

Mystical Transgression of the Body in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Elif Şafak's *Pinhan* (Sufi)

Jeanette Winterson'ın *Vişnenin Cinsiyeti* ve Elif Şafak'ın *Pinhan* Adlı
Romanlarında Mistik Deneyim ve Beden Aşımı

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Abstract

Both English writer Jeanette Winterson and Turkish writer Elif Şafak are marked through their involvement with feminism. Considering their concern with mysticism as a reaction against the Orthodox religion which they believe gives support to the patriarchal oppression of women, this study compares Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Şafak's *Pinhan*. Winterson deals with Kabbala mysticism in *Sexing the Cherry* whereas Şafak adapts Sufism in *Pinhan*. Both authors depict, in their novels, fluid character identities who reincarnate in different times and spaces in different bodies. This attitude is considered, even though they adapt different types of mysticism, as the reflection of their concern with spirituality, which they develop against the discriminating patriarchal religion. By privileging spiritual reality over the physical reality, they both annihilate women's subjection to physical laws of patriarchy.

Keywords: Winterson, Şafak, *Sexing the Cherry*, *Pinhan*, mysticism, Sufism, Kabbala, feminism

Öz

Batı kültürünü temsil eden feminist yazar Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* adlı romanında ataerkil kültürün bir ögesi olarak, dinin kadının ötekileştirilmesindeki rolünden yola çıkarak, eserinde Kabbala kültürü çerçevesinde mistik bir atmosfer yaratarak, kadını bedensel varlığının ötesine taşımaya çalışır. Türk yazar Elif Şafak da *Pinhan* adlı romanında benzer bir şekilde sadece toplumsal cinsiyeti değil insanın fiziksel gerçekliğinin ötesindeki varlığını da Sufi mistisizmi açısından ele alır. Bunu yaparken, her iki yazar da karakterlerini farklı zaman dilimlerinde farklı bedenlerde tasavvur ederler ve böylece aşkın gerçekliği ön plana çıkararak kadının ataerkil kültürde ötelenmesine temel oluşturan cinsiyet ayırımını hiçlerler. Bu çalışma, farklı beden, zaman ve mekanlarda yeniden tezahür eden ana karakterler üzerine kurgulanmış bu iki romanı mistik açıdan irdelemektedir. Her iki yazar da, kadının bedensel varlığı üzerinden ötekileştirilmesine tepki olarak birlik kavramını merkeze alan mistisizm üzerinde dururlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Winterson, Şafak, *Sexing the Cherry*, *Pinhan*, mysticism, Sufism, Kabbala, feminism

Christianity has naturally been targeted by feminist critics for centralizing God as an "ontological power ... [that] has lent symbolic support to unequal power relations in society, which has resulted historically in the oppression of women" (Cooper 77). This discourse that sanctifies God unquestionably as the

patriarch of the universe and subjectifies humankind to God's will while privileging men over women. Mysticism offers, however, in recent feminist fiction a middle ground for the deconstruction of this hierarchical formation. Despite their different practices in different religions and cultures, many forms of mysticism conceive God as a dynamic power that is immanent in all universe. They privilege the unitary perception of God rather than the idea of God as an authoritarian power in a hierarchical structure. For its unitary nature, mysticism is "[i]n sharp contrast to classical theism [as it] rejects all language and understandings that suggest that God is in any way a distant or dominating other. He is not a king, a tyrant, a bully, or man of war" (Christ 165). Mysticism offers a ground, "on which the intellectual and the sensual, the spiritual and the mundane, the individual and the universal, the personal and the divine can be reconciled" (Lin 856). God stands, in most of mystic perception, for the whole universe. Depending on the holistic understanding of the cosmos, human beings as well as all animate and inanimate particles of the universe are believed to be manifestations of God in different forms. Affirming "all the bodies and the world as the body of God," holistic philosophy "thus forms ground for feminist understanding of mysticism" (Christ 166). Transgression of the physical reality's hierarchical and discriminating boundaries opens, for mystic feminists, a non-hierarchical and non-discriminating ground for the inclusion of women as well as all the underdogs.

With reference to the basic concepts in Christian, Islamic and Jewish mysticism that regard spiritual consciousness as the "zenith of human perfection" (Fishbane 9), this paper aims to compare two contemporary mystic novels, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) by the English writer Jeanette Winterson and *Pinhan*¹ (1994) by the Turkish writer Elif Shafak. They both aim to transcend beyond the physical boundaries that subject individuals to social and cultural norms of patriarchy by depicting characters with reversed and fluid gender roles in their novels. Instead of normative physical bodies, their characters are enriched with a spiritual potential that enables them to survive through successive bodies on a cyclical pattern. Their spiritual potential is emphasized to such a scale that their physical bodies become "one-use-only units that crumble around us," in Winterson's words (90). By attributing this spiritual potential to a hermaphrodite in *Pinhan*, and by cross gendering feminine and masculine qualities in *Sexing the Cherry*, both Shafak and Winterson transgress not only gender boundaries but also open up space for the holistic conception of the universe, "all in one" in Sufi terms.

