

Historicizing Influence of Ottoman Mysticism and Mawlana Jalal Al-Din Rumi Through Contemporary Turkish Literature

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Abstract: Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi influenced Western societies with his teachings on mysticism and alternative approaches for human predicaments such as war, aggression and clash of civilizations. The 13th century Muslim poet is recognized throughout the world as a philosopher of *tasawwuf* and multicultural discourse; he is the leader of Sufism and a teacher on non-violence, brotherly love, tolerance and conflict resolution. At times of global conflict such as the 2011 Arab Spring, the Syrian resistance and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Rumi's modest appeal for open dialogue and human bonding is much sought for. Yet despite his long-standing legacy, Western world still fails to connect Rumi to his historical and political roots in Turkey, where he eventually embraced eternity. Rumi belongs and is squarely centered within the long-established tradition of Ottoman mysticism and Islamic studies, an inspiration to millions of scholars, authors, activists and philosophers around the world from India and Malaysia to the Americas, Middle-East, Europe, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Turkish author Elif Shafak illustrates how bridges can be built between Muslims and non-Muslims in *Forty Rules of Love (Aşk)*. The semi-historical novel is a testimony on how Rumi's *Mathnawi* and Ottoman mysticism is revered as Islam's most significant gift to the world.

Key words: Islamic Studies • Mawlana Jalal Al-Din Rumi • Ottoman Mysticism • Multi-Cultural Discourse
• Sufism • Non-violence • Turkish Literature

INTRODUCTION

One of the most revered figures representing the influence of mysticism on modern living is without doubt Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi. His popularity is significantly growing in the United States since the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared and dedicated 2007 as the "International Rumi Year." The statement compiled by UNESCO reiterated the fact that "Mawlana's vision, works and thoughts that search for inner peace, happiness and divine truth, are in conformity with UNESCO's objectives and its mission." Recognizing the 800th anniversary of Rumi's birth a commemorative medal was also issued by the organization [1].

The 13th century Muslim poet is recognized throughout the world first and foremost as a philosopher and a Sufi leader with his messages on non-violence, brotherly love, harmony and tolerance. During times of

human conflict such as war, poverty, famine, border disputes, anarchy and other problems causing international distress, such as the events that led to the 2011 Arab Spring, Rumi's modest appeal for open dialogue and brotherhood is better understood and appreciated. In the aftermath of the tragic events which marked September 11, 2001, Muslims in general had to face the negative effects of "Islamophobia" and hostility geared towards them. As friction grew between the East and the West there rose a need to stabilize the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. Neither famous statesmen of the East, nor renown diplomats of the West were able to achieve in magnitude, what a humble man of religious devotion had done single handedly, centuries ago, on behalf of the world's Muslim population. This essay is dedicated to the eternal memory of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi and his influence on a wide variety of peace movements throughout the world.

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Rumi's life and works provide an enormous wealth of inspiration for everyone and they are filled with promises of hope and tranquility transcending differences among racial and ethnic groups, as well as language and religion. Yet despite his long-standing legacy, Western world fails to connect Rumi to his historical and political roots in the Middle East, particularly in Turkey, where he spent most of his life before he eventually embraced eternity. This is one of the reasons why his massive impact should be evaluated and included within the long established tradition of Ottoman mysticism rather than a distant land.

By the same token it is important to note that his legacy is manifest within other scholarly and literary works in the United States and in Europe, particularly on major philosophical attributes on Sufi mysticism. The current international arena, with its extremely problematic political and social context, often necessitates an altruistic reference to Rumi mainly because of his contribution to world peace. A wide range of political developments and socio-economic currents in the Middle East relate, in many ways, to Turkey and Turks' leadership role in the region. Among Muslims Rumi's enduring legacy stands out as a beacon of hope; for non-Muslims his quest for wisdom, truthfulness and self-improvement offers an alternative perspective over hatred, discord and materialism. His teachings on mediation and self-discipline continue to raise awareness about Islam's respectability and broaden its popularity among non-Muslims.

