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The Hermeneutics of Love: Ricoeurian reading of Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*

Muhsina CK

PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India

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Abstract— *This paper examines Elif Shafak's The Forty Rules of Love (2009) through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion and faith. Ricoeur conceives interpretation as a dialectic: suspicion unmasks hidden ideologies, distortions, and unconscious motives, while faith seeks to restore meaning, trust, and openness to the text. Shafak's novel, which interlaces the story of Ella, a disillusioned American housewife, with the thirteenth-century friendship between Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, illustrates this dynamic. Ella's skepticism toward love, religion, and convention reflects the suspicious stance, questioning cultural norms and personal illusions. Yet, the Sufi teachings embodied in Shams and Rumi cultivate faith, offering renewal through love, transcendence, and spiritual transformation. Reading the novel through Ricoeur thus highlights how literature operates as both critique and affirmation, deconstructing rigid ideologies while reconstructing meaning. The novel affirms Ricoeur's claim that genuine understanding emerges in the tension between suspicion and faith, making space for identity, hope, and love.*

Keywords— Hermenutics of fatih, Hermenutics of suspicion; Mysticism; conflicts of interpretations; Symbols.

Defining Hermenutics of Suspicion and Faith

Ricoeur, following Heidegger, views humans as linguistic beings whose self-understanding is mediated through language. Since language is inherently complex and polysemic, Ricoeur focuses on symbolic words, where the hermeneutical problem is most apparent. He defines a symbol as a structure of meaning in which a primary, literal sense points to a secondary, hidden, figurative sense that can only be accessed through the first. Unlike mere signs, symbols are opaque and enigmatic, requiring interpretation to uncover their depth. Thus, symbols and interpretation are correlative: symbols give rise to thought, while interpretation is the intellectual act of deciphering hidden meanings within the apparent ones, unfolding layers of significance beyond the literal. (Ricoeur 1990, 118)

Ricoeur maintains that there is no single or universal method of interpretation. Instead, hermeneutics always unfolds in tension, caught between two polarities: suspicion, which seeks to unmask and demystify illusions that obscure truth, and faith, which seeks to recover and restore meaning. This "conflict of interpretations" provides hermeneutics with its double motivation—rigor and obedience, suspicion and trust. The hermeneutics of suspicion begins by doubting the immediacy of consciousness, particularly the Cartesian cogito, which falsely claims self-transparency. Ricoeur insists that self-understanding is only possible through the mediation of signs and their interpretation. Here he highlights Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as the "masters of suspicion." Each unmasks religion as an illusion: Marx as the "opium of the people," Nietzsche as a system of "slave morality," and Freud as mere nostalgia for the father figure. Together, they expose consciousness as "false consciousness" and practice demystification, iconoclasm, and the destruction of illusions. (Itao 2010, 3)

Suspicion, however, is not an end in itself. By stripping away the false, suspicion clears the ground for new possibilities of meaning. Ricoeur insists that "idols must die so that symbols may live." The deconstruction of illusions

allows symbols to re-emerge as sites of genuine significance. This transition from suspicion to openness sets the stage for the hermeneutics of faith. The hermeneutics of faith is characterized by trust, receptivity, and a "second naïveté"—not blind belief, but a post-critical faith achieved after suspicion. It listens to symbols as carriers of truth and meaning, much like the phenomenology of religion, which restores the sacred, and Bultmann's demythologization, which seeks the divine message within biblical myth. For Ricoeur, interpretation thus requires both suspicion and faith: the critical work of unmasking falsehoods and the constructive work of recovering deeper truths. (Gschwandtner 2024, iv)

Ricoeur sees hermeneutics not merely as the interpretation of symbols but as a philosophical path toward self-understanding. Symbols serve as mediators that allow humans to situate themselves and grasp their own existence. Through reflection—an act of appropriation—the ego reclaims its "effort to exist" and "desire to be," which are often forgotten as we become lost in the world of objects. Since the ego cannot be known directly through intuition or mystical insight, self-understanding must be mediated through works, actions, and symbols. Thus, reflection becomes interpretation, where signs and symbols serve as the only access to rediscovering the self. (Pellauer and Dauenhauer 2025)