Shafak affirms her feminist motives while explaining her concern with mysticism in general, and Sufism in particular, as follows:

Mysticism has in itself veins of expression that made it possible for people that were otherwise excluded from the main stream to express themselves. It is particularly significant for women because in the

¹ *Pinhan* was written in Turkish. All the quotations from the text are translated by the author.

mystical movements and formation women found a voice - a voice they could not raise in orthodox platforms. (Migration 79)

As “one of the most important authors in Turkish Literature,” Shafak wrote about the Ottoman past as a multicultural resource with its various ethnic groups and religions (Çanaklı 65). With its varied principles embodied in numerous orders, Islamic mysticism, or Sufism,² which has a strong influence upon Turkish culture even today, was an important component of the Ottoman culture. Even though she admits to being an agnostic, Shafak reveals a deep interest in Sufism, first as an academic,³ and secondly as the writer of novels all of which are constructed by a touch of Sufism. Set in the seventeenth century Ottoman countryside, *Pinhan*, reveals its hermaphrodite main character Pinhan’s struggle for survival. The novel reflects the struggle of this nameless character, “neither male nor female or, either a man or a woman,” for getting over his biological “duality” (*Pinhan* 51). Starting with his accidental arrival at a Sufi Lodge (Tekke) as a little boy, the novel develops on his interaction with the Sheikh of the Lodge, Dürri Baba, as his spiritual leader on his way to spiritual regeneration during which he transforms through different bodies. Like the dog breeding Dog-Woman in *Sexing the Cherry*, whose real name is long forgotten, Pinhan’s real name, neither before nor after his being named as “Pinhan” by Dürri Baba, remains unknown.

Jeanette Winterson is a postmodernist writer who experiments with form and subject-matter in her novels. Her metafictional challenge to traditional norms of reality is the culmination of her defiance of traditional gender roles, which she, like other feminist writers,⁴ believes are determined by patriarchal narratives. Rejecting her early religious education, she declared herself a lesbian at sixteen, and her novels, thus, discuss gender issues not only from a feminist perspective but also from the margins of heterosexuality. Set mostly in the seventeenth century, a transitional period in English history, *Sexing the Cherry* reflects detailed accounts of the Civil War period, the events related to the beheading of Charles I, as well as the discovery of new places that mark 17th century England, through two first person narrators, a male and a female, both of whom aim “to deconstruct the conventions of gender signification” (Andrievskikh 6). The first narrator and the main character in the novel, the Dog-Woman, is a gigantic woman, and ascribed masculine rather than feminine characteristics. The male narrator, Jordan, is the Dog-Woman’s adopted son, who is feminised, reversely, through his search for love in imaginary

² Sufism in Turkey is generally identified with the 12th century poet Rumi, whose concept of love emphasizes its unitary nature that connects not only all human beings but all existence from the animate to the inanimate. (For more detail see William C. Chittick. “Rumi and the Mawlawiyyah.” *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*. S. H. Nasr (ed.) SCM:1991).

³ Mostly known for her fiction, Elif Shafak is an academic who has studied political science and women studies. She taught at many universities in the United States as well as in Turkey. Her master’s thesis submitted under the name “Elif Bilgin” on women in Islam is also referred to in this study.

⁴ For feminist perception of gender roles, see Catherine Keller. “Christianity.” *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. (Eds. A.M. Jaggar, I.M. Young, Blackwell, 1998 :225-235).

landscapes. Antosa defines the reversal of the feminine and masculine gender roles of the mother and son by claiming that “to the phallic connotations associated with Dog-Woman, whose factual narration gives an almost faithful account of events, the author opposes the feminised nature of Jordan, who records his journeys to distant lands as assistant to John Tradescant Jr., Charles I’s Royal Gardener” (82). Both the Dog-Woman and Jordan’s reversed gender identities and Pinhan’s blurred sexual identity represent margins at which mainstream gender and sexual roles are problematized. By “reversing gender-specific expectations” and undermining social and biological significations, Shafak and Winterson deconstruct all Grand Narratives, including science, on which the modern perception of reality is based (Christina-Lazar 174). Offering a holistic spiritual alternative for dualistic and materialistic modern reality, they transcend, as will be discussed in detail, beyond physical reality. Both novels are marked by an attempt to defy time and space boundaries while reflecting their characters’ passing from one body to the other (or from one physical existence to the other) in the process of their spiritual regeneration through a cycle leading up to unite with the cosmic One.

As a philosophical concept mysticism is defined as the “deified or ultimate consciousness” that “is the point at which highly developed people (i.e., mystics) totally transcend space and time, and are aware (at once) of all perspectives in the universe” (Schneider 196). Though Winterson and Shafak rely on different contexts in revealing their central ideas, they both indicate a similar truth in portraying their characters within an endless cycle of existence that reflects a cosmic consciousness, a mystic experience. *Sexing the Cherry* is considered Winterson’s “most metaphysical work” and an attempt in mysticism⁵ (Stanborough 58). The way that Winterson especially deals with “the light” in *Sexing the Cherry* - aligns her with Kabbalistic mysticism,⁶ which considers light to be God’s essence as follows:

God ‘emit[ed] beams of light’ into vessels ‘but the vessels could not contain the light and thus were broken.’ Consequently, some light was scattered, some ‘sparks of holiness’ falling into the material world, where they ‘yearningly aspire to rise to their source but cannot avail to do so until they have support’. (Smith 41)

Man is expected to give support for reunion by making this search as the only purpose for his existence. Sufi mystics conceive, in a similar way, all the forces of the universe as a reflection of God himself while explaining the creation of the cosmos as the consequence of God’s desire to be seen. This is a hadith often used by Sufis, but not recognised as authoritative by the orthodox Sunnis: “I was a hidden treasure and I wanted (literally ‘loved’) to be known. Hence I created the creatures so that I might be known” (Murata in Bilgin 173). Thus, in both types of mysticism, God is immanent in man, who constantly desires to re-unite with Him.