Rumi as a poet and philosopher has enthused millions of readers, poets and philosophers from India, Europe, Americas to Sub-Saharan Africa. American literary figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Robert Bly have been influenced with his philosophy of peace and his unique literary style which represents free verse. Among contemporary interpreters of Rumi's works American teacher and poet Coleman Barks stands not only as a translator but as a promoter of Rumi's works. Indian leader M. K. Gandhi, in his advocacy of nonviolence shares close affinity with Rumi.

In our globally modern era, where communities are increasingly interconnected through digital media and internet highways, multicultural authors such as Elif Shafak find instant inspiration in Rumi's life of reaching-out. Writing both in Turkish and English, Shafak in an unusual approach builds bridges among diverse and international audiences, both Muslims and non-Muslims, through her novels and opinion pieces. Her 2009 novel titled *Forty Rules of Love (Aşk)* traces stages of Rumi's journeys, both geographical and spiritual, whereas the plot basically revolves around an ordinary love affair traversing the two continents.

In her narrative Shafak manages to transport her reader into a new space, which is generally an urbanized global setting. International travelers on transcontinental voyages, men and women who are attracted to remote or exotic destinations populate her novels. Shafak seems to be keenly aware of the modern individual's frenzied pursuit and search for meaning, kinship and love in life. "Traveling," in modern era is interpreted, among numerous attributes, as a symbolic reaction to globalization, or a "global *flanerie*." In *Forty Rules of Love (Aşk)* Shafak demonstrates the importance of nurturing empathy and understanding in human relationships as she re-tells, in her semi-historical novel, the camaraderie between Rumi and Shams which led to the formation of the famous *Mathnawi*. Following their initial encounter Rumi and Shams travel, virtually, in order to achieve perfection through worship and religious devotion. Their *flanerie* is representative of modern individual's quest for meaning in life; yet both have been ultimately successful in obtaining the wisdom to reach Allah and His divine discernment. Whereas for modern men and women fulfillment in societal living seems to be a distant dream, Shafak vividly draws this distinction in observation of Rumi's life of commitment and dedication to comradeship. Her works have been instrumental in internationalizing Rumi's impact through literature.

Henceforth this essay aims to illustrate the impact of Rumi's life and the global appeal Sufism has constructed recently through contemporary literature. The key argument relies on Elif Shafak's *Forty Rules of Love: A Novel of Rumi* (2009); additionally the theme of *flanerie* as a modern and symbolically binding component of contemporary living is explained in its multi-cultural, but primarily French context since it has been first conceptualized by French poet Charles Baudelaire. On the other hand, the relationship between Rumi and Elif Shafak is also manifest in the international recognition she has achieved through her advocacy of Rumi's contribution to our collective learning and knowledge. This has been the case since the publication of her first novel titled *Pinhan (The Sufi)* in 1997. On the other hand, *Forty Rules of Love (Aşk)* has already been translated into more than twenty languages and it continues to receive positive reviews from international readers.

Historical Implications: Conversely this essay has a dual purpose. On one hand it examines the influence of Rumi whose spiritual wisdom, mysticism and religious devotion have started a peace movement throughout the world. Rumi's work, particularly the *Mathnawi* has been frequently interpreted as an alternative to militant and

fundamentalist views of Islam. Certain aspects of Sufi philosophy, especially the series of events which outline Rumi's life, as well as the developments which led to the growth of Ottoman Islam, reverberate parallels with the socio-political developments in the Islamic world during the age of globalization. Although there is no exact date, Rumi continued to write the book of the Mathnawi at intervals of two years, beginning around 1260 and completed it before his death in 1274. Consisting of six books which are made up of rhyming couplets, the volume is embellished with Qur'anic references and it reveals the culmination of Rumi's capacity and indulgence in Islamic learning. Each book contains four thousand lines of verse. *Mathnawi* is considered by many scholars a serious work, whose focus is on the transformation of heart and soul. Yet at the same time it guides Muslims upon how to live piously, in self-reflection, allowing self-growth. In its capacity to direct one's body and soul from deceit and uncleanness to wisdom and dignified existence, *Mathnawi* is Islam's gift to the peoples of the world.