To resolve the hermeneutic conflict between suspicion and faith, Ricoeur proposes a triadic reflective structure: dispossession, antithetic, and dialectic. Dispossession, aligned with suspicion, unmasks false consciousness and returns to the forgotten subject ("archaeology of the subject"). The antithetic stage, aligned with faith, listens anew to symbols, restoring their original enigma and leading toward the subject's reappropriation ("teleology of the subject"). Finally, the dialectic stage reconciles these opposites into a unity, showing their complementarity rather than rivalry. In this synthesis, suspicion and faith coexist as legitimate and necessary, allowing the subject—once alienated—to be restored to a hopeful self-understanding rooted in ontology. (Ricoeur 1973, 98)

The hermeneutics of faith emphasize approaching narratives with trust, assuming participants are the best interpreters of their own lived experience. Rooted in phenomenology, it privileges understanding subjective meaning, honoring personal stories without reducing them to hidden causes. Researchers adopt a humanistic stance, seeking to faithfully re-present how participants make sense of themselves and their world. This perspective values empathy, dialogical encounters, and "I–Thou" relationships, where meaning is co-constructed and clarified through genuine exchange between researcher and participant.

Interpretation in this mode treats life stories as intentional acts of meaning-making, akin to a Bildungsroman, charting growth through struggle or transformation. While acknowledging gaps, partial truths, and contextual influences, the goal is to restore meanings with minimal distortion through thick description and reflexive dialogue. The hermeneutic circle—moving between parts and whole—guides analysis, while Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" highlights interpretation as co-construction. Restoration resists suspicion's reductive tendencies, aiming instead to preserve participants' voices, highlight marginalized perspectives, and produce faithful, though inevitably partial, representations of human experience. (McCarthy 1989, 12)

The hermeneutics of suspicion rests on Ricoeur's idea that both language and consciousness are inherently distorted and equivocal. Thinkers like Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche showed how surface meanings often conceal hidden truths, and thus narratives cannot be taken at face value. What appears transparent in experience is problematized, as stories may mask deeper realities, unconscious processes, or cultural constraints. The interpretive task is therefore to "tear away masks" and uncover the latent structures that shape what is said—and unsaid.

This approach treats narratives as constructions rather than transparent reports. Researchers focus on silences, omissions, contradictions, and indirect references to reveal deeper psychic or social processes. Techniques such as psychoanalysis, discourse analysis, or feminist readings demonstrate how unconscious defenses, power dynamics, and cultural discourses shape personal accounts, even without participants' awareness. A key element is that the authority to interpret rests not with participants but with researchers, who situate narratives within broader theoretical frameworks. Participants may believe in their own accounts, but from this stance, their self-understandings are incomplete. Interpretation thus requires constructing alternative readings, sometimes against participants' intentions, to reveal hidden structures of meaning. Classic examples, such as Geertz's study of cockfighting, show how everyday practices or stories carry symbolic significance beyond their immediate sense.

Demystification is skeptical yet productive. It assumes every story has an untold counterpart and seeks revelation rather than mere confirmation. Though sometimes seen as intrusive or elitist, it highlights the multidetermined, multivocal, and socially embedded nature of narratives. Like everyday "reading between the lines," it insists that meaning is always more than it appears, and interpretation

must unearth what is repressed, unsayable, or structurally concealed. (Josselson 2004, 10)

Ricoeur famously identified Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as the "masters of suspicion" because they unmasked illusions in religion, culture, and society. They attacked Christianity not to renew it but to overcome it altogether, replacing it with other life-affirming visions. Ricoeur argued, however, that even their destructive critiques contained an element of recovery, aiming to find affirmation beyond illusions—though he judged Nietzsche's *amor fati*, for instance, to fall short of a livable affirmation. (Ihde 1989, ix–x)