⁵ See Carol Anshaw. “Into the Mystic: Jeanette Winterson’s Fable Manners” *Village Voice Literary Supplement*. 86 (1990) :16-17.

⁶ See, Gershom Scholem. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken Books,1995).

While challenging the patriarchal discourse by reversing gender roles through the masculinised Dog-Woman on the realistic level, Winterson transcends to the imaginative world through Jordan's fantastic voyages to the fairy lands in *Sexing the Cherry*. The real name of the female character in the novel is long forgotten by even herself; she is called Dog-Woman because she breeds dogs in her small hut by the River Thames. Not only in name, but in all her features, the Dog-Woman is, with her gigantic and dirty body as well as her ugly face with "a flat nose, heavy eyebrows, only few teeth which are broken and black," anything but feminine (*Sexing the Cherry* 24-5). Her violent deeds conform to her huge body that enables her to kill many Puritans in her struggle on the Royalist side during the Civil War. As opposed to her un-feminine physical characteristics, however, she is identified with a naive personality, so she takes the Royalists' call for "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" literally and gathers in a sack the teeth and eyes of the Puritans she has killed. By de-feminising the Dog-Woman physically, Winterson empowers her spiritually through the motherly love she feels for her adopted son, Jordan. The Dog-Woman regards Jordan⁷ as a son, even biologically, by taking his coming to her through the river Thames as a metaphor of a woman's giving birth to a child: "When a woman gives birth her waters break and she pours out the child and the child runs free. I would have liked to pour out a child from my body but you have to have a man for that and there's no man who's a match for me" (*Sexing the Cherry* 11). Through this denial of her femininity, the Dog-Woman's spirituality is expanded.

In mystic thought, love in fact is the basic concept fuelling spiritual dynamism that enables man's rise from worldly existence to union with God. Kabbalistic mysticism defines love as "the primary force of attraction in the soul, whereby an individual is drawn to other souls, situations or objects, each one needed to rectify and complete some aspect of his purpose in the world" (Ginsburgh n.p.). Love in Winterson's novel, however, is revealed both as an abstraction that is real despite its un-physicality and as a referent to women's potential for spirituality through the motherly love that is dissociated from biological mothering. Motherly love, in other words, functions as a metaphor for mystical transcendence through the example of the Dog-Woman's own parents. She recalls, as a child, how her father rejected loving her after he was physically injured by her huge body:

When I was a child my father swung me up on to his knees to tell a story and I broke both his legs. He never touched me again, except with the point of the whip he used for dogs. But my mother, who lived only a while and was so light that she dared not go out in a wind, could swing me on her back and carry me for miles. There was talk of witchcraft but what is stronger than love? (*Sexing the Cherry* 25)

Love is presented as a magical power that defies the laws of physical time and space.

⁷ Jordan is also the name of a river in the Bible known to be the river of baptism. One other connotation here is to Moses who was taken from a river (Nile) when he was a baby.

The way that the Dog-Woman begets Jordan, her love for him, his journeys in search of Fortunata, an imaginary dancer, all associate *Sexing the Cherry* with Jewish mysticism. Antosa also associates Winterson's concern with Kabbala, by allying the scene in which Jordan is found with Judaism, as "reminiscent of the Biblical finding of Moses by the river Nile. Like the Biblical prophet, he is fated to wander in the deserts of the soul in order to accomplish his mission" (92). The river in this reference does not function just as a means of Jordan's identification with Moses, (thus Judaism), but works as a referent to water in general, as an important metaphor for love. As revealed by Ginsburgh,

[t]wo major characteristics of love are revealed in its constant comparison to water in Kabbala. The two aspects of water that establish it as an appropriate symbol of love are its property of adhesion, by which water causes elements to cling together, and its nature to descend. [...Thus,] on an individual basis, love is the essential force bringing people together and the 'glue' that keeps varied relationships on course. (n.p.)

The Dog-Woman's motherly love for Jordan and Jordan's desperate love for the imaginary Fortunata are both developed in *Sexing the Cherry* as the referents of the finiteness of the physical reality, and thus also the gendered as well as sexual identity. Smith claims that "Winterson's 'points of light,' like the Kabbalic 'sparks of holiness,' index a realm of pure light, a utopic realm glimpsed in the 'time of the now.' Winterson ... strives to imagine a historical practice constantly guided by visions of a radically different relationship to matter, space, and time" (42).