One of the goals of this essay is to illustrate how Rumi's works influence world literature, widely extending from Baudelaire's romanticism to Shafak's globally vigorous and wandering heroines, as evidenced in Rumi's dedication to the memory of his soul-brother Shams-i Tabrizi. Coleman Barks asserts that the conversations between the two and the essence of their communication represent the ultimate "sohpet" and "soul merging" which settle differences and separations across the cultures and nations. It generates numerous stories and cultural icons to meet and embrace the infinite potential hidden in mystical awareness and love" [2].

Elif Shafak is a bilingual author who has published nine books, seven of which are novels. She writes both in Turkish and English such as in *The Forty Rules of Love*, (*Aşk* in Turkish) which was published in the U.S. in February 2010 and in Britain in June 2010. With more than 550,000 copies sold he novel became a record best-seller in Turkey after it was translated into Turkish and published under the title *Aşk*. Shafak is also a best-selling author in Italy, France and Bulgaria. In 1998 her first novel, *Pinhan* ("The Sufi") won the "Rumi Prize," an award given to the best work in mystical literature in Turkey. In an interview Shafak stated that she had been influenced by Rumi early in her life. Through her ability to engage both Western and Eastern literary and philosophical traditions, Shafak demonstrates her commitment to celebrating the diversity of human experience. Furthermore she seems to advocate that despite differences and contradictions, there is already a shared common ground for all members of humanity.

Interestingly, in *The Forty Rules of Love* Shafak presents separate narratives with two interweaving parts. The main story, based upon the semi-historical plot, centers around the life of the Sufi poet. The second narrative which runs parallel to the first one is thematically intertwined with the first and it displays a modern love affair between an editor (Ella) and an author (Aziz). Their friendship is primarily navigated on-line, yet elaborated with occasional dates through intercontinental journeys which extend from Boston to Amsterdam and Konya.

In this semi-historical novel Shafak brings up a long-lost story which begins in the rural steppes of Northern Afghanistan during the thirteenth-century. She introduces the mystic Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi in an unconventional, yet deeply spiritual relationship to Şems-i Tebrizi (Shams of Tabriz), a wandering poet and a mystic *flâneur*. Rumi is an admirer of beauty and arts. Shams' arrival summons the inspiration and devotion he had been seeking in life. The two engage in discourses unparalleled in intensity, as Shafak weaves *flânerie* into a permanent theme and disconnects the story from its ordinary lair.

Whereas Rumi is intent to memorialize his friendship with Shams, Ella deserts her husband for Aziz. The plot substantiates the merits of long-lasting civic engagement, thrills of global strolling and the role of *flânerie* in the lives of its characters. However, no character achieves happiness or aesthetic magnificence in the end. Shams is murdered by Rumi's conspiring disciples; Aziz loses his fight to cancer; Ella remains a lonesome woman. Somehow their enchantment with *flânerie* ends in disillusionment, a symbolic allusion to the modern and materialistic wasteland we live in and estranged state of human affairs throughout the demise of capitalism. In a world that is continuously being polarized by numerous forces and unsubstantiated claims among nations, Rumi's call for peacefulness, humility and harmony offers respectability and concord, as millions of followers are increasingly attracted to the core of his ideas.