Against this backdrop, Kierkegaard presents a problem. On one hand, his exposure of hypocrisy, self-deception, and idolatry within Christianity resonates strongly with a hermeneutics of suspicion. Yet Kierkegaard critiques religion from *within* the Christian tradition, aiming not to destroy faith but to purify and rediscover it. Ricoeur did not classify Kierkegaard among the "masters of suspicion" because their critique was atheistic and external, whereas Kierkegaard's suspicion sought renewal of faith. (Damgaard 2018, 11)

Towards Conflicts of interpretations

Paul Ricoeur's *The Conflict of Interpretations* (1960–69 essays) shows his thought in sharper relief than his systematic works like *The Symbolism of Evil* or *Freud and Philosophy*. The guiding thread through his diverse interests (structuralism, psychoanalysis, religion, phenomenology, linguistics) is the question of hermeneutics, or interpretation. For Ricoeur, language is inseparable from both philosophy of language and the human sciences, and his project aims to reconcile structuralist "objectivism" with phenomenology's concern for subjectivity. Ricoeur engages structuralism as a sympathetic yet critical dialogue partner. He acknowledges the scientific value of treating language as a closed system of signs but critiques its reductionism: it suppresses history (diachrony) and the speaking subject. He distances himself from Merleau-Ponty's reinstatement of the embodied subject and Heidegger's radical ontology, both of which he sees as cutting off dialogue with the linguistic sciences. Instead, Ricoeur takes a more "conservative," dialectical approach, using methodological stages to mediate between objectivist and phenomenological perspectives. (Ihde 1989, vi)

He develops a theory of "levels of language," where structuralist linguistics and semiotics operate at a necessary but limited level, while higher levels reintroduce openness, novelty, and the act of speech. Here language reveals both finitude (system, structure) and infinity (event, creativity). The "word" unites system and act, structure and history, embodying both closure and openness. Hermeneutics thus centers on symbols—polysemic words with multiple layers of meaning. Interpretation is the work of deciphering hidden meaning through literal meaning, linking Ricoeur back to biblical and exegetical traditions while extending them into phenomenology. (Ihde 1989, vii)

Ricoeur expands hermeneutics beyond textual analysis to the human subject itself, treated as a text to be deciphered. Here he brings Freud and Hegel into dialogue. Both exemplify a "hermeneutics of suspicion" that displaces immediate consciousness: Freud through an archaeology of the unconscious, Hegel through a teleology of Spirit's unfolding. Though Ricoeur borrows from both, he demythologizes them, rejecting Freud's realism of the unconscious and Hegel's Absolute Idealism remaining faithful to a phenomenological method that resists metaphysical closure. Ricoeur treats the subject as a text, with hidden depths such as the unconscious or future possibilities that are uncovered through a hermeneutics of suspicion. This method challenges phenomenology's naïve claim of direct self-knowledge, showing instead that the self is known only through the world and the other. Suspicion humbles phenomenology, but in doing so, it radicalizes it, transforming it into an implicit hermeneutics of belief. (Ricoeur 1989, 445)

Faith, however, cannot return in a simple or naïve form. After passing through suspicion, it must be critical and demythologized. Symbols, myths, and theology all undergo a process of demythologization: theology is too distant and rationalized; symbols conceal archaic desires; even faith itself can harbor immaturity. The outcome of this critique is not the destruction of faith, but its transformation. Suspicion clears away false consciousness so that faith, if it survives, does so as a reflective, chastened faith. At this point, Ricoeur introduces hope as a "third term" beyond suspicion and belief. Hope replaces immediate faith at the center, displacing both the illusion of self-mastery and the dominance of the present. It opens freedom toward the future, toward the God "who is to come," grounding a new ethics oriented less toward individual authenticity and more toward social and political justice. This eschatological hope becomes the true response to evil and death, surpassing existential philosophies of despair. (Ihde 1989, ix)

Ricoeur insists that hope must be historical and open-ended rather than closed by any absolute metaphysics. He struggles to preserve both the openness of history and the assurance that hope points toward fulfillment. Faith, though displaced, remains hidden within hope: history's future possibilities are not random but oriented toward promises. Thus, Ricoeur envisions a post-Hegelian, Kantian hermeneutics where hope and faith together resist despair, affirm possibility, and prevent history from collapsing into meaninglessness.