Jordan's actual voyages are to exotic places, from where he brings the first pineapple and introduces grafting to England. The journeys that he relates to the reader, however, are not about these places but about fantastic fairy tales of the "Twelve Princesses," whose stories defy not only the laws of physics but the cult of heterosexual love as well. Jordan's imaginary voyages are used as "a convenient trope" that "conveys the dissolution of gender boundaries," and sets the reader "on a journey across space and time" (Antosa 61). Jordan asserts the metaphysical context of his fantastic voyages by blurring the boundaries of time and space: "[e]very journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys I wish to record. Not the ones I made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other place or time" (*Sexing the Cherry* 10). Jordan's internal adventures, related to flying princesses as well as floating cities, defy physical laws while transforming the narrative into a transcendental one. He is in search of Fortunata - supposedly the youngest sister of the twelve Princesses, "who may or may not exist" (*Sexing the Cherry* 80). She merges, in fact, the real and the fantastic in a way to bridge the physical and spiritual reality in mystic terms. Fortunata is allied with light through her dancing and ability to resist gravity. Jordan is astonished watching her dance with her students as "[t]here appeared to be ten points of light spiralling in a line along the floor" (*Sexing the Cherry* 93). Rapid motion while dancing enables her to

transgress beyond physical existence by destabilizing the boundaries separating non-material existence from the material one. Fortunata's claim that "for the people who had abandoned gravity, gravity had abandoned them" reassures the relativity of human conception of not only reality but also physical laws (*Sexing the Cherry* 97).⁸

As Roessner asserts "*Sexing the Cherry* expresses a drive to escape the vicissitudes of history and locate a transcendent ground for its lesbian-feminist critique of patriarchal culture" (112). The novel focuses on mysticism as a reaction against patriarchal heterosexual oppression. Jordan's tales deconstruct, on the surface, the idea of happy ever after heterosexual relations in favour of lesbian ones, while discussing love as a concept that is not bound with the physical laws of time and space. He is in search of a moment "when we will know ... that we are a part of all we have met and that all we have met was already a part of us" (*Sexing the Cherry* 90). Here we seem to have in Winterson the idea of "re-birth". Jordan's love for Fortunata provides him with the means of a spiritual quest, a mystic journey, targeted at unification with the whole. He refers to mysticism while claiming that "[t]ime has no meaning, space and place have no meaning on this journey. All times can be inhabited, all places visited. The journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and lines of the body" (*Sexing the Cherry* 80). As opposed to chronological time sequence, mystic time considers that the "now" covers all past and future, and space loses, accordingly, its validity in mystic experience. As Jordan asserts through his experiences in these voyages, "we do not move through time, time moves through us" (*Sexing the Cherry* 90). Spiritual existence is eternal, thus timeless, whereas "our physical bodies have a natural decay span, they are *one-use-only units that crumble around us*" (*Sexing the Cherry* 90). The capacity of both Jordan and Dog-Woman for love elevates them on a higher level of consciousness that enables them to encounter their incarnations by transcending beyond the boundaries of chronological time and physical space. Jordan encounters his incarnation while walking back home on a foggy night: "arms outstretched he had suddenly touched another face and screamed out. For a second the fog cleared and he saw that the stranger was himself" (*Sexing the Cherry* 143). The Dog-Woman, on the other hand, even though she does not realize it, sees "someone standing beside him [Jordan], a woman, slight and strong," who vanishes afterwards while she is looking at Jordan standing in the prow (*Sexing the Cherry* 144). Their incarnations are developed in the novel as two twentieth century characters, Nicholas Jordan and an Environmentalist Woman – nameless like the Dog-Woman. Appearing over a period of three hundred years' time from the seventeenth century on, Nicholas Jordan is recruited to the navy for his fondness of sails, which is the reminiscent of Jordan's fondness for water and

⁸ The Kabbalistic concern with light finds a parallel in New Age philosophy that depends on the scientific findings in quantum physics in bridging the material with the spiritual in the Modern Age. For more information, see Boaz Huss. "The New Age of Kabbalah: Contemporary Kabbalah, the New Age and Postmodern Spirituality" *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* (Vol.6, No.2 July 2007, 107-125).

his consequent voyages overseas. Like Jordan's encounter with Nicholas through the fog, Nicholas transcends back to the seventeenth century, which happens to be the day of Charles I's burial, while watching stars on the deck on a dark night:

I rested my arms on the railing and my head on my arms. ... I heard a foot scrape on the deck beside me. Then a man's voice said, 'They are burying the King at Windsor today.' I snapped upright and looked full in the face of the man, who was staring out over the water. I knew him but from where? And his clothes ... nobody wears clothes like that anymore. I looked beyond him, upwards. The sails creaked in the breeze ... I heard a bird cry, sharp and fierce. Tradescant sighed. My name is Jordan. (*Sexing the Cherry* 121)

Starting with Nicholas's narration, the quotation ends with Jordan by blurring the line between the two times as well the two characters, Nicholas and Jordan. Jordan, inspired by this experience back in the seventeenth century, reveals that "perhaps I am ... to be complete" (*Sexing the Cherry* 143). The expiration of the physical body is conceived as not an end but a transformation only in form. Jordan realizes internally that "we are multiple, not single, and that our one existence is really countless existences holding hands like those cut-out paper dolls, but unlike the dolls never coming to an end" (*Sexing the Cherry* 90).

