

Representing M(other): A Cixousian Reading of Memoirs Written by Jeanette Winterson and Elif Shafak

ABSTRACT

Writing about themselves, women return to their mothers and secure their self-identification by writing about the newly founded mother-daughter relationship. Nonetheless, depicting the concept of the mother is remarkably onerous because her image is either idealized by the patriarchal society or overlooked as a passive character under the masculine power of the father. Therefore, in order to depict a fair image of the mother, woman writers are compelled to stand against this overly simplistic depiction to portray her as complex and different. In doing so, women's self-writings will successfully remember the mother's voice and refer to her unique qualities. In this article, I would argue that Elif Shafak's and Jeanette Winterson's memoirs are tightly bonded with the concept of the mother, which is compatible with the way Hélène Cixous defines and writes about not only her mother, but motherhood in general.

Keywords: concept of the mother, woman-mother, self-writing, mother vs. father, mother-daughter dyad, Elif Shafak, Jeanette Winterson, Hélène Cixous

Reprezentacije matere kot/in drugega: cixousijsko branje memoarov Jeanette Winterson in Elif Shafak

IZVLEČEK

Ko ženske pišejo o sebi, se pogosto vračajo k svojim materam in si samoidentifikacijo zagotavljajo s pisanjem o novonastalih odnosih med materami in hčerami. Kljub temu pa je tematizacija koncepta matere izjemno težavna, saj je njena podoba v patriarhalnih družbah ali idealizirana ali pa povsem pasivizirana v odnosu do maskuline moči očeta. Če želijo pisateljice predstaviti kolikor toliko ustrezno podobo matere, se morajo zoperstaviti temu skrajno popreproščenemu prikazu. Na ta način žensko avtobiografsko pisanje vzpostavlja materin glas in poudarja materin edinstven doprinos k oblikovanju posameznic in posameznikov. V tem članku pokažem, da so spomini Elif Shafak in Jeanette Winterson tesno povezani s konceptom matere, ki je skladen z načinom, na katerega materinstvo opredeljuje Hélène Cixous.

Ključne besede: koncept matere, ženska-mati, avtobiografskost, mati vs. oče, diada mati-hči, Elif Shafak, Jeanette Winterson, Hélène Cixous

1 Introduction

One of the critical notions in women's self-writings is how they remember their mothers and represent them in the process of gaining self-knowledge. Interestingly, this process is different for men since their journey starts with independence from their family, especially their mothers, while women's growth happens within the realm of their families. In other words, they learn the ways of life from their mothers and by the way(s) they identify with them (Ferguson 1983, 229). As a result, women tend to include their mothers in the texts they write about themselves. However, the mother's image in a patriarchal society is disturbed by a one-sided, simplistic depiction as motherhood is traditionally "idealized as a feminine embodiment of moral purity" (Park 2019, 63), which is liable to omit queer mothers and even male caregivers. Consequently, traditional motherhood suppresses the voice of a wide variety of mothers. Hence, my argument is that there seems to be an urgent need for an alternative image of the mother, which I propose Shafak and Winterson have the potential to delineate in their memoirs, *Black Milk* and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*

Hélène Cixous holds the view that mothers are exceptional since they can have a significant impact on their children: "[W]hat makes the difference, his or her difference, is the mother" (1998, 45). Furthermore, the multitude of studies published in The Journal of the Motherhood Initiative attest to the importance of the mother, since they show how motherhood is related to different concepts like sexuality, literature, feminism, and the queer (O'Reilly 2019, 19). For this reason, this quality can conceivably introduce an alternative way of treating 'the other' through acceptance, which stems from the unique relationship between mother and her child as the mother allows 'the other' to exist without practicing appropriation (Cixous 1990, 112).

Accordingly, remembering and writing about motherhood is a way of displaying loyalty toward the childbearing aspect of femininity, which is a controversial idea in feminism. This is because there are numerous preconceptions associated with the role of the mother, and not all women can or want to be mothers. Notably, writing a 'mommy memoir' like *Black Milk* by Shafak or a memoir in which mother is remembered, like Winterson's *Why Be Happy?*, is utterly different from the traditions of autobiographical writings. Traditional autobiographies reflect power relations because only "wealthy white men viewed as holding public significance wrote and published autobiographies, while people disadvantaged by dominant structures of power generally did not" (Hewett 2019, 192). As a result, writing memoirs with mothers as the main characters obviously ignores the mainstream power relations in the genre.

