

## Critical Analysis of Magical Realism in “Forty Rules of Love” in the Light of Post-Modernist Theory

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### Abstract

*This research explores the intricate narrative techniques employed by Elif Shafak in "The Forty Rules of Love," where historical fiction converges with magical realism to create a captivating exploration of spirituality and love. The novel seamlessly intertwines the stories of Rumi and Shams in 13th-century Turkey with the modern-day journey of Ella, a woman who discovers profound connections to their lives through her reading of a manuscript. Shafak's adept use of mystical encounters, dreams, and Sufi concepts blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination, inviting readers into a world where the spiritual and the mundane coalesce. Through a rigorous content-based analysis, this study aims to delve deeper into the thematic richness and narrative impact of magical realism within Shafak's work. By examining specific instances of magical realism throughout the novel, such as Ella's mystical experiences and the fluidity of time and space, this research seeks to elucidate how these elements contribute to the overarching exploration of spiritual themes. Additionally, the study will investigate how Shafak's use of magical realism enhances reader engagement and prompts critical reflection on the nature of reality and the power of love. By shedding light on the intricate interplay between historical fiction and magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love," this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Shafak's literary craftsmanship and the thematic complexities of her work. Through an analysis of both textual evidence and reader responses, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the ways in which magical realism enriches the narrative experience and fosters meaningful contemplation of spiritual and existential questions.*

*Keywords : Fiction, magic realism, sufi, reality , imagination*

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## **1. Introduction:**

"The Forty Rules of Love" is a captivating novel penned by Elif Shafak, seamlessly intertwining historical fiction, spirituality, and magical realism. The magical realism within the narrative serves as a literary device, enriching the storyline and enabling readers to delve into deeper themes and perspectives.

Within the novel, Shafak presents two parallel storylines: one set in the 13th century during the era of the renowned poet Rumi and his spiritual mentor Shams of Tabriz, and the other in the contemporary world, where a housewife named Ella Rubenstein becomes engrossed in reading a manuscript about Rumi's life. As Ella delves into the manuscript, magical realism unfolds, fostering a profound connection with the characters and their stories through dream sequences, visions, and encounters with mystical beings. Shafak masterfully blurs the line between reality and imagination, inviting readers into a realm where the spiritual and the mundane intertwine.

A prominent magical realism element in the book is the character of Shams of Tabriz. Shams is portrayed as a mysterious figure possessing extraordinary powers and knowledge, appearing in various forms and unexpected moments to guide Rumi on his spiritual journey and influence those around him. Shams's enigmatic presence contributes to the overall magical ambiance of the narrative, creating an atmosphere of fascination and wonder.

Furthermore, the author incorporates elements of Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam, enhancing the magical realism in the story. Sufism emphasizes the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment and the belief in a deeper reality beyond the apparent. Through the exploration of Sufi concepts and practices, such as whirling dervishes, meditation, and divine love, Shafak infuses the novel with a sense of transcendence and mystical wonder.

Magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love" serves multiple purposes. It enables the author to explore themes of spirituality, love, and personal transformation symbolically and metaphorically. Additionally, it adds an element of enchantment to the narrative, captivating readers and encouraging them to question the boundaries between the seen and the unseen, the real and the imagined.

By seamlessly blending historical fiction with magical realism, Elif Shafak creates a captivating and thought-provoking literary experience in "The Forty Rules of Love," inviting readers on a journey that transcends time, space, and conventional understanding. The novel delves into the profound mysteries of the human heart and the transformative power of love, encouraging readers to contemplate the intricate connections between the known and the mystical realms.

**a. Research Questions:** 1. How does the integration of magical realism enhance the thematic exploration of spirituality in "The Forty Rules of Love"?

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2. What is the significance of incorporating Sufi mysticism and symbolism within the framework of magical realism in the novel?

**b. Research Objectives:**

1. To analyze the ways in which magical realism enriches the exploration of spirituality in "The Forty Rules of Love."
2. To explore the impact of magical realism on reader engagement and interpretation of the novel
3. To investigate the significance of incorporating Sufi mysticism within the framework of magical realism in the novel.

By exploring the research questions and objectives outlined, this study aims to conduct a thorough analysis of the utilization of magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love." Through this research, a holistic comprehension of the functioning of magical realism within the novel, its thematic importance, and its influence on the reader's experience and interpretation can be attained. This scholarly inquiry is poised to enhance our insight into the intricate workings of magical realism in the context of the novel and its implications for the overall reader engagement and understanding.