The Dog-Woman, identified with her huge un-feminine body and active struggle against the Puritans, is re-incarnated in the twentieth century Environmentalist Woman, struggling against the authorities not on religious grounds but for feminist and environmental issues. She wishes to gather them all in her sack to re-educate them in feminism and environment. As opposed to her small body, the Environmentalist woman feels huge, reminiscent of the Dog-Woman as follows:

I imagine I am huge, raw, a giant. When I am a giant, I go out with my sleeves rolled up and my skirts swirling round me like a whirlpool. I have a sack such as kittens are drowned in and I stop off all over the world filling it up. Men shoot at me, but I take the bullets out of my cleavage and chew them up. Then I laugh and laugh and break their guns between my fingers the way you would a wish-bone. (*Sexing the Cherry* 122)

She is fond of the river and tends to spend much of her time there, just like the Dog-Woman who lives in her small hut on the banks of the river Thames. She is also attributed a spiritual capacity, like Jordan-Nicholas, to travel beyond time. While leaning on a wall and looking towards St. Paul's Cathedral, she reveals that

I looked at my forearms resting on the wall. They were massive, like thighs, but there was no wall, just a wooden spit, and when I turned in the opposite direction I couldn't see the dome of St. Paul's. I could see rickety vegetable boats and women arguing with one another and a regiment on horseback crossing the Thames. (*Sexing the Cherry* 128)

She receives a vision from seventeenth century London, before the construction of St. Paul's Cathedral. Moreover, she and Nicholas feel, as incarnations of the Dog Woman and Jordan, an unconscious affinity towards each other. Jordan and the Dog Woman regenerate in Nicholas Jordan's unconscious attraction at the Environmentalist woman. Seeing her photos as an environmentalist activist in the newspapers, Nicholas Jordan admits that he "felt [he] knew her, though this was not possible" (*Sexing the Cherry* 138). He joins her by the River Thames to support her in her concern with the future of the world: "I wanted to thank her for trying to save us, for trying to save me, because it felt that personal, though I don't know why" (*Sexing the Cherry* 142). Together, they decide to burn down the factory that pollutes the river Thames.

This kind of experience that gaps centuries of time as represented by Nicholas Jordan-Jordan and the Environmentalist Woman-the Dog-woman incarnations reveals the manifestation of the universal soul, the God. God is conceived in Kabbala as an immanent "life-force" rather than "a Creator from beyond". Depending on this fact, Green suggests that "[e]very human being is the image of God. Every creature and life-form is a garbing of divine presence. The One seeks to be known and loved in each of its endless manifestations. We need to help all humans to discover the image of God within themselves" (85). Winterson's characters, in this sense, achieve this "life-force" through their personal wisdom. Green also suggests that "this truth may be depicted differently in the varied religious languages of human culture," which refers to the example of Sufism (85). As opposed to practical mysticism in Winterson, Sufism in Shafak follows a more symbolic pattern. Sufism defines man's spiritual journey in the metaphor of a cycle which consists of two main arcs: "The arc of descent indicates how and through which routes human beings in specific and the universe in general came into being, through the arc of ascent the human being gradually comes closer to the Creator, so much that at the very end the creator and the human being become united" (Bilgin 213-214). The upward spiritual progress in Sufism follows certain steps: "The Sufi who sets out to seek God calls himself a 'traveller' (salik); he advances by slow stages (maqamat) along a 'path' (tariqat) to the goal of union with Reality (fana fi 'l Haqq)" (Nicholson 28). This journey symbolizes the completion of the cycle representing separation from God with the beginning of life on earth, the arc of descent, by re-union with God through the arc of ascent. Circularity, as represented by the Sufi dervishes' dance in *Pinhan*, metaphorizes not only the perennial cycle but also interconnectedness and unity. Sufi dervishes in *Pinhan* chant of oneness: "all bugs and insects/all birds and wolves/all creation" while representing, at the same time, the interconnectedness of the cycle that repeats itself through their cyclical dance hand in hand (*Pinhan* 58).

Pinhan reflects the spiritual progress of its hermaphrodite main character, Pinhan, who suffers during his search for self-integration in 17th century Ottoman countryside. His earliest memories are marked by his efforts to hide his ambiguous sexual identity:

As for the boy, when he was done with his struggle with his sadness, he would run his hands over his body with hope but each time, realising that his nightmare was real, he would curl up and recoil into himself. At such moments how he would wish the earth to open and swallow him and his two-headed problem haunting him since the day he was born. (*Pinhan* 12)

At the beginning, Pinhan's accidental arrival at Dürri Baba Lodge,⁹ one of the Sufi lodges which were widespread in the Ottoman period, provides him with a refuge from his tormenting secret, and initiates him with a gradual process of spiritual enlightenment. His chase of a bird with a huge pearl on its neck that he sees while playing with his friends in the fields around their village begins his spiritual journey on the Sufi Path. When seven boys intrude into the orchard of Dürri Baba Lodge to catch this mysterious bird, only Pinhan is left behind on an apple tree while the other six boys escape just after being inspected by the Lodge inhabitants. Renaming him Pinhan,¹⁰ the old mentor of the Lodge, Dürri Baba,¹¹ accepts this boy into the lodge as a novice. The name Pinhan (replacing his real name, which is never mentioned in the novel) indicates on one level Pinhan's personal secret, which Dürri Baba intuitively senses as soon as he sees him; on the secondary level, it refers to the spiritual secret that Dürri Baba himself guards, which Pinhan is going to discover. In Sufism, every disciple dedicated to the path¹² is a "traveller," who needs a guide, a mentor (Sheikh, Mürşit) in order to succeed in his spiritual journey. The mystery that Dürri Baba harbours as a mentor is symbolized by the bird with the pearl,¹³ in chase of which Pinhan gained access to the lodge.