The Hermeneutic Conflict in *The Forty Rules of Love*

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Ricoeur's dialectic of suspicion and faith is central to how meaning unfolds. The novel itself oscillates between critique and affirmation: on one hand, it questions religious dogma, social conventions, and modern disillusionment; on the other, it offers Sufi wisdom as a pathway to transformation. This mirrors Ricoeur's insight that hermeneutics is always caught in a tension between suspicion, which unmasks false meanings, and faith, which recovers deeper truths. The hermeneutics of suspicion operate strongly in Ella's story. As a modern woman trapped in routine, she is skeptical of love, faith, and spiritual traditions. Her perspective reflects the Marxian critique of social illusions (domestic roles as oppression), Nietzschean suspicion of religious morality (rules that suppress individuality), and Freudian suspicion of desire (hidden motives behind relationships). Through her initial disbelief, Shafak dramatizes how suspicion unmasks the false securities of Ella's "immediate consciousness," exposing her self-deceptions and stagnant life.

Yet the novel does not stop at suspicion; rather, it clears a path toward renewal. When Ella encounters the story of Rumi and Shams, her skepticism begins to break open. In Ricoeur's terms, the idols of routine and false certainty "die" so that new symbols of love and transformation may live. Similarly, Rumi's grief after Shams's disappearance is not an end in despair but the beginning of a new poetic and spiritual vision, where love becomes the symbol through which meaning is reborn.

The hermeneutics of faith emerge as both Ella and Rumi learn to listen to the truths hidden in symbols—whether in Shams's forty rules, the *sama* of the dervishes, or the everyday acts of courage required to change one's life. This "second naïveté," post-critical and reflective, restores trust in love, spirituality, and interconnectedness. By weaving suspicion and faith into its narrative, *The Forty Rules of Love* illustrates Ricoeur's claim that interpretation must balance critique with recovery, ultimately affirming that genuine meaning comes not from rejecting symbols but from re-engaging them with openness and humility.

Dispossession, or the hermeneutics of suspicion, is reflected in Ella's growing awareness of the emptiness of her structured but loveless marriage. Reading *Sweet Blasphemy* forces her to question the life she has accepted as normal and uncovers her hidden longing for meaning and intimacy. Similarly, Rumi undergoes dispossession when Shams disrupts his established identity as a respected scholar, unsettling his intellectual certainty and revealing a forgotten depth within himself. Both characters are stripped of illusions, making space for a return to their truer selves.

The antithetic stage, associated with the hermeneutics of faith, emerges as Ella opens herself to Aziz's vision of love and transformation, learning to listen to the symbolic truths within Shams' forty rules. This stage restores the enigma of symbols and points her toward a life led by love rather than fear. Rumi too embodies this stage, as his relationship with Shams reawakens his spiritual imagination and guides him toward the rediscovery of divine love. The dialectic stage then reconciles suspicion and faith: Ella unites her critical awareness of her past life with her choice to embrace the risk of love, while Rumi integrates intellectual mastery with mystical passion. In both, suspicion and faith converge, leading to a new wholeness where self-understanding blossoms through love's transformative power.