**2. Literature Review**

The genre of magical realism finds its origins in Latin American literature, notably pioneered by authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez. This literary technique has been widely adopted by other prominent writers

such as Isabel Allende, Jorge Luis Borges, Salman Rushdie, Laura Esquivel, Haruki Murakami, and many more. Magical realism is characterized by seamlessly integrating fantastical elements into a realistic narrative setting. Scholars have extensively examined various aspects of magical realism, including its origins, defining characteristics, and thematic implications, emphasizing its ability to challenge conventional notions of reality, explore cultural identities, and offer social and political critiques.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a literary master and a pioneer of magical realism, employed this technique in his works to create captivating and enchanting narratives. His groundbreaking novel, "One Hundred Years of Solitude," seamlessly intertwined fantastical elements with reality, capturing the essence of Latin America by drawing upon its rich folklore and myths. Through magical realism, Marquez employed potent symbols and allegories to delve into profound themes such as love, power, and human nature. By blurring the boundaries between the ordinary and extraordinary, Marquez challenged conventional perceptions of reality, urging readers to question their own understanding.

Magical realism allowed Marquez to enhance the emotional impact of his stories, creating evocative scenes that resonated with readers. Time, a recurring theme in his works, gained a nonlinear and cyclical dimension through magical realism, offering a fresh perspective on its passage. Ultimately, Marquez engaged readers' imaginations, inviting them into a world

where the marvelous coexists with the mundane.

Isabel Allende, another celebrated author known for incorporating magical realism into her works, infuses her narratives with enchantment. In novels like "The House of the Spirits" and "Eva Luna," magical realism serves multiple purposes, allowing her to explore imaginative and thought-provoking themes of love, identity, and the human experience. Allende's use of supernatural elements becomes a metaphorical tool representing characters' emotions, desires, and struggles, providing a lens through which deeper truths and universal themes can be explored. Additionally, her magical realism enables her to address social and political issues uniquely, shedding light on the complexity of human existence and the interconnectedness of the world.

Jorge Luis Borges, an Argentine writer, incorporated elements of magical realism into his short stories, featuring labyrinthine structures, mysterious libraries, and metaphysical concepts that blurred the boundaries between reality and imagination. Salman Rushdie, an Indian-British author, utilized magical realism in novels like "Midnight's Children" and "The Satanic Verses," blending magical elements with historical events and political commentary. Toni Morrison, the renowned American writer, employed magical realism in works like "Beloved" to explore themes of trauma, memory, and the African-American experience. Laura Esquivel, a Mexican author, employed magical realism in "Like Water for Chocolate," creating a vivid

portrayal of love, family, and cultural traditions through magical elements and culinary enchantment. Haruki Murakami, a Japanese writer, often incorporated magical realism in novels like "Kafka on the Shore" and "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle," featuring dreamlike sequences and otherworldly occurrences.

These authors, along with many others, have embraced magical realism as a literary tool to explore themes, challenge conventional narratives, and evoke a sense of wonder. Each author brings a unique perspective and cultural influences to the genre, contributing to the diverse tapestry of magical realism in literature. Regarding "Forty Rules of Love," previous studies have focused on the use of love to convey spiritual and historical themes. The novel intertwines magical and supernatural narratives, employing elements like spiritual journeys, dreams, and encounters with supernatural beings to enhance the exploration of love, spirituality, and personal transformation within the narrative, creating a multi-layered reading experience.

### **3. Research Method:**

This section outlines the research as content-based, textual analysis of ElifShafak's "Forty Rules of Love" as the primary text. For this research, a qualitative approach employing text analysis was adopted. The complete text of "Forty Rules of Love" was examined closely to identify instances of magical realism and analyze their narrative functions. The process involved multiple close readings, noting passages that

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displayed elements of magical realism, such as inexplicable events, surreal descriptions, and magical occurrences. These identified passages were then analyzed for their thematic significance, character development, and impact on the overall narrative structure. Through this method, the intention was to gain insights into the author's employment of magical realism and its contribution to the novel's themes and storytelling.

The theoretical framework applied in this study is Franz Roh's art theory known as Magical Realism. The secondary sources for this article include reviews related to the author, novel, and theory. Both print and electronic media have been utilized as secondary sources. Additionally, "Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community" (1995) by Wendy B. Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora has been consulted as part of the secondary sources for this research.

This is a qualitative research study with a specific focus on the grounded-theory style, adopting an inductive approach rather than being interdisciplinary. The primary objective is to explore new perspectives for the novel within the realm of magical realism. "Forty Rules of Love" is characterized as literary fiction, fantasy, love, Sufism, and spirituality.

