Hutcheon's postmodern narrative theory, Susan Bassnett's intercultural translation approach, and Edward Said's concept of Orientalism.

The novel builds thematic and formal multilayeredness through multiple narrators and temporal planes. In line with Bakhtin's idea of polyphony, the characters' inner monologues, identity quests, and conflicting voices add both philosophical and psychological depth. According to Kristeva, meaning emerges through the interaction of texts and cultural references. In this sense, *The Forty Rules of Love* creates a space for intercultural dialogue by bringing together the Sufi heritage of Rumi and Shams with the inner transformation of a modern Western protagonist.

Moreover, the fictional novel *The Forty Rules of Love* embedded within the text further enhances intertextuality, transforming the reader into an active interpreter. As Hutcheon notes, postmodern structures rely on irony, rewriting, and plurality in both form and content. Within these frameworks, Shafak's novel stands as a multilayered discourse that transcends conventional literary boundaries.

Keywords: intertextuality, polyphony, postmodern narrative, cultural dialogue, sufi literature

1. Introduction

Intertextuality, one of the core concepts of Julia Kristeva's poststructuralist theory, refers to the dynamic relationships among texts. Kristeva (1980) argues that "every text is the absorption and transformation of another," emphasizing that meaning is continuously reproduced through textual interaction. This approach treats intertextuality not only as a relationship between literary works but also as a comprehensive concept encompassing interactions across cultures, historical contexts, and disciplines (Bassnett, 2002, p. 45).

Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, published in 2009, when evaluated through this theoretical lens, presents a structure in which classical Sufi texts and modern narrative forms are intricately interwoven. The novel not only creates a dialogic relationship between texts but also serves as an intercultural bridge reflecting the encounter and interaction between Eastern and Western cultures (Şafak, 2009, p. 210–238). In this regard, the concept of intertextuality plays a key role in understanding the multilayered narrative structure of *The Forty Rules of Love*.

Furthermore, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, p. 262–270) theory of polyphony is used as a significant conceptual and analytical tool in analyzing the novel's multiple narrative perspectives and temporal layers. According to Bakhtin, polyphony moves the narrative beyond monotony, enabling the coexistence, conflict, and harmony of various consciousnesses within the text. Additionally, Linda Hutcheon's (1988, p. 7–15) understanding of postmodern narrative reflects the same intersubjective and intertextual dynamics visible in *The Forty Rules of Love*.

Parallel to these ideas, Wolfgang Iser's (1978, p. 38–42) reader-response theory highlights the active role of the reader in constructing meaning. This approach offers a complementary perspective for understanding how intertextuality and polyphony are perceived and interpreted by the reader in *The Forty Rules of Love*.

In conclusion, this study seeks to reveal the structural, thematic, and cultural multilayeredness of *The Forty Rules of Love* through the lenses of poststructuralist intertextuality, polyphony, and reader-response theories. In this context, the study offers an original contribution to the body of intertextual analyses within Turkish literature and partially fills a gap in the literature due to the limited number of studies that apply Kristeva's theory to modern novels engaging with Sufi texts.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* through Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, revealing

its formal and thematic multilayeredness. It examines how classical Sufi texts interact with modern narrative techniques and how forms of intercultural dialogue emerge in the novel. Moreover, it evaluates the postmodern and polyphonic elements that shape the process of meaning-making.

1.2 Literature Review

The concept of intertextuality, first articulated by Julia Kristeva, has become a cornerstone of poststructuralist literary criticism. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, Kristeva (1980, p. 66–70) argues that “every text is an absorption and transformation of another,” thus rejecting the idea of textual autonomy. Meaning, therefore, is not confined within a single work but emerges from a dynamic network of texts, histories, and cultural codes. This framework allows scholars to view literature as a site of continuous textual and cultural negotiation.

Graham Allen (2000, p. 35–40) extends this premise by emphasizing intertextuality as a dialogic process in which no text stands in isolation. Gérard Genette (1997, p. 5–15), through his theory of *transtextuality* and the metaphor of the *palimpsest*, highlights how texts overlap and rewrite one another, generating new meanings through acts of reinterpretation. Similarly, Roland Barthes (1977, p. 146–150) shifts the focus from authorial intention to the reader's agency, proposing the “death of the author” to liberate meaning from fixed interpretation.

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, p. 262–270) theory of polyphony provides another dimension to intertextual analysis, particularly in novels characterized by multiple voices and competing worldviews. Polyphony is not only a structural feature but also a philosophical stance that positions the book as a space where diverse ideologies and consciousnesses coexist. This perspective is especially relevant to *Aşk*, which oscillates between historical and contemporary settings and juxtaposes Eastern and Western paradigms.

Linda Hutcheon's (1988, p. 7–15) concept of postmodern narrative intersects with intertextuality through its concern with metafiction, irony, and the fluidity of historical representation. Her idea of “historiographic metafiction” is particularly pertinent to Shafak's reconstruction of historical figures such as Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, whose spiritual legacies are reframed through a self-reflexive, contemporary lens.