"*Global flânerie*" is a modern construction explaining our reliance on interconnectivity; it carries implications for miscellaneous ways of association and correspondence among strangers. Whether it pertains moving from one place to another, or surfing in the cyber space through simulated environment, the revolution in computer technology also offers a range of interface zones to the intrepid passenger, through virtual engagement. The *global flâneur's* will is best expressed in a search, or "wandering" in the virtual world or a simulation, where users can interrelate to one another regardless of distance, setting or location. What renders

the “faraway” “nearby” is the prospect of exploration which is experienced within the virtual universe through the audacity of the flâneur or the flâneuse who is not troubled by challenges or risks of the unforeseen. Elif Shafak renders her protagonists typical flâneurs who are fascinated with the prospects of the “faraway.” Her characters are driven with a search for friendship; they seem to be empowered, or “programmed” with an extraordinary sense of direction for bonding.

As evidenced in Elif Shafak’s novels, the characters establish contact with each other through conveniences experienced through the virtual world. Essentially their lives are shaped by “traveling” across the globe. As these men and women join the world of global flânerie, their sojourns are exhilarated over the possibility of achieving some form of success, or satisfaction, in the “virtual world.” Whereas their pursuits are characterized by the triumphant spirit of flânerie, fear of failure in establishing bonding may result in inertia or unhappiness as well.

French poet Charles P. Baudelaire (1821-1867) was probably the first to coin the term “flânerie” as he became a “flâneur” walking in the streets of the nineteenth-century Paris, looking for affordable rental apartments. He used to move from one rundown hotel room to another, in order to evade his creditors. During this turbulent time in his life Baudelaire was highly distressed due to his ill-fated relationships, while pursuing his dream of establishing a long-lasting “perfect engagement.” Despite his family’s wealth, Baudelaire led an extremely troubled life, torn between religion and sin, struggling to balance good and evil in human relations. His major contribution to literature, besides his poetry and prose, has been his translations of Edgar Allen Poe’s works. Interestingly his own poetry collection titled *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*Flowers of Evil*, 1857) was deemed morally offensive by French authorities.

Baudelaire was taken to court almost at the same time with Gustave Flaubert who was being tried for his magnum opus, *Madame Bovary*. Ironically in his most acclaimed *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Baudelaire mimics a literary flânerie as he informs his reader through a “walking tour” of the arts’ most prized reflections such as fashion, trendy modes of dress, poetry and painting. Despite his dreams of attaining fame he remained a pariah until his death at age 46. In part, this essay aims to transport the idea of flânerie into a contemporary context and re-evaluate its current significance in world literature as a romantic lair inhabited by global explorers.

Shafak elaborates on the theme of “flânerie,” as Baudelaire did, by illustrating the impact of love and companionship on the growth of self as a source of modern discourse. She evokes the themes of the “flâneur” and “flâneuse” in connection with contemporary global urban phenomena and its dependence on traditional communication systems such as print media, broadcasting, cable television, but mainly the virtual world. Yet Shafak’s immersion into Turkish and Ottoman history deems her narrative more interesting for the contemporary reader. The sequence of events she brings forth includes a segment of early twentieth century history when the Ottoman political structure was being replaced with the newly founded Turkish Republic, between 1919 and 1923.

The Plight of the Janissary: History and the Flâneur:

In the *Bastard of Istanbul* Shafak depicts an important aspect of Ottoman military tradition as she narrates the friendship which grew between two young girls who meet online. Their communication eventually leads to an actual pilgrimage to the Turkish homeland. Armanoush, who is an Armenian American, compares her dilemma as the grand-child of Armenian expatriates to the plight of the janissaries who were foreign-born recruits of the Ottoman army. Circumcised and converted into Muslim faith at a young age, they were known as the *devşirme* (janissary) soldiers of the Ottoman army. They went through a lengthy conversion which included Islamic training and re-naming according to the strict regulations of the Ottoman military.