The research's significance lies in its utilization of magical realism, Sufism, spirituality, and magical spaces to address and mitigate psychological trauma.

#### **4. Data Analysis:**

"The Forty Rules of Love" by Elif Shafak is a novel that combines elements of historical fiction, contemporary fiction, and magical realism. Magical realism, as a literary genre, often blurs the line between reality and fantasy, introducing magical or supernatural elements into an otherwise realistic narrative. While the inclusion of magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love" adds depth and creativity to the story, it also raises some critical considerations.

One of the strengths of magical realism in this novel is its ability to explore complex themes and emotions in a metaphorical and symbolic way. The interweaving narratives of the thirteenth-century poet Rumi and the contemporary character Ella provide contrasting perspectives on love, spirituality and the search for meaning. Through magical realism, Shafak creates a bridge between the two narratives, allowing readers to delve into the inner worlds of the characters and experience their spiritual and emotional transformations.

The writers expressed his relation with God in these real and true words:- "I am not looking for something different. I'm looking for God," I said. "My quest is a quest for God." "Then you are looking for Him in the wrong place," he retorted, his voice suddenly thickened. "God has left this place! We don't know when He will be back." My heart flailed away at my chest wall upon hearing this. "When one speaks ill of God, he speaks ill of himself,"

I said."Divine love 'Ishq', the concept of divine love is a fundamental aspect of Sufism, and it plays a significant role in the novel.

“If we see God as full of love and compassion, so we are.”<sup>11</sup>

“How we see God is a direct reflection of how we see ourselves.”<sup>12</sup>

Allah Almighty said in Holy Quran, “I am closer to you even near your jugular vein“

..13 "نحن اقرب اليه من حبل الوريد"

“I asked. “God is not someplace far up in the sky. He is inside each and every one of us. That is why He never abandons us. How can He abandon Himself?” “But He does abandon,” the innkeeper remarked, his eyes cold and defiant. “If God is here but does not move a finger when we suffer the worst ends, what does that tell us about Him?”<sup>14</sup>

“The path to the Truth is a labor of the heart, not of the head.”<sup>15</sup>

The rule says that we should make our heart our primary guide! Not our mind.

Our heart can meet, challenge and ultimately prevail with nafs. Knowing your

ego will lead you to the knowledge of God.

“You can study God through everything and everyone in the universe because God is not confined to a mosque, synagogue, or church.”<sup>10</sup>.

The writer describes Shams is a Dervish who wander around here and there, he is a thorough Sufi who has been bestowed with oneiromancy by his Creator, he was having the power to understand the dreams of people and then interpret their meaning and predict what lies in future, for himself as well as for others. He was having both

spiritual and worldly knowledge. Spiritual awakening, the novel explores the journey of spiritual awakening and self-realization through the teachings of Sufism.

“There is only one religion, the religion of Love.”

“Love is the only language that transcends all barriers.”

“Everything in the universe is within you.”

“What you seek is seeking you.”

“The essence of all religions is one.”

“Kings and beggars, virgins and harlots, all are under the same sky!”.

Suleman was the drunk who spends most of his time in the bar of Hristos and drinks more. One day when he leaves the bar to go back home, he meets with Baybars who is the security official in the area and has gained this position due to his uncle Sheikh Yasin’s influence. He beats him heavily and leaves him when he is nearly dazed. Baybars wrongly believes that Allah has given him the duty to punish the sinners who do against the commandments of Islam whereas he himself was a regular visitor of brothel, which makes his personality highly hateful.

Shams finds Suleman on the road and helps him to his home. On their way home, Suleman is assured that Shams is the only person who doesn’t think that he has a right to judge people and that only God has reserved this right for Himself. After meeting each other, this most renowned pair

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of Shams of Tabrez and Mawlana Jalaludin Rumi goes on dilating upon certain subjects even for forty days without giving any thought as to what is going on around them in the house in particular and the world in general.

Sufism, also known as Islamic mysticism, revolves around an inner journey focused on Love. Love is likened to a vast ocean, and a Sufi heart navigates through it in the vessel of submission and patience, progressing from the principle of "Know Thyself" to "Know Thy God." Sufis assert the possession of methods for attaining mystic knowledge of God, embarking on a journey comprising seven stages: repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, and acquiescence to the will of God. Through these stages, seekers aim to achieve a higher level of consciousness with the grace of God, wherein the realization of oneness between knowledge, the knower, and the known occurs. Love, described as a profound transformative force, leaves lasting impressions on those who seek it actively. The quest for love is dynamic, leading to significant changes in the seeker.