In the field of intercultural literary studies, Susan Bassnett (2002, p. 47) introduces the concept of *intercultural intertextuality*, which examines how texts act as mediators between distinct cultural and epistemological systems. Translation and adaptation across borders, she argues, play a crucial role in shaping textual meaning. This approach is central to Şafak's *Aşk* (2009), which reinterprets Sufi philosophy through the spiritual awakening of a Western protagonist, thereby creating a dialogic intersection between cultural traditions.

Edward Said's (1978, p. 5–15) theory of *Orientalism* provides a critical postcolonial lens for examining East–West encounters in literature. While Said exposes the Western tendency to exoticize and essentialize the East, Shafak's novel complicates this discourse by depicting mutual transformation rather than unilateral fascination. However, the novel's portrayal of Sufism can also be read as engaging, and at times negotiating with, Orientalist expectations within global literary markets—a tension that merits further critical attention.

Finally, Wolfgang Iser's (1978, p. 38–42) reader-response theory underscores that meaning is not fixed but co-created through the reader's engagement. The metafictional layering in *The Forty Rules of Love* invites readers to participate actively in constructing intertextual and intercultural significance.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing *The Forty Rules of Love* as a postmodern, intertextual, and intercultural novel. Yet, despite increasing scholarly interest in Shafak's work, few studies have applied Kristeva's intertextuality theory in a sustained way to a Turkish novel rooted in Sufi mysticism. Addressing this gap, the present study contributes a more nuanced and critically engaged reading that situates Shafak's narrative within both global and local literary dialogues.

2. Method

2.1 Rationale for Text Selection

Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* was selected because the novel presents a highly suitable ground for applying intertextuality theory, due to its intense engagement with classical Sufi texts and its strong postmodern narrative characteristics.

2.2 Application of Theoretical Framework

The study primarily adopts Julia Kristeva's intertextual approach. This framework is supported by Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, Genette's *transtextuality* and *palimpsest*, Hutcheon's postmodern narrative theory, and Bassnett's intercultural perspective.

2.3 Quotation Selection Criteria

Quotations have been selected based on their direct reflection of the intertextual structure of the novel, their convergence of multiple temporal-spatial and cultural references, and their function in supporting the principle of polyphony.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality is employed to explain how relationships between texts enrich meaning. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyphony highlights the simultaneous and conflicting existence of multiple consciousnesses within a text and illuminates the internal dialogues of the novel. Gérard Genette's metaphor of *palimpsest* illustrates the layered nature of texts and the creation of new meanings through overwriting. Linda Hutcheon's postmodern narrative theory is used to analyze the novel's blurring of fiction and reality,

while Susan Bassnett's perspective on intercultural intertextuality serves as a guide for explaining the interplay between texts across cultural contexts.

3. Julia Kristeva and the Concept of Intertextuality

Kristeva is one of the poststructuralist theorists who first introduced the concept of *intertextualit e* (intertextuality) in the 1960s. According to her, texts are "a mosaic of quotations" (Dođan, 2023, p. 57). Kristeva's (1980) notion of intertextuality draws from Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and dialogism. She asserts that "every text bears the traces of other texts and cannot exist without them" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68). In this view, meaning is not determined by the author's intention but emerges from the interrelations among texts. Allen (2000) summarizes this approach as "a dynamic system in which texts can only be understood in context with other texts."

According to Kristeva's theory, intertextual relations are not limited to direct quotations; every text inherently carries traces of preceding texts, emphasizing transformation over originality (K ımb ıl & S y lemez, 2021, p. 951). By redefining authorship as a relational process, Kristeva challenges the Romantic notion of originality and positions the text as a site of transformation rather than creation. She also emphasizes the functional role of the author's name in turning a text into an object of transformation... yet the primary agent in the construction of meaning is no longer the author, but the reader (Dođan, 2023, p. 57).

Intertextuality includes not only direct quotations or references, but also themes, narrative structures, and modes of discourse (Genette, 1997). Thus, Kristeva's framework provides a critical tool for analyzing how texts negotiate meaning through cultural and historical layering, revealing the inherently dialogic and fluid nature of literature.

4. Intertextuality in the Novel *The Forty Rules of Love*

Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* was first published in Turkish in 2009 and quickly garnered significant attention both nationally and internationally. The English version, titled *The Forty Rules of Love*, written by the author later the same year, was published by Viking in 2010 (Shafak, 2009/2010). Since its first release, the novel has been published in many countries, has appeared on bestseller lists, and has reached a wide readership, largely due to its English translation and the accessibility it provided to global audiences (Dođan, 2018, p. 112). Its English edition was released in 2011, which significantly contributed to the novel's global dissemination (Smith, 2014, p. 47). It has sold over 12 million copies worldwide (Penguin Random House, 2024).

The novel consists of two parallel stories set in different times and locations. Barthes's conception of the text as a "multilayered fabric woven with cultural and textual references" is particularly relevant here, as he argues that meaning is not fixed but open to multiple interpretations (K ımb ıl & S y lemez, 2021, p. 951). The novel features a Sufi fiction set in the 13th century—focusing on the mystical relationship between Mevl n  Cel ledd n-i R m  and Shams of Tabriz—alongside a contemporary story of an American housewife, Ella Rubinstein, and her inner transformation. This dual narrative structure enables readers to trace intertextual echoes across temporal, spiritual, and cultural boundaries (K   k, 2020, p. 212).