My main objective in this article is to argue that *Why Be Happy?* And *Black Milk* are both quests for mother/mothering, during which Winterson and Shafak talk about their own mothers but at the same time make an attempt to picture a new image of the mother as a concept that influences people's lives. Winterson views the mother as "our first love affair". If we hate her, we are likely to carry the hatred into our other love affairs (Winterson 2011, 311). Likewise, Shafak's memoir is a text about the process of becoming a mother, along with the life stories of many literary women, some of whom were mothers while others decided not to be. One could say that both memoirs ponder the mother-daughter relationship, and as I shall argue, similar to Cixous' interpretation of the mother, her image in these memoirs could be radically different from the one imposed on women by patriarchal society.

2 M(other) and Positive Receptivity

Writing about mothers and mothering could be regarded as a key concept in women's self-writings, since "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (Woolf 1979, 75). However, it is not easy to write about motherhood because the fertile aspect of womanhood is used to encourage women to have children and to reduce them to mere baby-making machines within a society that will despise them for avoiding procreation (Cixous 2008, 7). Moreover, the patriarchal world represents mothers as either absent or overly idealized (Kristeva 2011, 47), and in the common view mothers are always passive, second-rate, and helpless (Söderbäck 2019, 63). Therefore, it is challenging to represent the mother because there are not enough representations of her real being in literature. To differentiate the mother's real being from its patriarchal image, looking at the differences between the concepts of 'mothering' and 'motherhood' is helpful. In order to introduce a new image of the mother, critics have exchanged the male-defined 'motherhood', a patriarchal and controlled institution, for the word 'mothering', which is a more female-defined concept concerning women's experiences (O'Reilly 2019, 20). Therefore, mothering is no longer linked to biology and can be done "by anyone who commits themselves to the demands of maternal practice" (O'Reilly 2019, 22). For that reason, we can also have mothers in "single, blended, step, matrifocal, and same-sex" (O'Reilly 2019, 31) families.

Another challenge of writing about mothering lies in the assumed love and/or hate relationship between mothers and daughters with roots in Freud's idea of mother hatred. Working with his patient Dora, Freud concluded that she hated her mother because she was simply after her father's love. In contrast, Cixous makes a hero out of Dora, believing that Dora broke the social structure and language, which basically functioned as the major causes of her mother's defeat (Goodman 2019, 12). Thus, in Cixous' interpretation, Dora was actually on her mother's side, which means regardless of the state of this relationship, at least some daughters are one way or another on the side of their mothers.

According to Cixous, the mother's role is important both symbolically and in real life. The symbolic impact of the mother belongs to her life-giving nature, while her present reality stems from the fact that she is constantly engaged in life's daily routines, turning her into a sheer "commonplace". By this means, the Cixousian mother cannot be idealized because her presence can be felt in every aspect of life compared to the father, who is Godlike and always floats in the imaginary (Fisher 2003, 68). Furthermore, in attempting to approach a fair image, the mother is represented on three different levels by Cixous: first in the mother-daughter dyad, second by looking at the way she changes our lives compared to the role of the father, and third by talking about the quality of the mother and her universal voice that can be found in every human.

Looking at Cixous' representation of the mother in the context of recent studies on mothering, it seems that her image of the mother is that of an empowered one. On the one hand, Smith Silva reminds us that Cixous does not overlook the subjective nature of the mother-daughter relationship (2019, 304). On the other hand, focusing on the mother's influence on her daughter's life instead of the father, Cixous manages to replace the mother-son relationship with the mother-daughter dyad and disturb the patriarchal attempts to trivialize this (Rich

1976, 226). Finally, by introducing the quality of the mother as a characteristic everyone can achieve, she pays special attention to “othermothers”, whom Smith Silva defines as everyone who accepts the caretaking responsibility (2019, 298). This fact can be regarded as one of the essential aspects of recent studies concerning the notion of mothering.

In addition, Cixous defines the symbolic role of the mother by breaking the binary opposition of man/woman in the family institution that unavoidably prioritizes the father and gives him more power than the mother. She postulates that the mother is always alive in us and fights against death, while the father is afraid and fails to do so (1991a, 19–20). In Cixous’ view, the mother is the life drive, the one who encourages the daughter to pursue freedom (Andermatt Conley 1991, 69), while the father is the actual death drive, always in suspense and absent (Cixous 1990, 129). It is worth noting that the mother’s relationship with the Other is metaphorically evident since the maternal body keeps ‘the other’ inside. That being said, the mother does the difficult job of “letting people to be born”, as Derrida puts it, and Cixous defines it as going beyond the anatomic maternal body since you “let yourself to be taken by the other” (1991b, 84) by accepting otherness inside you.