The inevitable identity transformation took the young soldiers in due course to favorable positions, both in rank and status, although they endured extraordinarily tough circumstances in the beginning. As young children these boys were brought to the Ottoman land from the occupied territories in Europe and in Balkan countries, to be educated but primarily trained as soldiers to serve the Ottoman state. When they were eventually recruited for service, they were promoted to superior positions either in the Ottoman state, or in the military. For example, Sinan the architect (1489-1588), apparently a genius, was born in Central Anatolia, to a Christian family. He attained great fame at an early age through the mosques, bridges and school buildings he designed and built. The sons of Köprülü family, originally from Albania, sent six grand viziers to the Ottoman court from 1656 to 1735 and served successively to Ottoman Sultans with extraordinary devotion [3].

These children were forced to live through an allegorical *flânerie* throughout their entire lives. As they left their families behind they endured numerous difficulties with the anticipation of a brighter future which awaited them. Neutralization through identity transfer was the primary goal of their conversion process and they had to comply with the command of the state. Concerning the janissaries Shafak remarks:

The paradox of the janissary commands the maintenance of a position squashed between two opposite spheres of existence. On one hand the residue of the past accumulates. On the other hand the promise of a prosperous future sparkles. The past is represented through three exigencies as in the letter M: memory, melancholy and mistake. The future is a shelter adorned with trophies of success; a sense of security which you never owned before, the desire to join the multitude and be neutralized (128).

Armanoush was able to draw the parallel between the *devşirme* system which denied an ordinary boyhood to the young janissary and her particular status as a “threshold” child whose parents had experienced the consequences of cultural and religious differences. Yet she is brave and determined to start a pilgrimage towards her grandmother’s land of birth. “I know how it feels to be torn between two opposing sides, unable to belong to either side, constantly moving between the two” (128). About visiting her paternal grandmother’s house in Ýstanbul, she added: “I will see it with my own eyes. This is a journey into my family’s past, towards my own future. The Janissary’s Paradox will haunt me unless I do something to discover my past” (129). Fascinated with the odyssey of the *flâneur* —the archetypal “janissary”— the young flâneuse mimics her ancestors’ journey in reverse. Without hesitation she heads towards the ancient metropolis which rendered a new identity to anyone, Muslim and non-Muslim, who walked in and around its web-like passageways, arches, underground tunnels, Byzantine cisterns, historic churches, mosques with golden-tipped minarets, old temples, Egyptian obelisks, walls of the hippodrome and dilapidated fortifications which lined the banks of the Bosphorus. As a matter of fact, as the capital city of the Ottoman Empire Ýstanbul used to rise on the shoulders of its janissaries for five hundred years.

Rumi and the Forty Rules of Love: In her 2009 novel Shafak elaborates on the continuation of global *flânerie* in a semi-historical context. *The Forty Rules of Love: A Novel on Rumi*, (“*Aşk*” in Turkish) is based on two dissimilar stories which develop simultaneously. Shafak devises a complex organizational pattern and interweaves a story within a story. The “forty rules of love” represent doctrinal passages which serve as transition pieces between the two narratives. These passages also communicate Rumi’s ideas, in an organized pattern, to the reader who is willing to indulge in Sufi learning. Each chapter begins with an initial lyric segment reminiscent of Rumi’s poetic verses. On one hand the reader is informed about Rumi’s evolution from adolescence to manhood; on the other hand he is introduced to Shams who becomes the personification of the Divine love for Rumi. Rumi and Shams discover spiritual companionship while they *search* for the “ideal communion” with the Creator. Simultaneously the audience is introduced to the story of Ella Rubinstein and Aziz Zahara.

Ella is a Jewish-American suburban homemaker who lives in Boston, with her disloyal husband and their three children. She falls in love with a globe-trotting Sufi author named Aziz Zahara, when she was assigned to review his novel for her part-time editorial job. Ella and Aziz are both fond of Rumi’s verses. Strangely, Aziz’s novel titled “Sweet Blasphemy” (*Aşk Şeriatı*) is based upon Rumi’s philosophical attributes on significance of love and devotion to an eternal entity. As such, the historical events which surrounded Rumi’s life, as well as his philosophical teaching serve as the overarching metaphor for divine *flânerie* throughout the entire novel.