In terms of its engagement with classical Sufi texts and its fusion with the modern individual's search for identity, the novel serves both as an intercultural bridge and an illustration of postmodern narrative experimentation. According to Hutcheon's conceptualization of historiographic metafiction, postmodern narratives not only reconstruct the past but also expose the fictitiousness of history, questioning the boundaries between literary and historical texts (K ımb ıl & S y lemez, 2021, p. 956).

The parallel depiction of the 13th-century Sufi relationship between Rumi and Shams and the modern-day journey of Ella Rubinstein creates a strong metafictional layer that foregrounds reading itself as an intertextual act (Şafak, 2009).

According to Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, these narrative structures in *The Forty Rules of Love* sustain textual continuity and enable the production of meaning: "Intertextuality is the echo of another text within a text; this echo may be visible or hidden" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68). According to Lechte, Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality stresses that writing never truly belongs to itself; every text bears the traces of other texts. A text is formed through the "layering of different texts" (Lechte, 2013, p. 91–94). In Shafak's narrative, the "forty rules" of Shams embody this process by reinterpreting Sufi teachings within a modern framework, transforming mystical discourse into a universal reflection on love and spirituality. Kristeva's view thus provides a powerful theoretical foundation for interpreting the structural and thematic layers of the novel.

Shafak reinterprets classical texts by reflecting the mystical love between Rumi and Shams onto the life of a modern individual. Recent scholarship has also questioned the global reception of *The Forty Rules of Love*, particularly in terms of its intercultural representation. Several critics argue that Shafak's novel, while promoting East–West dialogue, simultaneously caters to Western expectations of "spiritual Orientalism," where Sufi mysticism is repackaged as a universal self-help philosophy (Erbaş, 2020, p. 88–90; Kaya, 2021, p. 134–136). As Aktaş (2022, p. 57–59) notes, this commodification of mysticism risks reducing complex theological traditions to marketable cultural symbols. Likewise, Demir (2023, p. 201–204) highlights that Shafak's Anglophone narrative strategy often softens cultural specificities to appeal to a broader readership. Such critiques reveal the tension between intercultural dialogue and cultural appropriation within the novel's global framing.

Nonetheless, other scholars emphasize that Shafak's work initiates valuable transnational conversations by embedding Turkish Sufi discourse into contemporary literary networks ( zdemir, 2024, p. 77–79). Rather than simply retelling canonical narratives, the novel transforms them through a contemporary lens that bridges cultural, temporal, and spiritual dimensions (Bassnett, 2002).

4.1 Text Within a Text: The Novel *The Forty Rules of Love*

In the novel, the inner worlds of the characters are presented through a carefully constructed, multilayered narrative structure. Ella's inner voice intertwines with the mystical narration of Aziz Zahra, and the reader oscillates between voices that articulate Western rationality and Eastern mysticism. This structure transforms the novel from a classical narrative into a polyphonic text that resists singular interpretation. Modern narratives, through such layered patterns of voice and meaning, demonstrate how intertextuality enables dialogue between the past and the present by linking mythic themes to contemporary forms. Narratives in which internal conflicts are interwoven with mythical structures gain both depth and universality through "ancient myths echoing in the characters' inner voices" (Taniyan, 2021, p. 160).

At the heart of the novel lies a fictional book titled *The Forty Rules of Love*, which Ella Rubinstein reads. This structure turns the main narrative into another text, aligning with Genette's (1997) concept of transtextuality. By embedding a text within a text, Shafak self-consciously dramatizes the act of reading itself, transforming the novel into a reflection on narrative creation and reception. In terms of its synthesis of classical Sufi texts and the modern individual's quest for identity, the novel is considered both an intercultural bridge and a successful example of postmodern narrative technique. Recent studies also note that Shafak's metafictional framing invites readers to question the authenticity of spiritual experience in a globalized literary marketplace (Aydın, 2022, p. 55–58). In particular, the fictional rewriting of the teachings of Rumi and Shams adds not only a historical but also a metaphysical layer to the text (Kristeva, 1980; Bassnett, 2002, p. 45).

"Little did she know that this was going to be not just any book, but the book that changed her life. In the time she was reading it, her life would be rewritten." (Shafak, 2010, p. 14–15)

This sentence expresses the reader's deep experience of identification and immersion with the text. According to Wolfgang Iser's (1978, p. 38–42) reader-response theory, a text draws the reader in and enables their active participation in the interpretive process. Ella's sense of "losing herself" in the narrative embodies Iser's notion of the reader as co-creator of meaning, illustrating the transformative function of reading. Ella's sense of "losing oneself" is a concrete indication of the impact of intertextuality on the reader (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68).

"Ever since I 'met' you through your novel and your e-mails, you have dominated my thoughts..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 263). This description illustrates how the boundaries of a text expand the reader's world and establish various intertextual connections. Within the framework of Genette's (1997, p. 5–15) definition of transtextuality, a text constructs its meaning by referencing other texts and thereby alters the reader's perspective. As recent scholars have observed, this metafictional correspondence between Ella and Aziz Zahra serves as a reflection of the author–reader relationship itself, highlighting literature's reflexivity (Güneş, 2023, p. 142–144).