Furthermore, the importance of the mother comes from her ability to define people through the mark she leaves on them. The mother is both a metaphor and not a metaphor simultaneously; those with a mother inside face ‘the other’ with watchfulness; therefore, “the mother is a quality” (Cixous 1998, 45). This quality first comes from the maternal body and then is transferred to the child. Hence, any living human has a little of their mother inside of them and can successfully achieve the mother’s quality. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that Cixous’ close attention to this quality and her constant reference to woman’s ability to get pregnant is not simply biological. In fact, her major arguments about the feminine body are thoroughly morphological:

It is not anatomical sex or essence that determines us in anything; it is, on the contrary, the fable from which we never escape, individual and collective history, the cultural schema, and the way the individual negotiates with these structures, adapts to them and reproduces them, or else gets around them, overcomes them, goes beyond them, gets through them. (Cixous 1991a, 155)

In contrast, Freud is an essentialist, believing that everything depends on anatomy:

The excremental is all too intimately and inseparably bound up with the sexual; the position of the genitals – *inter urinas et faeces* – remains the decisive and unchangeable factor. One might say here, varying a well-known saying of the great Napoleon: ‘Anatomy is destiny’. (Freud 1912)

Following these lines, Bray concludes that “the body understood as morphology is not reducible to either nature or culture but is, rather, the scene of a dynamic writing which exceeds the limits of either category” (2003, 39). As a result, one may say that Cixous is not an essentialist as Freud is since, in *Stigmata*, she argues that everyone can reach the mother inside of them both as a metaphor and a quality (1998, 45).

Here I argue that this unique definition of ‘the quality of the mother’ is evident in the selected memoirs in terms of how they describe mothers and depict themselves as entities possessing this quality. The fact that both Shafak and Winterson accept difference takes them to the state of ‘positive receptivity’ in which a woman keeps ‘the other’ inside. Through this process, women experience the inside, filled with an ‘other’ that changes them in a non-negative way. More interestingly, they even take pleasure in having the ‘other’ inside (Cixous 1991a, 155), which is likely to happen in texts as well. That is, in telling the story of the mother along with the self, the maternal voice (the symbolic) and her milk (the real) are heard (Andermatt Conley 1991, 56), and in writing, once one starts remembering, the cycle of forgetting would be broken (Borofka 2010, 10). In other words, Shafak and Winterson successfully create a textual space in the form of a memoir in which the mother’s presence is remarkably redefined.

The alternative image of the mother depicted in Elif Shafak’s and Jeanette Winterson’s memoirs *Black Milk* and *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* Can be proved on two levels. Firstly, on a personal level, when Shafak and Winterson represent a different relationship with their mothers: they tend to picture the mother as similar to any other human with a complex web of varied characteristics. Moreover, they move from personal to the public sphere by representing the Cixousian ‘quality of the mother’ and associating the acceptance of otherness with the motherly state of being, enabling everybody to act motherly through positive receptivity. As a result, a sisterhood among women is born and depicted through some vivid images in the memoirs.

3 The Real Mother

In a curious quest to find the mother, Shafak and Winterson encounter a variety of contradictions between what they believe and what the patriarchal world wants them to believe. However, it seems they both end up on good terms with the concept of the mother despite the differences they discover. This discovery helps both see the real mother as she is present in her daughter’s everyday life, and that mothering is utterly different from person to person.

Cixous writes about her mother “without being consumed”; that is, she recreates her mother and then allows her voice to talk through her (Cixous 2008, 128–29). Through my interpretation of this concept, this not being consumed could imply that the predefined idea of the passive and devoted or overly idealized mother does not have a place in Cixous’ text, as her recreation of the mother is tangible enough due to being commonplace in the life of her daughter. On the other side, the same tangible yet diverse presence is noticeable in the way that Shafak and Winterson write about their mothers. In fact, the type of mother they intend to introduce is neither traditional nor modern, neither moral nor immoral, neither an angel nor a monster. Instead, the mother in their memoirs resembles everyone else, with typical human flaws as well as strengths. As I mentioned earlier, motherly feelings generally vary tentatively person to person. That is precisely why I argue that Shafak’s and Winterson’s depiction of the mother, fairly similar to that of Cixous, can resist the assumptions forced by the outside world. In line with the previous points, analysing the memoirs in question can hopefully demonstrate my point more clearly.

Black Milk is Shafak's memoir about pregnancy and mothering. The book starts with a scene where Shafak is traveling on a boat and sees a mother of two boys who is pregnant again and starts bragging about how she prefers single life over the life this particular woman is experiencing. Later on, in an interview with a famous Turkish writer, Adelet Agaoglu, who does not have children and has dedicated her life to writing, Shafak is asked to choose between having children or becoming a professional writer. That is when she excuses herself to the bathroom and introduces her fantastic multiple selves called "finger women"¹. Little Miss Practical, Dame Dervish, Miss Highbrowed Cynic, Milady Ambitious Chekhovian, Mama Rice Pudding, Blue Belle Bovary, and also a man called Lord Poton (the postpartum Djinn). Other than that, to deal with her serious dilemma about marriage and children, Elif starts reading about other famous literary women's ideas on the matter. In each part of Elif's journey, one or two of her finger women take control of her life and try to push her toward certain choices, but eventually, after falling in love, getting married, having a child, and dealing with her postpartum depression, Elif decides to embrace all her selves as different parts of her existence.

Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? Is Winterson's autobiographical book about finding her biological mother. While writing about the hows and whys of the decision to start this difficult journey, Winterson recalls her life with her adoptive parents, and mostly her mother, Mrs. Winterson. The book does not have a chronological timeline, and while Shafak uses fantasy, Winterson's time-plays are her way of talking about her mothers and how she identifies with them. Apart from her life story, Winterson also talks about different writers and poets who played an essential role in the way she gained self-identification. Eventually, Jeanette visits and gets to know her biological mother (Ann). Winterson, a British writer and childless lesbian, dedicated her book to her "three mothers: Constance Winterson, Ruth Rendell, Ann S": one is a friend who helped her in this process of becoming (Ruth Rendell), another is her adoptive mother who abandoned her at the age of sixteen upon learning of Jeanette's homosexuality (Constance Winterson), and the third is her biological mother, who abandoned her after giving birth because she did not know what else she could do (Ann S).

Shafak's view of motherly feelings could be pursued in her description of her motherly side, Mama Rice Pudding. Unlike the other more Westernized finger women living inside Elif, Mama Rice Pudding seems to be her traditional self (Boşoiu 2014, 116), but surprisingly nothing appears exotic or strange about her. She is instead described as a kind of femininity everybody can achieve by being simple, caring, and at ease with themselves:

She is wearing an aquamarine dress that reaches her knees, red shoes without heels, a belt of the same color, beige nylon stockings. Her wavy hair is held back in a ponytail by a modest hair band. The chubbiness of her cheeks is due to her extra pounds, but she seems to be at peace with her body. (Shafak 2011, 72)

Additionally, Shafak confirms that Mama Rice Pudding is motherly and loving, and has been repressed all these years (2011, 73) by Elif and her other finger women. However, Mama

¹ Finger women are fantastic characters Shafak has created to impersonate different aspects of her personality as a woman. These characters are tiny women who live inside her and control her actions and reactions to the outside world.

Rice Pudding's motherly feelings are more prominent when she is the only finger woman who strives to save Shafak from ignoring her body and femininity (2011, 91). Despite that, at the beginning of pregnancy, her dark side emerges as she turns into a tyrant and bans reading books by literary figures who are against pregnancy, and even bans talking to other finger women (2011, 115), although she does her best to help Elif experience a smooth pregnancy. Mama Rice Pudding could thus be viewed as a helpful yet tyrannical mother, and her real presence is depicted without either victimization or turning her into a heroine. In other words, Shafak has accepted and portrayed the complexity and plurality within the mother figure by writing only about her own motherly side, devoid of any generalizations about mothers.

Similarly, Winterson renders both of her mothers realistically yet really different from each other because her adoptive mother Mrs. Winterson had a strong presence in Jeanette's life, with her strange ways of living, whereas her birth mother was absent for a long while (van der Wiel 2014, 176). It is important to note that Winterson does not favour one over another as she avoids introducing one as a better mother and depicts them as neither passive nor simple angels. She describes her birth mother as straightforward and kind, while Mrs. Winterson is portrayed as a labyrinth (2011, 412). Her birth mother is a woman who likes men and has been married four times but never depended on them, as she did everything by herself, even putting up the shelves (2011, 417). On the other hand, Mrs. Winterson is the one in charge of language (2011, 61): a confident, dramatic reader (2011, 63) who teaches Jeanette how to read (2011, 60). Mrs. Winterson is thus the mother on the side of the mind, while Jeanette's birth mother is on the side of the body. In other words, the author has a little bit of both in her by writing about sexuality and the ways of the body. As such, we can see that Jeanette's mothers are not passive because Winterson has pictured them as decisive and responsible women with entirely different personalities. Jeanette's mothers are both good and bad, since they tried to do what was best for their daughter but eventually abandoned her. Therefore, unlike the patriarchy's definition of mothers, Jeanette's are neither passive nor angels.

Shafak and Winterson thus do not let a rigid image of the mother created by the masculine world affect their own view regarding who a mother is or what she should be. The mother in both memoirs is both good and evil, understanding and annoying, a saviour yet someone who might abandon you. More importantly, not all mothers are the same, just like any other human being. Notwithstanding the above argument, Shafak and Winterson go beyond representing a personal idea of mothering by writing about the symbolic mother, as I shall argue below.