Meanwhile Ella’s journey is doomed from the beginning. While she abandons the comforts of a married life for Aziz, her dreams of happiness are shattered by Aziz’s early death. After she buries him in Konya, Ella takes on the role of the global flâneuse. She flies to Amsterdam, in order to sketch the memory of her lost love and continues her *flânerie*.

“The Fortieth Rule is ...” she said slowly, “a life without love is a waste...which kind of love shall I follow next time? Spiritual, metaphorical, material, or worldly, which one?.. Love does not need descriptions, or categorizations... Love is a universe by itself, you are either at the center of it, inside, or outside, longing for it.” (415)

Conversely, the “perfect engagement,” which Baudelaire constantly pursued among huge crowds in Paris, finds further relevance in the story of Shams, who had arrived Konya following his long search for Rumi. At this point Shafak’s narrative merges with historical facts relevant to the origins of Rumi’s acquaintance with Shams, who was driven towards Rumi not through imagination but intuition. Assuming the role of a mystic flâneur he started out westward from Baghdad (in present-day Iraq), because he was told that Rumi waits for him in Konya. Yet, as Baudelaire argued imagination always had a stronghold in the mind of the flâneur: “The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and profession are to become one flesh with the crowd.” Further he noted: “For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the middle of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite.” Shams, on the other hand, could care less for the crowds; he was determined to render his *flânerie* a memorable trip and eventually meet his soul-mate.

Sometime between 1215 and 1220 under the imminent threat of Mongol armies, Jalalu'l-Din Rumi’s family had migrated westward from Balkh, Rumi’s place of birth in the district of Khorasan, currently in northern Afghanistan. Following a lengthy trip the family finally settled around 1228 in Rum, or Konya (ancient Iconium) in present-day Turkey. Jalalu'l-Din was just twelve years old when his family had taken on this courageous journey. At age 25 he had already formed a fraternity of theological disciples in Konya, who addressed him as their “Şeyh,” or “Mevlana,” (Mawlana) which meant “spiritual leader.” Consequently, his promotion to the rank of “master teacher” led to the formation of the first Sufi order and hundreds of students rushed to Konya, to hear him preach about divine love. In 1244 a wandering *dervish*, (also “darvish”, a Muslim ascetic) known by the name of “Tebrizli Şems” (Shamsu'l-Din of Tabriz, or “Shams”), arrived Konya. Shams was a wanderer enthralled with the allure of distant lands. He had an irrepressible desire to travel since his childhood. He was, by birth, a native to the *global flânerie*:

Since my boyhood I have been traveling to different places; during my travels and expeditions I hear voices from the nadir of the unknown realms. I speak to the Creator and he responds. He explains and speaks to me. ...I travel up and down the depths of

the earth and roam underground. I am here and there. Occasionally I forget how to speak; the words are lost to me. Then, just like the migrating birds, they all come back. The first person who resented my trips to faraway lands was my father; he was alarmed by my expeditions and scolded me harshly (61).

After he arrived Konya, Jalalu'l-Din found a great friend in the wandering dervish. They became close friends; they read and recited spiritual poetry and sang mystical music to each other. The two friends were almost inseparable for at least two years. Reynolds A. Nicholson, an eminent Rumi scholar, notes that “Jalalu'l-Din found in Shams that perfect image of the Divine Beloved which he had long been seeking.” Rumi’s love for Shams was so profound that he referred to him as the “world emperor.”

If you want to see the beloved’s face
Polish the mirror, gaze into that space
In these truths, the secrets you weave
Are your punishments, yourselves deceive.
Shams-e Tabrizi, is the world Emperor
Seekers of his grace are behind which door?
This graceful King showers you with gifts
Unbeknownst to you, your souls uplift.