Damgaard (2018) revisits Ricoeur's distinction between the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of faith, arguing that suspicion, while necessary for unmasking false consciousness and exposing hidden power structures, should not remain the final horizon of interpretation. Instead, through suspicion one can be led toward a rediscovery of faith — a mode of interpretation that restores meaning, trust, and openness to symbols. This is highly relevant to Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*, where characters undergo suspicion of tradition and authority before arriving at a renewed sense of faith through love, storytelling, and Sufi wisdom. (Shafak 2015, 1-16)

Shafak dramatizes Paul Ricoeur's dialectic of suspicion and faith in both Ella's contemporary story and the parallel narrative of Shams of Tabriz. At the start, Ella's surface stability as a housewife masks deep dissatisfaction. Her rejection of Jeannette's engagement, insisting that security matters more than love, is suspicion turned inward—it exposes her own loveless marriage and suppressed longings. Jeannette's blunt accusation that Ella is "an unhappy housewife" unmasks this denial, forcing her to confront what she hides. The coincidence of the manuscript *Sweet Blasphemy* echoing her very words function as another layer of suspicion: language itself is revealed as opaque, reflecting hidden truths rather than transparent meaning. Similarly, in Baghdad, Shams unsettles the innkeeper and confronts the judge, tearing down the masks of hypocrisy in religion and law. His presence embodies suspicion as disruption, stripping away false appearances.

Yet suspicion in both stories is not an end in itself. Ella's first tentative email to Aziz marks a turn toward faith, what Ricoeur calls the "second naïveté." After her illusions are stripped, she risks trust in a new voice that speaks of submission and love. The manuscript's symbolic coincidence also points toward meaning that can be reappropriated if she chooses to believe. Shams, likewise, restores meaning through parables and teachings: his

retelling of Moses and the shepherd reframes "blasphemy" as sincerity, showing that true faith lies not in rigid conformity but in authentic love of God. The symbol, opaque and double-layered, becomes generative once embraced in faith.

Ella vacillates between skepticism and openness—dismissing love in Jeannette's life but longing for it secretly, doubting Aziz yet being drawn to him, clinging to her marriage but feeling its emptiness. The "stone in the lake" metaphor captures this movement: suspicion disturbs the stagnant surface, while faith allows ripples of transformation to expand. In the parallel chapters, Shams embodies this dialectic directly. He strips others of empty securities but simultaneously affirms divine love as the true foundation of existence. His suspicion and his faith are inseparable, each preparing the ground for the other.

Taken together, the parallel narratives illustrate Ricoeur's threefold movement. Suspicion brings dispossession—Ella is stripped of illusions about her marriage, while Shams tears away hypocrisy in others. Faith then offers reappropriation—Ella dares to trust Aziz's words, Jeannette reconciles with her mother, and Shams points toward sincerity as the path to God. Finally, the dialectic unites both moments, preparing Ella for inner reawakening and Shams for his destined meeting with Rumi. (Shafak 2015, 20-94)

The Forty Rules of Love explores the tension between suspicion and faith through a series of encounters that unsettle established norms and open new paths of transformation. Rumi's recurring dream in Chapter 21 highlights his spiritual unease, showing that knowledge, prestige, and family cannot fill the inner void he feels. The dream foreshadows his coming encounter with Shams, suggesting that the stripping away of self-certainty will pave the way for renewal. This inward crisis reflects the hermeneutics of suspicion, where illusions of mastery collapse, leaving space for deeper meaning to emerge.

Shams's arrival in Konya, introduces a radical alternative to conventional religiosity. He recognizes every person as God's "unfinished masterpiece" and insists that true spirituality requires humility, respect, and openness. His defense of the marginalized like beggars, prostitutes, or drunks shows him as both iconoclast and healer. Suspicion for Shams means unmasking hypocrisy and prejudice, while faith means affirming divine presence in unlikely places. His role destabilizes rigid boundaries and reveals the possibility of a more inclusive vision of God.

The marginalized voices of Hasan the Beggar, Desert Rose, and Suleiman the Drunk embody the conflict of interpretations at the heart of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Hasan doubts Rumi's message of suffering as the privilege of a man removed from misery, while Desert Rose believes herself condemned by society's scorn. Suleiman rails against the hypocrisy of religious prohibitions. Yet through encounters with Shams, each character experiences a movement from suspicion to faith: Hasan is reminded of the divine within, Desert Rose is assured of forgiveness through compassion, and Suleiman discovers that doubt is part of faith itself. In each case, suffering becomes crucible for rediscovering dignity and divine love.