4 The Symbolic Mother

The mother and the qualities associated with her role and presence have a similarly substantial influence on the symbolic level, since they are essential for self-recognition and therefore play a critical role in memoir writing. For instance, Shafak and Winterson create an alternative symbol of the mother, depicting their mother's strong and active presence. They even manage to illustrate a mother-daughter dyad that depicts 'the quality of the mother' as a feminine characteristic, rejecting Freud's doctrines in this area.

The mother's presence can be studied by looking at the man/woman binary opposition and defining the mother's role in the institution of the family compared to that of the father. Cixous describes the father as an absent mystery compared to the mother's life drive, constantly resisting death. The mother's life force derives from her commonplace existence in her daughter's life, her association with the body and giving birth, and also the fact that she accepts 'the other' inside herself both in the English language – m(other) (Bray 2003, 74) – as well as in reality (pregnancy) (Cixous 1991b, 84). On the other hand, the father's archetypal association with logic turns him into an unknown mystery, always absent from his daughter's life. Shafak's and Winterson's portrayal of their mothers and fathers neatly resembles Cixous' definition of them and, at the same time, could potentially reverse the existing binary opposition that has always prioritized the father.

Shafak's mother takes care of her daughter after getting divorced, and the reader cannot see a trace of her father in the text: she talks about herself as "the only child of a single mother", and even when she stays with her paternal grandmother so that she can spend more time with her father ends up seeing his mother more than him (Shafak 2011, 16, 134). As a result, her grandmother has a more substantial presence than her father. Moreover, since her father is never present, Elif decides she does not want to carry his name any longer (2011, 67) and, instead, defines herself by her father's absence (Benenhaley 2014, 10). She thus changes her last name to her mother's first name, Shafak, which means 'dawn' (2011, 71), 'the emergence of light', and a 'life drive'. Consequently, the father, who is always absent, loses his position, and her mother's name replaces him. That is how the mother gives life, even through the meaning of her name. Interestingly, Elif's first story was published under the name of Elif Shafak – Elif and her mother, as the mother takes a positive place in her daughter's writing career.

Moving on from Elif's father to the father of her child, one could still feel the noticeable absence of the father. Elif is almost always alone after pregnancy and childbirth. For one reason or another, her husband (the father-to-be) is not there. For instance, during her postpartum depression, Eyup (the father) is doing his military service for six months, although he calls when he can (Shafak 2011, 129–30). However, even when he is back and is asked to take care of the baby, while Elif writes, he panics and suggests looking for a nanny (2011, 159). Overall, the father is absent in Elif's and her child's lives, but the reason for this differs.

Similarly, present mothers and absent fathers are also shown in Winterson's memoir. Her biological mother breastfed her but did not try to keep her because of poverty (Winterson 2011, 436). Elaborating on her mother's reason for putting her child up for adoption, Winterson writes, "Better for Janet to have a mother and a father" (2011, 388). Ann gives Jeannette up because she does not want her to grow up without a father. Moreover, she believes that by letting go of her, Jeanette can have a better life, and thus fights back against the death of hope for her child. Little did she know that the father in her daughter's new family would also be passive and invisible.

Moreover, the portrait of the Winterson family also breaks the binary opposition of active father and passive mother since Mrs. Winterson liked to wrestle (with problems) while her husband only liked watching wrestling (Winterson 2011, 15). In addition, he was usually

either at work in the factory or in the church (2011, 109–10), so he was absent from the household. Nevertheless, what clearly shows Jeanette's idea of her father's passivity (absence) is when she describes his role in her exorcism and the fact that he did not do anything to help her (164), although he was against it, and later on he did nothing (2011, 104) to keep her from leaving home. Winterson thus shows the symbolic absence of the father, stating that he never tried to save her. On the other hand, despite Jeanette's problems with Mrs. Winterson, she writes about the effective presence of her adoptive mother, which might remind one of the ways Shafak portrays her mother.

The mother-daughter relationship solidified in *Black Milk* and *Why Be Happy?* Is mainly similar to Cixous' idea rather than that of Freud. Treating Dora, Freud suggested that daughters hate their mothers, while Cixous had a positive interpretation of Dora's feelings toward her mother (Goodman 2019, 12), since the mother is the voice that is always alive in a woman's writing, and it seems that sentences, expressions, and anecdotes are "her sphere" (Sellers 2006, 117). Besides, the mother is always within the daughter (Cixous 1976, 881), affecting the formation of her daughter's identity. In other words, Shafak and Winterson seem to have written "matrifocal" narratives, which O'Reilly and Caporale Bizzini define as "one in which a mother plays a role of cultural and social significance and in which motherhood is thematically elaborated, valued, and structurally central to the plot" (O'Reilly and Caporale Bizzini 2009, 11). If so, the mother's strong presence in her daughter's life can be observed in both memoirs.