"Words become more precious than ever. The whole world turns into a blank screen, waiting to be written upon." (Shafak, 2010, p. 325). The blurring of boundaries between inner voices and character narration in this context points to Bakhtin's (1981, p. 262–270) concept of polyphony. Polyphony refers to the coexistence of multiple consciousnesses and perspectives within a single text. This multiplicity not only enhances the reader's identification with the narrative but also reveals the text's multilayered and dynamic nature (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 7–10). In this sense, Shafak's narrative demonstrates what contemporary criticism terms "readerly polyphony," where textual voices echo across cultural and interpretive boundaries (Topçu, 2021, p. 213–215).

"To get lost in the novel meant to discover new meanings about one's own life." (Shafak, 2010, p. 67).

"She felt as if a circle had been completed." (Shafak, 2010, p. 251)

"Half of her felt like crying; the other half was elated..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 304)

These samples highlight the transformative impact of the text on the reader. Within the framework of intertextuality theory, the act of reading not only involves uncovering the meaning of the text but also allows the reader to reinterpret the self (Barthes, 1977, p. 146–150). Such affective participation underscores how the novel translates Sufi notions of enlightenment into modern psychological terms (Yıldız, 2020, p. 98–100). In Elif Shafak's novel, the experience Ella undergoes exemplifies the establishment of a dialogic relationship between reader and text, thereby reinforcing the multi-layered structure of the narrative (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68).

4.2 Explicit References to Sufi Texts and Teachings

The Forty Rules of Love does not merely allude to classical Sufi imagery and symbols; it actively reconstructs these motifs within a contemporary narrative form. This demonstrates how classical discourse can be rendered functional within a modern fictional context (Soysal, 2019, p. 432). The novel explicitly incorporates the teachings, discourses, and philosophy of Shams of Tabriz and Rumi. For instance, Shams's "Forty Rules" serve as fictionalized reflections of Sufi wisdom.

"Try not to resist the changes that come your way..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 101). This statement reflects one of the central elements in Shams's conception of love: the essence of love lies in self-effacement for the sake of the beloved, prioritizing the well-being of the other (Lewis, 2000, p. 112). In rearticulating this understanding within her novel, Elif Shafak engages in what Julia Kristeva defines as a process of "absorption and transformation" in intertextuality theory—that is, classical Sufi thought is both infused into and transformed within the narrative (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68). Recent comparative readings suggest that Shafak's adaptation of these teachings blurs the line between spiritual pedagogy and fictional rhetoric, inviting debate about authenticity in literary mysticism (Karaman, 2023, p. 165–167).

"I will smash my ego to smithereens..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 181) The emphasis here points to the Sufi concept of *fanā*—the annihilation of the self—where love is understood as transcendence of the individual ego to experience divine unity (Schimmel, 1975, p. 89). Shafak's fictionalization of *fanā* has been interpreted as a metaphorical reworking of female subjectivity, offering an intersection between mystical

surrender and feminist self-discovery (Akgül, 2021, p. 223–226). In this sense, Elif Shafak's novel transposes the Sufi notions of self-transcendence and ego transformation into contemporary literary discourse (Gray, 2020, p. 134–136).

"Patience doesn't come easily..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 178) In Sufi literature, *ṣabr* (patience) is not merely the act of waiting, but rather signifies an inner resilience and spiritual tranquility (Nasr, 2006, p. 134). By situating *ṣabr* within a Western domestic context, Shafak translates a mystical virtue into a modern psychological motif, making Sufi ethics accessible to diverse readers (Yılmaz, 2022, p. 77–79).

"Stay away from all sorts of idolatry..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 246) This metaphor reflects the heart-centered epistemology of Sufism, in which truth is discovered not solely through intellectual reasoning but through the intuition of the heart (Chittick, 1983, p. 45). Recent analyses highlight that this heart-centered epistemology is reinterpreted in Shafak's work as a critique of secular modernity's rationalism (Polat, 2020, p. 189–191).

"Love is the reason. Love is the goal" (p. 182). This sentence highlights the inextricable connection between love and truth in Islamic mysticism (Corbin, 1977). Elif Shafak's novel reconfigures this theme within the structure of the modern novel, thus appealing to both Eastern and Western readers (Said, 1978). As Çetin (2024, p. 61–64) argues, this dual appeal positions Shafak's novel at the intersection of spirituality and global literary commerce, revealing both its inclusive and problematic dimensions.

4.3 The Rewriting of Historical Figures

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Elif Shafak reimagines historical figures such as Rumi, Shams of Tabriz, and Kimya Hatun, blending the individual journey of love with the mystical traces of the Sufi tradition. These characters are not merely names drawn from historical records but reconstructed identities embedded in a postmodern framework that reinterprets spiritual authority through fiction. In this regard, the novel presents not only a narrative that references the past but also a layered structure in which historical and cultural heritage is re-envisioned through a contemporary lens. Intertextuality thus operates not only across literary texts but also through relationships with philosophical writings, myths, and hagiographies, situating Shafak's narrative within a network of cultural rewriting (Yücel, 2022, p. 114–116). The use of allusion functions as a structural strategy that multiplies layers of meaning within the text (Karahana, 2021, p. 107). For example: "Shams of Tabriz must have felt the same gloom..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 259–260).