In parallel, Ella's storyline mirrors this dynamic on a modern plane. Turning forty fills her with suspicion about her marriage, her identity, and her choices, but Aziz reframes this moment as an opportunity for transformation. Their growing correspondence pushes Ella to loosen her grip on control, rediscover her capacity for faith, and embrace the uncertainty of love. Just as Shams unsettles Konya, Aziz unsettles Ella, stripping away the false securities of her domestic life and awakening a new openness to meaning. Together, these intertwined narratives dramatize how suspicion and faith, destruction and restoration, loss and renewal work hand in hand to reshape human experience. (Shafak 2015,95-146)

The novel dramatizes the dialectic between suspicion and faith that Paul Ricoeur identifies as essential to interpretation. The Zealot (ch. 34) embodies suspicion in its reductive form: a literalist rejection of symbolism, poetry, and mystical experience. He treats the Mongol invasions as divine punishment and insists on obedience over interpretation, refusing to admit ambiguity or plurality of meaning. In Ricoeur's terms, the Zealot reduces religious truth to ideology, closing off self-understanding. By contrast, Shams (ch. 35, 44, 57, 61) represents a hermeneutics that moves through suspicion critiquing superficial religiosity, gossip, fear, and hypocrisy—toward faith, where love, surrender, and divine presence reshape human existence. His insistence that "idols must die so that symbols may live" resonates with Ricoeur's conviction that suspicion clears away false consciousness, enabling faith to rediscover meaning.

The encounters between Shams and Rumi (chs. 36, 39, 48, 52) dramatize Ricoeur's idea of the *second naïveté*, where faith is re-appropriated after critique. Rumi's first meeting with Shams shocks him into dispossession, unsettling his identity as a scholar and preacher. Shams's probing questions about Bistami or the nafs dismantle Rumi's illusions of self-mastery and force him into hermeneutic reflection. By guiding Rumi through critique of ego, fame, and rigid scholarship, Shams enables him to embrace poetry, love, and unity as symbols of divine reality. This mirrors Ricoeur's insight that suspicion is not destructive if it opens onto deeper affirmation—here, faith expressed in mystical union.

Other characters embody the tension of Ricoeur's hermeneutics in their own ways. Ella (154-160) oscillates between suspicion of Aziz—questioning his identity, resisting his worldview—and a growing faith in the transformative power of love. Kerra and Kimya (165-178) illustrate suspicion as alienation: Kerra is excluded from male intellectual life and distrusts Shams, while Kimya wrestles with Qur'anic interpretation and her feelings for Shams. Yet faith also breaks through—Kimya discovers love as a deeper hermeneutic than fear, while Kerra, though wounded, begins to confront her own buried longing. These shifts echo Ricoeur's claim that faith is not blind acceptance but a re-reading of life's symbols after critique.

Finally, the narratives of suffering and transformation—Desert Rose's brutal assault and spiritual awakening (213), Aziz's descent into addiction and rediscovery of Sufism (215-231)—enact Ricoeur's hermeneutics at a biographical level. Both characters pass through suspicion: Desert Rose confronts the violence and degradation of her life, while Aziz confronts despair and nihilism. Yet both re-appropriate faiths not by denying pain but by interpreting it anew, discovering love and divine presence in fragility. Their journeys exemplify Ricoeur's idea that meaning is forged not by evading suspicion but by carrying it through to a rediscovery of faith. (Shafak 2015,147-236)

The narrative amplifies the tension between suspicion and faith, dramatizing how interpretation itself becomes a site of conflict. In the tavern scene (235-236), Rumi's entry shocks Suleiman and the drinkers into confronting their own prejudices. For them, a saintly scholar in a tavern can only be a hallucination or blasphemy. Yet through his words, Rumi transforms suspicion into self-examination: wine is not condemned as a material substance but as a mirror of what lies within. This is Ricoeur's hermeneutics at work: suspicion unmasks false idols of purity and reputation, while faith re-appropriates symbols—here bread, wine, and scars—as signs of divine presence. Rumi's insistence on personal responsibility and compassion exemplifies the "second naïveté," where prohibitions are no longer imposed externally but integrated as an interior freedom.