Although Jeanette criticizes Mrs. Winterson and challenges her by "setting her (Jeanette) story against hers (Mrs. Winterson)" (Winterson 2011, 20), in the end, she even feels lucky for having her (2011, 439). In the same manner, similar to Shafak, Winterson carries her mother's last name since she always calls her father merely 'Father' while her mother is always 'Mrs. Winterson', with such a sense of strong presence: "She filled the phone box. She was out of scale, larger than life. She was like a fairy story where size is approximate and unstable" (2011, 17). Winterson even alludes to Mrs. Winterson's influence on her career by hinting at her mother's, which forced Jeanette to memorize the Bible. Later on, Jeanette was not even allowed to read and keep her favourite books, and so she had to memorize them (Trussler 2013, 27).

All the same, Winterson does not express any hatred toward Mrs. Winterson because she believes this dark gift has been helpful, as it seems to be all Mrs. Winterson could do for her (2011, 412). That is how Winterson values the positive presence of her adoptive mother despite their disagreements. On the other hand, Winterson mentions that she had been writing stories so that her birth mother could one day find her (2011, 311). She thus appears to have depicted both her mothers as the people who shaped her existence. In fact, she has decided to continue living her life by looking back at these two women while simultaneously stepping forward and going beyond them.

The symbolic, present, and "life-affirming mother" (Bray 2003, 54), who encourages her daughter to choose freedom and has a give-and-take relationship with writing and language, can also be seen in both memoirs. Winterson linked the bitter days when she could not talk (when she lost her language) to when her birth mother abandoned her before she could even have a language (2011, 316). Therefore, she is concerned about maternal loss (van der Wiel 2014, 4) as well as the loss of language. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, she learned reading

from Mrs. Winterson, who was in charge of language at home. On the other hand, Shafak's mother encourages her to write by giving her a turquoise notebook to use as a journal, but Elif, who is bored with her life, starts writing stories instead of recording her daily life (Shafak 2011, 144). Thus, both memoirs link the mother to words, writing, and reading. In addition, both writers refer to how their mothers are involved in or impact their writing process or language. In other words, the mothers give their daughters a language to write with, and the daughters remember their mothers in the texts they write, so the mother is always remembered in a give-and-take relationship instead of a love-hate one: I am the mother, and I give you what you need to write; I am the daughter, and I remember you in my texts. To the 'matrifocal' narrative, the role of the mother is as significant as the words and language used.

Moving on from personal memories of their mothers to a more general image of the concept, to celebrate mothering and different ideas about it, Shafak and Winterson tell stories of mothers who are not similar to each other, and they even include those women who cannot be mothers or have decided not to be. Including different kinds of women, a break in the forgetting cycle is created that reminds us of the variety in the feminine world, that 'woman' and, as a result, 'mother' is plural. Furthermore, insisting on the notion of mother is not to turn the woman into an 'other'. Instead, it functions as a tactical move that deconstructs the phallogocentric thought (Bray 2003, 29), considering the mother as the central piece of the plot. More importantly, this can encourage women to play the role of the mother for themselves and others (Sellers 1992, 141). The movement from a personal account of the mother to a more general discussion showing different aspects of her to the world can happen in the attempt to depict 'the quality of the mother'.

The mother's relationship with 'the other' can be defined by the Cixousian term of 'positive receptivity.' The m(other) is the only person who allows an 'other' to grow in her, and then she sets that other free (giving birth) without attempting to change it/him/her to herself. The way the mother accepts an 'other' is called 'positive receptivity' (Cixous 1991a, 155), and Cixous calls this 'the quality of the mother'. It is also worth mentioning that both Shafak and Winterson write about the existence or absence of this quality in their memoirs. Although Winterson constantly writes about Mrs. Winterson, she seems to be aware of the fact that her adoptive mother's flaw is the lack of this motherly quality, since she describes her fixed routines and ideas to imply that she mother does not accept things that are defined in any other way than what she regards as typical norms. Here I argue that the most eye-catching moment depicting the lack of Cixousian motherly quality occurs in the scene that features the title of the memoir. In this particular scene Jeanette wants to leave because she is happily in love with Janey, while Mrs. Winterson asks, "Why be happy when you can be normal?" (Winterson 2011, 226). For Mrs. Winterson, normal means living under the authority of the Bible's instructions and the evangelical church (patriarchal institutions), according to which homosexuality is unacceptable and considered a sin. Mrs. Winterson is always concerned about being normal and bans any 'otherness' even in books, since she believes fiction causes trouble (2011, 81): "The trouble with a book is that you never know what's in it until it's too late" (2011, 73), while Winterson uses books to write about Mrs. Winterson and her unusual ways of life. Books can thus possess 'the quality of the mother' by having the other inside, accepting the one who is against them.