This portrayal serves as a powerful example of the literary reanimation of historical figures within the narrative. Moreover, Linda Hutcheon's (1988, p. 15–20) concept of historiographic metafiction is particularly relevant to such texts, where historical reality and fictional storytelling are intricately intertwined. Through this metafictional layering, Shafak not only humanizes Rumi and Shams but also exposes how history itself is narratively constructed and ideologically framed (Demirtaş, 2020, p. 90–92).

"Four years ago I began to recite *The Mathnawi*..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 342). Here, Rumi's poetic world unfolds in parallel with the character's inner transformation. This dynamic can be linked to Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence—a fusion of meaning that arises through the creative struggle with precursor texts (Bloom, 1973, p. 23–28). Shafak's reworking of Rumi's voice illustrates a postmodern engagement with influence, transforming reverence into reinterpretation (Kılıç, 2021, p. 207–209).

"When we were done, Kimya didn't look like an inexperienced, timid girl anymore, but a woman burning with love and passion." (Shafak, 2010, p. 316). The embodiment of Kimya Hatun enriches the novel's historical and mythological layers. As Hutcheon (1988, p. 33–37) suggests, this character exemplifies the postmodern reconstruction of historical figures. Recent feminist readings, however, argue that Kimya's portrayal borders on idealization, perpetuating a gendered mysticism that prioritizes suffering as enlightenment (Eren, 2023, p. 131–134). Nonetheless, her character contributes significantly to the novel's spiritual and dramatic depth, merging sacred memory with emotional realism.

4.4 Polyphony and Internal Dialogues

The inclusion of the inner voices of many characters evokes Bakhtin's theory of polyphony. Shafak structures the narrative as a mosaic of perspectives that challenge singular truth claims, positioning each voice as a moral and philosophical participant. The sections narrated by Shams are particularly noteworthy:

"East, west, south, or north makes little difference..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 86). This sentence reflects the characters' multilayered inner worlds and their existential quests. According to Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, the coexistence of multiple consciousnesses within a text adds narrative depth (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 262–270). Shafak's adaptation of this form produces what contemporary scholars describe as "transcultural polyphony," where Eastern and Western epistemologies coexist without hierarchy (Öztürk, 2021, p. 174–176).

"A life without love is of no account..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 350). Here, love is presented through various forms of emotional intensity. This approach aligns with Kristeva's views on emotional transformation and processes of identification in texts (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68). Recent criticism has also pointed out that Shafak's polyphonic construction democratizes mysticism by extending spiritual insight to diverse social identities, including women and outcasts (Bora, 2022, p. 65–68).

"Love exists within each of us from the moment we are born..." (Shafak, 2010, p. 112). This passage, in which Shams speaks with the madam of the prostitutes, reflects his belief that every individual contains divine essence. The metaphor signifies not only the inner polyphony of the self but also the process of self-discovery. Within the frameworks of Bakhtin and Kristeva, the novel's internal dialogues contribute to the formation of identity (Bakhtin, 1981; Kristeva, 1980). By portraying sacred revelation through profane characters, Shafak destabilizes hierarchies of holiness and impurity, expanding the moral universe of Sufi thought (Gürbüz, 2024, p. 102–104).

“On the surface we lived a collective life...” (Shafak, 2010, p. 233). The tension and harmony among the inner voices, shaped by both individuality and shared experience, reveal the multilayered nature of the narrative. Hutcheon’s postmodern narrative theory also emphasizes such inner dialogues as a form of polyphony (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 40–45). This interior multiplicity suggests that Shafak’s novel is not merely a story but a dialogic meditation on coexistence, difference, and self-awareness (Arslan, 2023, p. 89–91).

4.5 *Dialogue Between Eastern and Western Cultures and Intertextuality*

The novel reinterprets Eastern mysticism through a Western character, Ella. This encounter can be associated with Edward Said’s (1978) concept of intercultural dialogue. Ella’s admiration for Shams and Rumi reflects the West’s attempt to make sense of the East through textual engagement. Yet recent scholarship has questioned whether Shafak’s portrayal risks romanticizing the “East” as a spiritual refuge for disenchanting Western readers (Altun, 2021, p. 55–57).

“In many ways the twenty-first century is not that different...” (Shafak, 2010, p. 15). The novel establishes a dialogue not only between texts but also across cultural and historical contexts. The encounter between Ella’s Western identity and Shams’s Eastern mysticism aligns with Bassnett’s (2002, p. 47) definition of intercultural intertextuality. This dynamic can also be situated within Bhabha’s (1994, p. 56–65) “third space,” where meaning emerges through hybridity rather than opposition (Çoban, 2022, p. 141–144).

The friendship between Aziz and Ella symbolizes a bridge between the mystical introspection of the East and the rational modernity of the West. “Ella saw herself as a liberal...Aziz, however, was a spiritual man...” (Shafak, 2010, p. 159). This juxtaposition dramatizes the ethics of cross-cultural empathy, showing how understanding the Other requires negotiating difference rather than dissolving it (Tunç, 2023, p. 120–122).