The father–son conflict (239) exposes how suspicion can harden into resentment. Aladdin interprets his father's act of fetching wine as betrayal, reading it through the lens of honor and disgrace. Shams's counsel to "soften his heart" is a call toward faith, yet Aladdin resists, clinging to suspicion of Shams as a corrupter. Rumi's rebuke—expressing shame rather than anger—pierces Aladdin more deeply than hostility could, revealing the painful gap between literalistic suspicion and compassionate interpretation. The hermeneutic clash here is generational: the son clings to law and reputation, the father to inward transformation.

Shams's symbolic act beneath the rose tree (239-244) makes Ricoeur's point about symbols most vividly. By pouring wine and seeing a crimson rose bloom, Shams dramatizes how reality is reconfigured through faith's interpretive act. When he tests Rumi by offering wine, the trial is not about consumption but about transcendence: will Rumi cling to prohibition as law or embrace it as symbol, moving from suspicion into a higher faith? Rumi passes, showing humility and surrender. Ricoeur's dialectic is enacted: suspicion clears away rigid religiosity, faith re-reads the symbol as a disclosure of divine love.

Meanwhile, Ella's confrontation with David (245-247) mirrors this dialectic in the modern frame. David reads her emails with suspicion, seeking betrayal; Ella insists her love for Aziz is not revenge but transformation. The hermeneutics of suspicion exposes hidden structures—estrangement, lovelessness—but Ella insists on a hermeneutics of faith, reinterpreting love as gift rather than transgression. Her letter to Aziz is her "second naïveté": she knows the risks, yet affirms love as meaning making rather than illusion.

The conflicts with Sheikh Yassin (248-254) bring Ricoeur's theme of ideology into sharper focus. Yassin interprets Rumi's tavern visit as proof of corruption, reducing mystical openness to heresy. Shams confronts him by narrating the parable of the four merchants, exposing the violence of judgmentalism. Suspicion here is doubled: Yassin uses it to denounce, while Shams uses it to unmask self-righteousness. Husam's hesitant reply—refusing to judge—embodies the hermeneutics of faith, where humility safeguards sincerity. Ricoeur's contrast between the scholar's fixation on law and the mystic's trust in symbols is dramatized in this confrontation.

Desert Rose's refuge (263-264) extend this dialectic into embodied practice. Desert Rose's scars embody suspicion—society reads her as fallen—but through Shams's guidance she reinterprets her emptiness as a space for divine fullness. The sema, too, is an act of re-symbolization: movement, music, and rhythm, once condemned as worldly, are re-appropriated as sacred. Ricoeur reminds us that symbols give rise to thought; here, the whirling dervishes generate a new language of faith that transcends suspicion.

The sovereign's humiliation (268-270), Aladdin's rage (271-272), and Shams's recognition of impermanence (273-276) remind us that suspicion always returns, often violently. Shams's rejection of gold unmasked hypocrisy but provoked political hostility. Aladdin's near-violence shows suspicion collapsing into hatred when it refuses

transformation. And Shams's solitary reflection recalls Ricoeur's sober insight: faith does not erase suspicion but carries it forward, knowing love is both gift and wound.

Ella's decision to leave home and meet Aziz (276-278) crystallizes the hermeneutic wager. Suspicion whispers of betrayal, instability, and regret; faith interprets love as risk and transformation. By choosing Aziz, Ella steps into Ricoeur's "second naïveté," affirming meaning after critique. Her act embodies the novel's central claim: love, when embraced interpretively, is the deepest form of faith, even when it unsettles established identities. (Shafak 2015,237-282)

The final part of the novel opens with Shams's disappearance and Rumi's unraveling grief, which Ricoeur would interpret as the transformation of absence into presence. For Rumi, the loss of Shams is not mere negation but a symbolic surplus of meaning: the void itself generates poetry, vision, and a deeper selfhood. Sultan Walad's dilemma—whether to truly search or to feign loyalty—illustrates the hermeneutics of suspicion, exposing ambivalence and hidden resentments. Yet the very tension between fidelity and betrayal shows how absence operates as a text: each character interprets Shams's vanishing in their own way, projecting meaning onto what is no longer there. In Ricoeur's terms, Shams's disappearance becomes the "symbol that gives rise to thought," opening interpretive layers that exceed literal absence.