However, and as noted earlier, the 'quality of the mother' is not a feature exclusively for mothers, and so the lack of this quality in Mrs. Winterson is not due to the fact that she did not have a child of her own and has adopted one. Even Jeanette, who has never had a child of her own, possesses this quality in the way she treats her biological mother and adoptive parents. In Winterson's memoir, one can notice two different incidents in which Jeanette takes the role of a caregiver and treats her father like an accepting mother would. In the first incident, her father decides to get married after Mrs. Winterson's death but still fears his dead wife and worries that she will never forgive him. Jeanette then helps and calms him down by saying that Mrs. Winterson would be happy to see him happy, although she is sure this is untrue (Winterson 2011, 102). Even after her father's death, there is a problem with the cheque she had written for the undertakers, so they refuse to bury her father. Then Winterson introduces herself as the writer of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, an auto-fictional book about her family and her problems with them with regard to her homosexuality. This book is quite famous in England because the BBC had made a TV series based on it, and the people who were in charge of the funeral had seen and were impressed by it, so they agreed to bury her father (2011, 379) since they were sure a famous writer would eventually pay them. Interestingly, Jeanette's auto-fictional book about her life with the Wintersons helps her father's funeral to run smoothly. On the other hand, as I mentioned before, her father could have helped her grow up effortlessly, but his absence and passive nature prevented him from doing so, whereas 'the quality of the mother' in Jeannette urges her to help her father.

In addition to the above, Jeanette also shows her motherly quality in her relationship with Mrs. Winterson. She disapproves of Mrs. Winterson's lifestyle, yet she defends her presence as her mother when she admits, "She was a monster, but she was my monster" (2011, 441). The same is true about her biological mother, as Jeanette declares, "I certainly don't blame her. I think she did the only thing she could do" (2011, 412). Overall, even though both women abandoned her at a certain point in her life, Winterson acts motherly toward them by trying to understand their reasons and accepting them as they are. Eventually, she is happy with the person she turns out to be (2011, 439) and comes to terms with her own 'otherness'. Although Jeannette criticizes both of her mothers at some point, her own 'quality of the mother' is reflected by giving them a certain position in her created world and by just calling them mothers instead of good/bad mothers, as the masculine world tends to. Winterson thus remembers her mothers and records their lives in her auto-fictional texts.

In contrast, one could discern Shafak's lack of motherly quality in her attitude toward the pregnant woman on the boat, but later she learns this quality of accepting 'the other' by reading and narrating life stories and the ideas that various literary women have about having children. In fact, these ideas were so diverse that Shafak could not find a fixed rule. All the biographies aside, Shafak practiced and learned about mothering by accepting her independent, modern mother and her superstitious, conservative maternal grandmother's different ways of life. While doing so, she did her best to avoid prioritizing one over another, believing that each had her advantages and disadvantages (Shafak 2011, 83). That is how she stands against the patriarchal notion of motherhood, which disregards stay-at-home mothers as being passive and inexperienced in the ways of the world, although it simultaneously values them. The male

world applies the same kind of double standards to a modern mother who is applauded for her independence, but blamed for not spending enough time with her children.

Writing *Black Milk*, Shafak is looking for “inner democracy” (Shafak 2011, 14), which can be taken as another term for ‘the quality of the mother’. Shafak explained her inner democracy as recognizing all her finger women and treating them equally (Shafak 2011, 161), disregarding their differences, and admitting the fact that she is all of them and needs all of them, too. In my present argument, this definition is similar to having ‘the quality of the mother’ through which one accepts others and will not try to change them into a restricted self. Therefore, I cannot entirely agree with Boşoiu, who believes Elif’s finger women coexist peacefully from the beginning (2014, 114), because in her attempt to gain inner democracy or ‘the quality of the mother’, Elif went through different stages, named after different political terms, that rule over spaces outside the text. Initially, she had an inner monarchy in which she did not give voice to her motherly (Mama Rice Pudding) and feminine (Blue Belle Bovary) sides because she was trying to be cynical and creative. Then, a coup d’état took place led by Miss Ambitious Chekhovian and Highbrowed Cynic to keep Elif focused on writing, and after that, there was a strict military regime to stop Shafak from even considering marriage and pregnancy. Later on, after pregnancy, the monarchy of the queen Mama Rice Pudding resulted in the imprisonment of all finger women by Lord Poton (the postpartum Djinn). Finally, she accepts all the voices inside her and realizes that she “loves them equally without discrimination” (Boşoiu 2014, 113), which enables her to achieve inner democracy or ‘the quality of the mother’.