“For a fleeting moment, it felt as if everything Aziz Z. Zahara included in his personal blog...” (Shafak, 2010, p. 43). Ella’s emotional connection with Aziz’s writing underscores the permeability of textual and cultural boundaries. Said’s understanding of representation and “the Other” (1978, p. 32–35) clarifies this interaction, revealing how literary intertextuality becomes a form of ethical translation (Ergin, 2024, p. 199–201).

Thus, Shafak’s text is not only intertextual but also a transcultural dialogue. This duality evokes both Kristeva’s theory of transtextuality (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68) and Bassnett’s view of intercultural translation (Bassnett, 2002), supporting the novel’s multilayered and dynamic structure.

“Not Christian or Jew or Muslim...My place is placeless...” (Shafak, 2010, p. 183). Here, the search for cultural synthesis and the negotiation of oppositions are explored. Bhabha’s (1994, p. 56–65) concept of the “third space” elucidates the creative potential of such intercultural in-between zones. As Koç (2024, p. 77–80) observes, this hybrid vision articulates a postnational form of mysticism that transcends religious identity while remaining rooted in cultural memory.

“Love can’t be explained...It cuts across countries, cultures, and centuries.” (Shafak, 2010, p. 14). In line with Said’s (1978) postcolonial perspective, new cultural meanings emerge from the interaction of texts. Through this synthesis, Shafak constructs what Özkan (2022, p. 45–47) calls a “global Sufi imaginary,” uniting spirituality and cosmopolitanism.

4.6 *Textual Reflection and Awareness of Fiction*

The novel occasionally reveals itself as a novel and employs postmodern techniques. Ella’s relationship with the novel, in particular, conveys to the reader a heightened awareness of the narrative process. Through this metafictional framing, the reader is continually reminded of the constructed nature of fiction, where the act of reading becomes an integral part of the narrative itself (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 7–10).

She felt the need to go back to Sweet Blasphemy, with a different eye, not for the sake of the story this time but to find the author hidden in its central character, to find the Aziz in Shams of Tabriz (*The Forty Rules of Love*, p. 185).

References within the text to other texts and real life are typical characteristics of postmodern narratives. Hutcheon’s (1988) theory of postmodern metafiction explains such self-revealing narratives. The connection the reader or character establishes between their own reality and the text triggers textual subjectivity and autobiographical associations (Kristeva, 1980, p. 68). Recent scholarship also highlights that such metafictional awareness invites readers to become co-creators of meaning, turning the reading act into an interpretive collaboration (Demir, 2022, p. 41–43).

“What surprised her even more than this change was seeing that it did not disturb her in the least. It was as if she were waiting, confidently and patiently, for something momentous to happen.” (Shafak, 2010, p.174) This statement emphasizes intertextual identification and conscious awareness of the reading process. Iser’s (1978, p. 25–30) reader-interaction theory is important in explaining this situation. Through Ella’s shifting awareness, Shafak performs a metafictional act of self-reading—where text and reader merge in an interpretive mirror (Tuna, 2023, p. 90–92).

“She wanted to read the novel again... not for the sake of the story this time but to find the author hidden in its central character.” (Shafak, 2010, p.185). The idea that knowing the structure and plot of the text deepens textual interpretation is consistent with the layered nature of textual analysis in postmodern criticism (Hutcheon, 1988).

“She wondered if Aziz had deliberately based his character’s looks on himself... just as God had created human beings in His image.” (Shafak, 2010, p.185). This sentence reflects the blurring of the boundaries between reality and fiction, a fundamental characteristic of

postmodernism. Hutcheon (1988) and Kristeva (1980) explain this phenomenon with the concepts of intertextuality and self-reflexivity. Similarly, contemporary postmodern theory interprets this blending as “ontological intertextuality,” where fiction imitates reality’s self-awareness (Kaya, 2021, p. 78–80).

As in the examples in this section, such discourses transform the text into a structure that refers to another text and bear the traces of postmodern intertextuality (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 7). Shafak’s metafiction thus positions the act of storytelling as both the subject and the method of the narrative itself (Aydin, 2024, p. 59–61).

4.7 Romance Novel in the Context of Intercultural Interaction and Edward Said’s Concept of Orientalism

Elif Shafak’s novel *The Forty Rules of Love* offers a concrete example of intercultural interaction, depicting the inner transformation experienced by Ella Rubinstein, a Western character, through the influence of Eastern Sufi texts and mystical teachings. In this context, the novel can be directly linked to Edward Said’s (1978) theory of East–West relations in *Orientalism*. Said states that Orientalism is the West’s way of establishing itself as a “superior” identity against the East:

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called ‘the idea of Europe,’ a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans. And because the European identity as a superior one is based on this idea of Europe, Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine representing the Orient as a place of darkness, superstition, and irrationality...(Said, 1978, p. 7).

However, in *The Forty Rules of Love*, Ella’s relationship with the mystical wisdom of the East transcends the one-sided and hierarchical Orientalist perspective described by Said. Shafak reconfigures Orientalism into what can be termed “reciprocal Orientalism,” in which both cultures engage in a mutual exchange of meaning rather than domination (Karaca, 2020, p. 102–104). The novel demonstrates the possibility of intercultural dialogue and the transformation of the individual through the interaction between different texts and identities. This intertextual negotiation challenges the binary of the rational West and spiritual East, emphasizing hybridity over opposition (Erdoğan, 2023, p. 144–146).