However the Sufi students resented their teacher’s devotion to Shams. Their bitterness made Shams flee and he went to Damascus. Rumi sent his son Sultan Veled (Walad) who brought Shams back to Konya. Yet the hostility deepened and Shams fled from his agitators for a second time. Veled was once again summoned to bring him back. In 1247, shortly after his last return, Shams was reportedly killed and his body was thrown into a nearby well. For Jalalu'l-Din Shams’ disappearance marked the end of sanguinity and he got consumed in a spell of sorrow. He busied himself by composing poetry which he later called the *Divan-i Shams-i Tabriz* (“Lyrics of Shams of Tabriz”) and *Manawîye Ma'nawî* (“Spiritual Couplets”) to commemorate Shams’ legacy. The creation of *Mathnawi* coincided with this season of sorrow in his life. Throughout this time period Rumi began to meditate on pure, joyful, yet excruciating power of love. The act of “whirling,” which has been popularized by Sufi dervishes is believed to have originated during this time in his life. Thus, from wandering to whirling, the act of *flânerie* took on another characteristic, monumentalizing Shams’ journeying spirit, as Rumi relentlessly kept searching and yearning for his friend.

On the other hand Shams' determination to locate the whereabouts of his soul-mate runs parallel to Rumi's excitement about attaining the ultimate knowledge in *getting closer* to the Creator. The two eventually follow the same lead and indulge in a similar quest. Ironically it was Shams' enthusiasm to discover the unknown which led to his eventual disappearance. Shafak portrayed, in Shams, a *flâneur* who is wayward and unpredictable. "Since the day I left Tebriz and my family I have become a wandering *abdāl*" (*Aşk* 62). "Abdal" in Turkish, refers to a bard, a "traveling poet," which is probably closer in meaning to the *flâneur* within the context of this essay. In Arabic it means "servant of God." As Shams asserts:

I traveled high and low, from East to the West, North to the South, I walk in and out of seven seasons, searching for Him, for the sake of truth, justice and the rightfulness. I claim no roots, I belong to nowhere I lost myself in Him, since the time before I died; I have no beginning, no end. Don't be misled, I am not one of those lowly dervishes. I am the north western wind which blows in the right direction. (62)

During an interview Elif Shafak stated that she was obsessed with Rumi's life and expressed his influence on her life as an author in her first novel titled *Pinhan*, (*The Sufi*, 1997).

I was so "drunk" and therefore I wasn't my age when I wrote that novel. I was head over heels in love with Sufism and I wrote with and within that love. It is a novel that has not only many Ottoman words and Sufi concepts but also layers upon layers. (Interview 11)

Not only Rumi and Sufism but Ottoman history has captivated her imagination. Shafak believes in the healing and transformative power of love: "Every true love and friendship is a story of unexpected transformation. If we are the same person before and after we loved, that means we haven't loved enough" (366). Shams who first responded to the Divine calling in Samarkand (in present-day Uzbekistan) set on his global *flânerie* to search for Rumi's whereabouts. He knew, intuitively, he was going to meet Rumi in Konya, though he spent a great deal of time wandering in different cities before he reached his destination. Later he told Rumi:

Dear One, I spent my entire life searching for you throughout the Universe. I followed your footprints. Rather than the sultan, the prince, the scholars in

ivory towers, I sided with the underdog, the excommunicated, the unfortunate, the desperate. Little by little I trained the Satan in me and converted him into Islam. Now I am ready to overflow. I want to relinquish my wisdom to the One you have chosen. Allow me to find him.

I heard a song, sweeter than honey, lighter than a feather. "Şems-i Tebrizi, you have got news, your prayers are accepted. Get ready, you are going to Baghdad!" I recognized the voice; it belonged to my guardian angel, from my days of boyhood (64).

Whereas Shams was ordered by his mentor to reach Konya in order to assist Rumi and immerse himself along with him in the Divine Love:

In a near-by city there lives an incredibly brilliant man. He is a master teacher; he is pious and credible. Thousands love and adore him. What he lacks is being absorbed by the Divine Love; this is why his transformation is not complete yet. One of us from our group has to go and keep him company (101).