This inner democracy is the first step in creating a sisterhood among women, which Shafak pictures in at least two different ways in her memoir. Firstly, by illustrating a feminine unitary decision to support pregnant women:

No matter how many times I say “no, thank you,” they insist until I give in. So I walk around munching on other people’s sandwiches and cakes. It doesn’t matter that I’ve never met these women or that I’ll never see them again. Where there is pregnancy there is no formality. Where there is no formality there is no privacy. (Shafak 2011, 124)

Even if Shafak presents a negative notion in the last sentence, this unique decision to support the mother and mothering can still be celebrated.

Another scene that perfectly exemplifies the sisterhood I mentioned earlier is the second time Shafak meets Adelet Agaoglu. Even though Agaoglu had decided not to have children when she was young, she still is the person who tells Shafak that having children was perhaps a good decision. Describing the situation, Shafak writes, “I gently squeezed her hand, and offered humbly in return, ‘And I respect your decision not to become a mother so as to fully dedicate yourself to your writing’” (Shafak 2011, 159). Despite having different life stories and choosing different lifestyles, they hold each other’s hands and share a moment of unity. And despite a multitude of existing ideas and mindsets, the fact that they accept different ways they have chosen to live could be regarded as a sign of positive receptivity. This plurality of feminine characters has the potential to stand against Clanchy’s idea that Shafak has overlooked the real barriers a new mother will face in the outside world (2013, par. 9).

These barriers include “loss of status, economic inequality, and so on”, but Shafak writes about the “inner fears” and precarious motherhood created by the same inequalities Clanchy names in her review. In the end, the democracy Shafak has gained “in herself” by accepting the inner diversity she has learned from her depression (Shafak 2014) might be said to be the first stage of defeating the “bigger and more important political problems of motherhood and selfhood” that Clanchy points towards. One could argue that the politics of Shafak’s memoir is in the illustration of ‘the quality of the mother’ that can be achieved in different ways, yet women can still hold hands and form a sisterhood.

By the same token, Winterson’s decision to write about herself as a lesbian with no children, Mrs. Winterson, a religious woman who has adopted a child instead of having one herself, and Ann, who has been married four times and has several children but gave her first child up for adoption, shows Winterson’s ability to gather different kinds of women, mothers and caregivers and create a bond among them.

Therefore, in my interpretation of Cixous’ theory, ‘the quality of the mother’ is not just for those women who can and want to have children, but it is simply about the concept of sisterhood among women and the way they break the circle of very rigid definitions in order to create alternative ways of defining the mother-woman in their stories. The way Winterson writes about Mrs. Winterson and her biological mother, in line with the way Shafak writes about her mother, maternal grandmother, the pregnant woman on the boat, and all other literary women, could be regarded as certain representations of this quality. By writing about different kinds of caregivers, a recreation of identity has happened through writing about various feminine selves, which other feminine selves can read. In doing so, one plays the role of the present mother, not only to herself but to other women. As demonstrated in this article, the writers not only remember and write about mothers but also act like mothers in caring for themselves and their created worlds, while protecting language, literature, literary figures, and their readers.

5 Conclusion

Black Milk is Shafak’s quest to find the personal meaning of womanhood while representing a plural picture of mothering. In this book, two different views that try to define motherhood as a dormant state in a woman’s life are criticized: the traditional and sanctified view of motherhood, which calls it “Holy and Honorable” (Shafak 2011, 115) and the belief that women should leave all other aspects of their lives to fulfil this sacred duty, and also the modern view of women’s magazines in which all women are considered “superwomen”, able to handle a career, children, and husband at the same time (Shafak 2011, 154). Besides, Shafak shows that as a woman she can change her mind about apparently fundamental concepts such as marriage and motherhood and, instead, introduces change and alteration in discussing notions that have always been defined non-flexibly.

Why be Happy When You Can Be Normal? also functions as Winterson’s curious quest to find her biological mother (Ann), since she believes finding her lost mother will most fill in the empty part of her character as an adopted child. To put it differently, Winterson wants to make amends with her inner unhappy child. Interestingly, Winterson questions all the fixed

predefinitions of motherhood by writing about the differences between her adoptive and biological mothers. Even though Jeannette seems to have confused feelings toward these two women, she also dares to write about their cruelty of abandoning her and their innocence of not knowing what else to do.

In conclusion, I argue that being the mother's voice and telling her story could be a way of resisting the condescending look of patriarchy on mothers. To elaborate more, the concept of mother and motherly feelings in *Black Milk* and *Why Be Happy?* seems to be able to resist the simplistic notion of the patriarchal society that omits 'other mothers' and regards women with childbearing ability as the only ones who can become caregivers. On top of that, women suffer from double standards of judgment as mothers depending on the kind of mother they are. In contrast, the mother can be seen as a quality everyone can achieve and is much needed in every aspect of everyday life, since it encourages the acceptance of difference and otherness. And I believe the latter is what Shafak and Winterson have done in their auto-fictional books.

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