Thus, Shafak transcends traditional boundaries between West and East, establishing an “intercultural bridge” through literary text. In this respect, the novel offers a new interpretation and expansion of Said’s theoretical framework. Contemporary scholars have further suggested that Shafak’s novel functions as “decolonial literature,” revisiting spiritual epistemologies from non-Western traditions without subordinating them to Western validation (Polat, 2024, p. 201–203).

4.8 Multilayered Narrative, Intertextuality, and Reflection on Fiction

Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of polyphony directly aligns with the structural characteristics of *The Forty Rules of Love*. While conveying the perspectives of both Ella and Aziz, the novel breaks the monotony of narration through the fictional form within the fiction of *The Dervish’s Love*. This formal structure also allows the text to become thematically multilayered. Hutcheon (1988, p. 50–55) notes that postmodern narrative particularly emphasizes this type of intersubjectivity and structural multiplicity. In Shafak’s text, this layering evolves into an “intertextual spiral,” where each narrative revises and reinterprets another (Gündoğdu, 2022, p. 133–135).

Postmodern theory posits that texts are composed not only of previous texts but also of different cultural and social codes (Doğan, 2023, p. 60). Intertextuality is not limited to references to the past; it also transforms literary discourse by establishing connections between texts written in different periods. As Eren Soysal (2019, p. 434) puts it, “the transfer of a statement from one text to another functions as a bridge between two texts.” In the novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, Shams’s words, Mesnevi quotations, and Sufi teachings demonstrate this functionality. These quotations are not merely literary motifs but also supporting elements of a multilayered narrative structure.

“Aziz was like a jigsaw puzzle she aimed to complete piece by piece...” (Shafak, 2010, p.158).

This quote reflects the character’s identification with fiction and her own reality. When considered within the context of Barthes’s (1977, p. 148–150) idea of the “death of the author,” it is no longer the author but the reader’s own experience that determines the text’s meaning. This multilayered reading experience aligns with Kristeva’s (1980, p. 66–70) concept of intertextuality, as characters are brought together on both historical and fictional levels, creating a new field of meaning. Through these textual intersections, Shafak enacts a process of “readerly authorship,” allowing narrative meaning to emerge collectively (Uçar, 2024, p. 118–120).

“The story I herewith send you takes place in thirteenth-century Konya...” (Shafak, 2010, p.14).

This expression is directly related to Genette’s (1997, p. 35) concept of the “palimpsest.” Each new narrative bears the traces of previous ones; they are not erased but layered upon each other. This palimpsestic quality turns Shafak’s work into a “living archive” of cultural texts that coexist in translation (Yıldırım, 2023, p. 172–175).

“Little did she know that this was going to be not just any book...” (Shafak, 2010, p.15)

This sentiment aligns with Bakhtin’s (1981, p. 262–270) understanding of dialogic structure. A dialogue between different consciousnesses presents a multifaceted narrative that does not consist of a single perspective. This demonstrates that the structure of the text within the text serves not only a structural but also a meaning-generating function. According to Hutcheon (1988, p. 65), such reflective narratives are a fundamental characteristic of postmodern structure. Shafak’s narrative thus exemplifies “metatextual transcendence,” where fiction simultaneously constructs and critiques its own narrative framework (Bayrak, 2022, p. 211–214).

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Findings

- *The Forty Rules of Love* constructs a complex, multilayered narrative structure by utilizing different narrative perspectives and a multi-temporal plot, thus challenging conventional linear storytelling and breaking away from traditional narrative forms.
- By combining classical Islamic Sufi texts with modern literary techniques, the novel functions as both an intertextual and intercultural bridge, rendering the interaction between Eastern and Western cultures tangible and dynamic within the text.
- The metafictional elements, particularly the fictional novel titled *The Forty Rules of Love*, allow readers to develop a heightened self-reflexive awareness of intertextuality and the process of textual meaning-making.
- The concept of polyphony reveals internal conflicts and dialogic coexistence among diverse consciousnesses and perspectives, enriching both identity construction and the production of meaning.
- Through postmodern narrative techniques such as fragmentation, metafiction, and self-referential narration, the novel blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, reinforcing its pluralistic structure both formally and thematically.
- Recent studies (Aydın, 2024; Uçar, 2024) confirm that Shafak's hybrid narrative model exemplifies postmodern intertextuality in contemporary Turkish fiction, emphasizing both textual multiplicity and transcultural dialogue.

5.2 Discussion

The findings provide the basis for comparative literary inquiry, not only with the unique structure of *The Forty Rules of Love*, but also with novels such as Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* or Latife Tekin's *Dear Shameless Death*, which similarly embody elements of intertextuality and intercultural dialogue. Such comparisons highlight how contemporary Turkish literature negotiates identity through narrative plurality and dialogism (Demir, 2023, p. 51).

This study has revealed the multilayered, dialogic, and transcultural dimensions of Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* in light of Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. It has been understood that the novel, by skillfully blending classical Sufi discourses with postmodern literary techniques, serves not only as an intertextual but also as an intercultural bridge. Bakhtin's concept of polyphony and Hutcheon's theories of historiographic metafiction and postmodern narrative have been influential in explaining the novel's formal and thematic richness. Furthermore, Genette's palimpsest metaphor provides a solid theoretical basis for understanding *The Forty Rules of Love's* text-within-a-text structure and its multilayered production of meaning.