Even before he met Rumi Shams knew that the course of their common destiny, delicately intertwined with one another, was already chartered with an ill-fated *flânerie*.

Throughout his conversations with Rumi, Shams expressed the need to uproot the old order in Konya and establish a new "order" which would bring about a spiritual transformation and facilitate the cleansing of the soul for the followers of Rumi. As a wandering mystic he was deeply committed to truth and love of the Divine wisdom. Actually until Shams' arrival Rumi had not realized that he was surrounded with deceit and hypocrisy. Indeed it was his students' hostile attitudes towards Shams which proved the revelation to be alarmingly true. Having personally experienced the brunt of the Nazi oppression, the twentieth century philosopher Walter Benjamin had once expressively argued that when aesthetics were politicized by the ruling class, anarchy is inevitable. "The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life." Any engagement with truth necessitates devotion. Freedom without responsibility brings discontent. There cannot be love without justice.

Significantly, Shafak's personal story reveals characteristics of a life exhausted in contemporary *flânerie*. Since her childhood, she spent many years abroad, traveling with her mother who was then

diplomat. Her journeys resemble those of Rumi, Shams and the janissary, especially the long trips they involuntarily took, leaving a hometown behind. This is why Shafak remarks: “We are all looking for love and we all feel incomplete without it. The story of Rumi and Shams strongly resonates with our needs and longings in the modern world” (Interview 10). Her statement implicitly echoes a romantic yearning, emphasizing the inevitable role of destiny, chance occurrences in one’s life. Ella remarks:

I cannot describe what fate is. But I can tell you what it isn’t. Fate is not about predestination...Fate does not necessarily illuminate the entire route; it just indicates the crossroads. The route may be familiar, but the bends and the turns on the road belong to the passenger. Thus, while you are not entirely in command of your life, you are not helpless either. (275)

Essentially Rumi’s teachings carry important messages for contemporary audiences. His words inspire multitudes; he has united the members of the *global flânerie* who maintain universal endorsement due to the expansion of technology. Rumi’s famous declaration sounds as realistic as it used to be in the days he compiled it: “*I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem. I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea; I am not of Nature’s mint, nor of the circling heavens.*”

BIO-SKETCH

Dr. Nilgün Anadolu-Okur teaches African American Studies at Temple University. Her first book titled *Contemporary African American Theater: Afrocentricity in the Works of Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka and Charles Fuller* (1998) conceptualized the necessity of developing a theoretical approach to African American drama and film. Besides comparative and world literature, she writes on topics related to African American and Women’s literature. She has edited and authored books in world literature and ethnic studies such as *Essays Interpreting the Novels of Orhan Pamuk, Women, Islam and Globalization in the 21st Century*. Her essays on Elif Şafak, Orhan Pamuk, Ottoman history and Rumi—with regard to identity and communicative discourse in a “globalized universe”— have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Currently she teaches courses on Black Film and Theater, Race and Racism, Mass Communication, Black Literature and International Women’s Writing. Keenly interested in preservation of historical sites in Pennsylvania, she has collaborated with Upper Darby and Phoenixville Historical Societies and the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, PA. She has been a Commonwealth Speaker for Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) on Underground Railroad and Abolitionist movement. Her manuscript on the formation of abolitionist discourse is currently under review.

Recipient of two International Fulbright Awards, Anadolu-Okur served as the Director of Comparative and World Literatures Division for the Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA), 2009-2010. She is the founder of two annual conferences, namely “The Underground Railroad and Black History” and “International Women’s Issues.” She has established and directed a study abroad program in Turkey for Temple University’s International Programs. She served as the Chair of Temple University’s Faculty Senate Status of Women Committee and is a voting member of the Educational Policies and Programs Committee. Her unpublished fiction and prose poetry recently brought her international recognition through her campus readings.

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