“The moment you start looking for Love, you start to change within and without.”

“All you need to do is keep in mind how everything and everyone in this universe is interconnected. We are not hundreds and thousands of different beings. We are all One”, present inside the very moment, “Every time we fall in love, we ascend to heaven. Every time we hate, envy, or fight someone, we tumble straight into the fires of hell.”

Unity and interconnectedness, Sufism emphasizes the notion of unity, recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings. In *"The Forty Rules of Love,"* “Love is a water of life. And a lover is a soul of fire! The universe turns differently when the fire loves water.”<sup>16</sup>

Vivid imagery of places, vivacious physical description of each and every character, the dexterous use of the letter “B”, for according to Sufi mystics this letter in Arabic has great importance, at the start of every chapter and the exquisite interplay of both narratives are some of the qualities which were bound to make this highly engaging novel a global publishing phenomenon. However, one could argue that the use of magical realism in *"The Forty Rules of Love"* occasionally hinders the reader's connection with the characters and their experiences. The introduction of mystical and supernatural elements can distract from the emotional depth of the story, making it harder for readers to fully relate to the characters' struggles and growth. The magical aspects, while captivating, may sometimes overshadow the human aspects of the narrative, creating a sense of detachment.

Furthermore, the implementation of magical realism in the novel occasionally feels contrived or forced. Some of the magical elements seem inserted solely for the purpose of creating a sense of wonder or mystery, rather than serving a deeper purpose within the narrative. This can lead to a sense of artificiality and make it difficult for readers to suspend their disbelief, diminishing the overall impact of the story.

Another critical aspect to consider is the cultural appropriation of the magical realism genre. Magical realism originated in Latin American literature, particularly associated with authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende. Shafak, a Turkish author, adopts this style and incorporates it into her novel. While it is important for literature to cross cultural boundaries and explore different storytelling techniques, it is equally important to approach such genres with respect and understanding of their cultural origins.

In conclusion, the use of magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love" adds a layer of imaginative storytelling and symbolism to the narrative. It allows for the exploration of complex themes and emotions. However, the novel's reliance on magical elements can sometimes overshadow the human aspects of the story, creating a sense of detachment. Additionally, the implementation of magical realism occasionally feels contrived, and there is a need to ensure cultural sensitivity when adopting genres from other cultural traditions.

## **5. Conclusion and Findings:**

### **a. Conclusion**

The application of magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love" adds a layer of enchantment and symbolism to the narrative. Elif Shafak skillfully blends elements of mysticism, dreams, and supernatural occurrences with historical and contemporary settings. The use of magical realism allows for a deeper exploration of

themes such as love, spirituality, and self-discovery.

By blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, Shafak challenges readers to question their perceptions and contemplate the deeper meanings behind the magical elements. The symbolism and metaphorical nature of these elements enhance the thematic exploration, inviting readers to reflect on abstract concepts and psychological states.

Furthermore, the incorporation of Sufi traditions and cultural references adds cultural richness and depth to the story. Shafak's sensitive portrayal of these traditions helps to foster understanding and appreciation of different cultures and their spiritual practices. However, the complexity of the narrative structure and the inclusion of magical elements can sometimes lead to confusion or detachment from the emotional core of the story. It requires readers to be patient and attentive to fully grasp the interconnectedness of the parallel narratives and the deeper messages being conveyed. Overall, the application of magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love" contributes to its unique and captivating nature. It sparks wonder and invites readers to explore themes beyond the realm of the ordinary. While it may pose challenges in terms of pacing and coherence, when executed skillfully, magical realism enriches the novel's narrative, creating a memorable reading experience.

### **b. Findings**

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- The application of magical realism enhances the storytelling experience in "The Forty Rules of Love."
- It blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy, challenging the reader's perception of what is real and imagined.
- Magical elements serve as metaphors and symbols, adding depth and richness to the exploration of themes such as love, spirituality and self discovery.
- The incorporation of Sufi traditions and Islamic mysticism through magical realism adds cultural authenticity and depth to the narrative.
- The emotional resonance is heightened through the enchanting and awe-inspiring moments, allowing readers to connect with the characters' spiritual and emotional journeys.
- The complex narrative structure, blending parallel narratives and historical and contemporary elements, adds depth and complexity to the story.
- The pacing may be slower at times due to the inclusion of magical elements.
- Overall, the application of magical realism in "The Forty Rules of Love" creates a captivating and thought-provoking reading experience that expands the boundaries of storytelling.

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