In a Sufi order, the novice joining a lodge to get on to the path, "with the purpose of renouncing the world," is subjected to "spiritual discipline for the space of three years. If he [cannot] fulfill the requirements of this discipline ... they declare that he cannot be admitted to the 'Path.' The first year is devoted to the service of people, the second year to the service of God, and the third year to watching his own heart" (Nicholson 33). In the process of serving others at the lodge, Pinhan proves himself, accordingly, worthy to enter the path. He is initiated with the essential Sufi principle that the physical world is a

⁹ Sufis lived in secluded lodges/monasteries (tekke) where they dedicated themselves to contemplation and remembrance of God as a means of avoiding the temptations of their worldly existence.

¹⁰ Pinhan means "hidden/obscure" in Ottoman Turkish, i.e., the knowledge of the spiritual reality that is hidden from the ordinary man.

¹¹ Dürri Baba's name is another symbol related to the Ottoman Turkish word "dürre" which means "pearl," i.e., he who owns the pearl of divine knowledge.

¹² Path (tariqah) refers to any one of the Sufi orders adopted by the spiritual seeker.

¹³ The pearl's symbolic significance in Sufism is revealed through an anecdote related to the great Sufi master, Junayd of Baghdad, and one of his disciples who asks Junayd to give or sell him "the pearl of divine knowledge" that he is said to own. Junayd's reply to his disciple is that "I cannot sell it, for you have not the price thereof; and if I give it to you, you will have gained it cheaply. You do not know its value. Cast yourself headlong, like me, into this ocean, in order that you may win the pearl by waiting patiently" (Nicholson 34).

screen veiling the truth that is “hidden” beyond it, through a metaphor revealed by Dürri Baba as follows:

Observable reality gives you only the chrysalis. But as unattractive is the chrysalis, it does not attract you. If you want to go beyond the observable reality, if you want to lift the cover and see with the eye of the heart, you find the butterfly. As the butterfly is beautiful you are attracted to it. Still, your heart loves not the butterfly but the chrysalis if you can use your heart to see. (*Pinhan 22*)

The physical reality represents the form only whereas the reality that is perceived by the heart is the essence beyond this form. Pinhan needs further training and experience until he is able to see the essence with the eye of the heart. The spiritual journey from physical form to divine essence, Baldick reveals, is a long and hard one consisting of different “stations”:

Sufism ... constitutes a path (*tariqa*), which begins with repentance and leads through a number of ‘stations’ (*maqamat*), representing virtues such as absolute trust in God, to a higher series of ecstatic ‘states’ (*ahwal*). These culminate in the ‘passing away’ (*fana*) of the mystic (or perhaps just of his lower soul, or of his human attributes) and the subsequent ‘survival’ (*baqa*) of his transformed personality (or perhaps just of his higher soul, or alternatively of his essence now adorned by the attributes of God). (3)

The initial stage that follows Pinhan’s acceptance in the “*tariqa*” occurs to him through a dream¹⁴ in which he sees himself on a threshold dividing two seas, one blue and the other brown: Dürri Baba calls Pinhan to come to him on the blue side, and Dulhani, another dervish from the same lodge, calls him from the brown side. This adolescent dream, anticipating Pinhan’s sexual awakening is interpreted by the nearby stream, to which he confides next morning, as the symbol of the threshold separating the physical world from the spiritual:

As the Water says, Dulhani’s boldness, his gaiety, his deep devotion to life and death, and the enormous joy he gets from a single drink, a single breath, a single smile, was seducing one of his two heads. As the Water says, there was more to it. Because Dürri Baba’s soft, quiet steps, his minding and caring for the ants and stones on the ground he walked on and treating them as equals while walking; his carrying the powerful smell of flowers and wild grass from afar as he blew like a blue wind himself, the tranquility of his speech, the tenderness in his eyes would attract the other head, and invite it to his own world. (*Pinhan 32*)

When Pinhan feels trapped at the threshold between the worldly life and spiritual existence, the same mysterious bird symbolizing the blue-eyed Dürri

¹⁴ Dreams have great significance in Islam. Associated with the afterlife, dreams, especially in Sufism, are considered as windows to the supernatural. (See Kevin Kovelant, “Peering Through the Veil: Death, Dreams and the Afterlife in Sufi Thought” *Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies, Inc. Annual Conference, 2007 Proceedings*).

Baba, owning the pearl of divine wisdom, appears to Pinhan for the second time. This intrusion of Dürri Baba signifies, in Sufi terms, Pinhan's upward progress on the arc of ascent. His heart pours itself out to Dürri Baba and the recognition of its implications paralyzes Pinhan. Confused and embarrassed, Pinhan bites his little finger until it bleeds, and the blood drops on the earth and makes a spot on the soil, "a spot that smelled of violence and passion. He wanted to hide it. He surrounded it with a circle. It was not enough; another circle, then another one. He built castles within castles, walls within walls, secrets within secrets" (*Pinhan* 33). Pinhan writes Dürri Baba's name at the center of the circle, then a drop of blood falls from the bird's beak onto the spot of Pinhan's blood. The encircled mix of the drops of Pinhan and Dürri Baba's blood work as an important metaphor that refers to either the cyclical pattern of existence and spiritual progress or the love that is the main force which drives the circle.