One of the most significant findings of this study is Shafak's use of intertextuality as both a literary and philosophical tool—a means of enabling intercultural interaction and identity formation. In this respect, the novel should be considered a dynamic text, in which new meanings are generated from the interaction of different geographies, temporalities, and belief systems. However, Iser's aesthetic theory of reading, which emphasizes reader participation and the open-ended nature of the text, has played a complementary role in explaining the novel's readerly impact and emotional resonance.

In addition, the intertextual relationship established with Rumi's works and the Sufi tradition in Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* remains not only a narrative strategy but also decisively shapes the characters' spiritual and intellectual development. In this context, quotations, paratexts, and allusions deepen the novel's layers of meaning while illuminating the characters' inner transformation. A similar approach can be observed in Anar's story *Hotel Otağ*. As Qasımlı (2021) notes:

The author draws on diverse literary and musical sources to add depth to the narrative. These allusions not only reflect the intellectual background of the text's main character but also reveal the cultural and scientific knowledge possessed by Azerbaijani intellectuals.

Similarly, in Shafak's text, the characters' intertextual backgrounds represent their intellectual profiles and hybrid identities, which further supports the polyphonic and intercultural nature of the novel.

However, this study also bears certain limitations. While the textual analysis focuses primarily on textual and theoretical dimensions, reader response and sociocultural implications were not examined in greater depth. Furthermore, the impact of translation and cultural adaptation processes of *The Forty Rules of Love* into different languages and cultural contexts was beyond the scope of this study. Future research could explore these dimensions to expand the discussion of how Shafak's intertextual and intercultural techniques operate across global readerships (Erdoğan, 2023, p. 148).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all critics view Shafak's approach positively. Several scholars argue that Shafak's use of mysticism in *The Forty Rules of Love* risks reducing complex Sufi concepts to marketable spiritual tropes aimed at global readerships. Furlanetto (2013, p. 205) discusses the "Rumi phenomenon" and its problematic popularization, while Fox (2023, p. 8) analyses how spirituality can be commodified in contemporary marketing of literary texts. Gray (2020, p. 135) offers a close reading of Sufi pedagogy in the novel and notes tensions between spiritual depth and popular reception. These criticisms highlight the tension between Shafak's intercultural aims and the commercialization of mysticism in contemporary global literature.

6. Conclusion

This study provides an original contribution to the analysis of intertextuality in Turkish literature, addressing a critical gap in contemporary scholarship—particularly given the limited number of studies that apply Kristeva's intertextuality theory to modern novels

grounded in Sufi tradition.

Centered on Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, this analysis reveals that Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* is far more than a romantic narrative; it is a multilayered, polyphonic, and postmodern work that opens space for intercultural dialogue and self-reflexive interpretation. The novel weaves an extensive intertextual network—linking classical Sufi writings, the poetry of Rumi, and the teachings of Shams al-Tabrizi with the Western search for selfhood and spiritual identity. In this sense, *The Forty Rules of Love* successfully integrates the text-within-a-text structure and the rewriting of historical and cultural narratives to construct meaning across multiple dimensions of time and culture.

Explained through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, the novel interlaces diverse narrative voices and perspectives, producing a dialogic structure rather than a singular, authoritative one. This narrative form generates depth both within the story and inside the characters' psychological worlds. As Hutcheon (1988) emphasizes in her postmodern theory of narrative, the use of self-reflexivity, temporal multiplicity, and fictional consciousness is effectively employed in Shafak's text. Aziz's metafictional work *The Love of the Dervish* functions not only as a narrative layer but also as a mirror that redefines the reader's engagement with fiction itself.

At an intercultural level, the novel merges Eastern mysticism with a Western woman's journey of transformation, creating a dialogue not only between texts but also between civilizations. As Bassnett (2002) argues, such intertextual spaces enable translation across cultural and epistemological borders. Ella's transformation thus symbolizes a process of reconciling with the "Other"—a negotiation between personal identity and cultural alterity (Erdoğan, 2023, p. 145–147). In this respect, the novel subverts Orientalist hierarchies and proposes a multilayered, egalitarian relationship between East and West, where both sides undergo mutual redefinition.

Consequently, *The Forty Rules of Love* stands as a distinctive example of contemporary fiction that embodies Kristeva's intertextuality theory and the central tenets of poststructuralist literary discourse. Its narrative heterogeneity, inter-narrator permeability, metafictional layering, and polyphonic structure all contribute to a text that transcends simple storytelling. Through these strategies, Shafak transforms reading into an active, reconstructive experience, positioning the reader as a co-creator of meaning.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* is not only a site of intertextual interplay but also a literary embodiment of intercultural dialogue—bridging Sufi metaphysics, Western individualism, and postmodern narrative experimentation. In this regard, it provides a unique model of intertextual and intercultural synthesis in the modern Turkish novel, both in form and content.

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Dr. Neslihan Parlak was the only person to be responsible for study design and revising, data collection, drafting the manuscript and revision of it.

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