When Shams is found in Damascus and returns to Konya, the narrative shifts into Ricoeur's dialectic of suspicion and faith. Shams's chess game with Francis enacts interpretation as dialogue across traditions, where religious difference is unmasked as secondary to shared submission. His decision to return is not driven by logic or self-preservation but by loyalty and love—a hermeneutics of faith that reconfigures risk into fidelity. Yet suspicion continues to operate through the community's hostility and Aladdin's growing resentment, reminding us that interpretation is always contested. Here, Ricoeur's insight into the coexistence of critique and trust is embodied in Shams: he accepts suspicion as inevitable but insists on interpreting life through the horizon of love.

The marriage of Shams and Kimya dramatizes the tragic limits of interpretation. For Kimya, love is read as destiny and redemptive hope, while for Shams, marriage is a misreading of his own nature. Ricoeur emphasizes that symbols are polysemic—they carry multiple, sometimes conflicting meanings—and the marriage exposes this multiplicity. For Kimya, the symbol of marriage is fullness and recognition; for Shams, it becomes death-in-life, a burden that cannot be consummated. Kimya's heartbreak and eventual death exemplify how the hermeneutics of faith can collapse under the weight of disappointed expectations, leaving only silence and suffering. Yet, in Ricoeur's frame, even this tragedy births meaning: Kimya's devotion, Desert Rose's guilt, and Rumi's grief all reveal the fragility of love's interpretive possibilities.

Shams's murder marks the culmination of suspicion's triumph, where fear, jealousy, and resentment drown out faith. Yet, paradoxically, his death unleashes a hermeneutics of renewal in Rumi. Stripped of his companion, he is reborn as poet and mystic, transfiguring grief into The *Mathnawi* and the whirling dance. Ricoeur insists that interpretation moves toward a "second naïveté," where the broken symbol is re-appropriated with depth. For Rumi, Shams is no longer a historical presence but a universal voice—an inexhaustible text inscribed in poetry, music, and love. Suspicion exposed the fragility of human bonds; faith reconstitutes those bonds in a horizon of divine permanence. Ella's parallel journey with Aziz closes the novel in this same key: Aziz's death, like Shams's, becomes not an end but a beginning, a surplus of meaning that reshapes Ella's identity. In both narratives, love survives loss by becoming interpretation, confirming Ricoeur's vision that symbols of faith always outlast suspicion through their power to generate new life. (Shafak 2015, 283-350)

CONCLUSION

Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* provides a fertile ground for examining Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion and faith. Through its parallel narratives, the novel demonstrates how suspicion operates to unmask illusions of security, authority, and self-transparency, while faith re-appropriates meaning through love, compassion, and symbolic imagination. The dialectic between suspicion and faith does not culminate in resolution but remains dynamic, as scenes of conflict, loss, and tragedy continually reopen the space of interpretation. Shams's radical iconoclasm, Rumi's transformation from jurist to mystic, and Ella's passage from domestic conformity to existential reawakening exemplify Ricoeur's claim that critique is a necessary prelude to reconfiguration, that "idols must die so that symbols may live." By dramatizing this hermeneutic movement, Shafak's text illustrates how literature itself becomes a site of philosophical reflection, enabling readers to experience suspicion not as mere negation but as a path toward the rediscovery of meaning. In doing so, the novel affirms Ricoeur's vision of interpretation as a dialectical process in which faith and suspicion are inseparable, each sustaining the other in the ongoing task of understanding.

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