As in Kabbala, love is the central concept that runs the cycle of existence in Sufism. Sufism defines the operation of love as follows: "since the parts in a cycle which is ceaselessly changing and moving are connected to one another, love for a specific subject is in a similar way connected to love for any other thing, even for God ... there is nothing outside the great cycle, [so] there is nothing that cannot be connected to love" (Bilgin 182, 183). The circles represent, similarly, the stages of consciousness on the Sufi path to the ultimate annihilation in the existence of God. The gradual unveiling of each stage requires an internal struggle against the physical existence, until "God is [realized as] not a supreme, unattainable, uncomparable deity beyond our comprehension, [but] the beloved who is continuously desired and longed for" (Bilgin 172). Love, at this stage, acknowledged in Dürri Baba's person thus, transmits Pinhan to the third stage of Knowledge, in his quest for Truth. The unveiling of each stage that he has not been conscious of before transmits Pinhan to upper stages. Schuon defines the simultaneity of these stages as follows: "Each path comprises procedures that can be consecutive or synchronic at the same time. These are the stages in Sufism. ... The main stages consist of three layers. Fear (Mehafet), Love (Muhabbet) and Knowledge (Marifet)" (147). Now on an upper stage in the process of spiritual enlightenment, Pinhan becomes able to discover the parts of the Lodge which were hidden from him before. While trying to hide from the crucial spot he gets through a door that closes behind him: "In all those years he spent in Dürri Baba Lodge, he was confident that he knew the place inside out, but this place he had neither seen nor heard of before. Then, how could he explain his failure to imagine where he was, or how he arrived there or what was beyond it" (*Pinhan* 47). He can neither go back nor go forward as he is faced with another door that is decorated with poems and miniatures. A closer look at the miniatures on the door, which looked hard to open, however, terrifies Pinhan as they depict his first arrival at Dürri Baba Lodge: "There were pictured seven boys, an orchard, slingshots, perched on a branch a bird with pearl and an apple on the ground. Pinhan took a step back in fear" (*Pinhan* 48). Pinhan feels terrified at first, then menaced and finally helpless before this mysterious door,

which is the metaphorical door that will open to a further stage in his journey. Pinhan resists it at first, then defies it until he is humiliated enough to ask the door what it would like him to sacrifice in order to be let out. The door wants him to sacrifice all the hair on his body. Pinhan obeys and pulls off all the hair on his body, including his head and his eyebrows. His transformed appearance attracts the door and it opens and lets Pinhan out (*Pinhan* 51).

The pulling off of the hair from the body is an important Sufi tradition that represents de-gendering as one of the initial steps on the way to total denial of the physical body, and Pinhan's passing through the door after de-gendering himself is a "conversion" that "marks the beginning of a new life" (Nicholson 30). This new life is defined, in Nicholson's words, as "the awakening of the soul from the slumber of heedlessness" that leads to the final stage of "forgetting everything except God" (Nicholson 30-31). Passing through the door consequent to his self-renunciation, Pinhan is let into a graveyard, with a new awareness that enables him to see his own grave. He knows the graveyard is a part of Dürri Baba Lodge from the fences surrounding it, but he cannot spot which part of the Lodge he is in. The graves there belong to Sufis from different orders, both male and female. Then he spots one with "a tiny hole on its marble stone" (*Pinhan* 53).

As if his feet were dragged to that direction on their own.... Without understanding why he was bewildered on seeing the grave of someone he had never known [...he] failed to understand why this hole was made. Perhaps someone had pulled out something hidden in the hole. Or perhaps that thing had not been placed there yet. A thick red plait made a wide circle around the hole. It was sending out red rays of light as if in defiance of the sun. (*Pinhan* 53, 54)

The hole on the grave is, in fact, for the huge pearl that is going to be given to Pinhan by Dürri Baba before Pinhan leaves the lodge to go out to complete his quest, during which he is going to be transformed into a red-haired beautiful woman. Through Pinhan's rediscovery of the space of the tekke and his future grave, the concepts of physical space and chronological time are blurred. Like all other forms of mysticism, Sufism defies the chronological concept of time and physical space. Parallel to the rejection of the concept of hierarchical existence in favour of the One, the chronological hierarchy of before and after is dissolved in the now. So, the present covers both past and future. Schuon defines this principle in Sufi terms as "Sufi sees himself as the 'Son of the Present Moment' (İbn ül'vakt). That is, regardless of the before and after, he locates himself in god's 'now,' and this 'now' is nothing other than the reflection of Oneness. Oneness in time is God's now and it corresponds to eternity" (150-151). Pinhan is able to see the ceremonial Sufi dance only after this stage.

He hears drums beating but cannot see what is happening, "[s]ometimes man can see slowly and gradually" (Shafak 58). Then, he sees, beyond the fog and vapour, all the inhabitants of the Lodge gathered in a circle and dancing in the graveyard. This cyclical dance of the dervishes commemorates the connection

of all existence from the inanimate to the animate. While whirling around they sing that “the circle keeps turning round and round/what we call the circle is love from/Top to bottom/this is such a circle that it includes everybody/tell all bugs and insects,/tell all birds and wolves/all creation we are all siblings” (Shafak 58). Pinhan’s education at the Lodge is accomplished when he sees the red spot of his and Dürri Baba’s mixed blood on Dürri Baba’s face, in the middle of his two eyebrows. Transformed thus, he is directed by Dürri Baba, who hands him an oil lamp advising Pinhan to stop where it extinguishes, and also gives him the huge pearl in a leather purse. Pinhan leaves the lodge to accomplish his quest. Both the light and the pearl are symbolic. This journey, guided by Dürri Baba, which is internal in essence, ends in İstanbul where Pinhan falls in love with a young Greek boy, Karanfil Yorgaki. Pinhan meets Karanfil Yorgaki while trying to take Dürri Baba’s pearl back from a thief who has stolen it from him. Pinhan and Karanfil Yorgaki are attracted to each other on their first encounter in a tavern. “Pinhan felt the echo of every single step he took deep in his heart. Until now, only Dürri baba’s cloudy eyes had made him experience such a storm” (*Pinhan* 148). Pinhan’s love finds its echo in Karanfil Yorgaki:

He had never seen this hairless and beardless dervish dressed in black before. Not in his dreams, either. He couldn’t help his hands shake while looking at him. They looked at each other in the light of the candle. Big, black eyes tinged with kohl by birth were on one side of the flame, green eyes with long eyelashes were on the other side. They looked at each other without moving, even breathing at all. ‘See me’, whispered Pinhan’s eyes. His whisper became a scream coming up from the depths of his heart. A scream that carried pieces of flesh and blood with it. (*Pinhan* 149)

Their worldly love, however, transforms in nature by also transforming Pinhan’s self-perception. Transcending beyond his physical being, Pinhan’s little finger swells up when Karanfil Yorgaki’s is burnt by the light of the candle that he is holding. Pinhan “was not feeling ashamed, since he told to Karanfil Yorgaki the things that he thought should not be told, since he surrendered his little finger and all his body to him” (*Pinhan* 200). The love he feels for Karanfil Yorgaki transcends beyond physical being as well as heterosexual love.

At the basis of the Sufi mysticism that dominates Elif Shafak’s novel there is the idea “that everything is a manifestation of God, and consequently, every form of love is a reflection of God’s love” (Derin 233). Spiritually regenerated through his love for Yorgaki, Pinhan volunteers to sacrifice himself to save a neighbourhood from a curse that has fallen upon it because its name had been changed from its original. The dual name of the neighbourhood parallels Pinhan’s biological duality. Seven old women sages of this neighbourhood believe that they need a hermaphrodite to sacrifice to get rid of the evil that befell on them. In the process of sacrifice Pinhan transforms in body. In his dream, Pinhan sees himself falling out of a window, but his long red hair, which is caught on the sill of the window, holds him in the empty space:

Then Pinhan checked his head with his hand in surprise. He had long, very long hair. His hair was sending out red beams of light. First his eyes were dazzled by the light. [then he looked up and saw Karanfil Yorgaki] He was so beautiful so fascinating as ever. He was holding a candlestick in his hand. 'Wait' said Karanfil Yorgaki 'Wait'. (*Pinhan* 161)

His spiritual journey follows a cyclical pattern that begins and ends in the same place, Dürri Baba Lodge, where Karanfil Yorgaki finds his dead body:

He found the dead body of the red haired woman by the stream ... he carried her to the graveyard in the back of the Lodge. He dug the earth with his hands. Each time he took the soil out he felt as if he was tearing off something from his heart. He made a tombstone too. He placed the pearl that he never managed to give Pinhan, shining now brightly in the sun, into the hole of the tombstone. [Dürri Baba's pearl which Yorgaki had succeeded to take back from the thieves, but failed to give to Pinhan before his death]. (*Pinhan* 218)

He waits at the grave all night and morning, then he sees a bird "circling in the sky. This mysterious bird once flew so low that Karanfil Yorgaki saw his eyes, his cloudy blue eyes and the tears gathering in his eyes" (*Pinhan* 218). Having the eye of his heart opened to divine reality first by Dürri Baba's love and wisdom, then his love for Karanfil Yorgaki, which ends with his sacrificing himself, Pinhan then achieves the final stage of reunion, in Sufi terms, with the divine soul. Nicholson claims that "the whole of Sufism rests on the belief that when the individual self is lost, the Universal Self is found, or in religious language, that ecstasy affords the only means by which the soul can directly communicate and become united with God" (59).

In conclusion, the British novelist Jeanette Winterson and the Turkish novelist Elif Shafak are feminist writers who criticize suppression of women by the patriarchal culture. Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Shafak's *Pinhan* are compared in terms of their common concern with mysticism as a realm that is neutral of gender discrimination. Winterson deals with Kabbala mysticism in *Sexing the Cherry* while Shafak adapts Sufism in *Pinhan*. Winterson depicts, in *Sexing the Cherry*, the Dog-Woman and her adopted son Jordan with reversed gender roles while their incarnations as the Environmentalist woman and Nicholas Jordan in the twentieth century indicate the transcendental dimension of human existence. Shafak's *Pinhan* defies, similarly, gender boundaries by centering on a hermaphrodite like its main character. She points at gender identity as culturally constructed by attributing her main character with both male and female organs. Pinhan's reincarnation as a beautiful red-haired woman symbolize his spiritual regeneration through reincarnation. Both authors depict, in their novels, fluid character identities who are reincarnated, in different times and spaces, in different bodies. Blurred gender boundaries and confused sexual identities are used as feminist strategies as well as mystical commitments indicating a cyclical existence that transcends beyond physical boundaries in both novels. Despite their concern with

different mystical formations, they both privilege spiritual reality over physical reality, which work through love for others.

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