Three Daughters of Eve

Title: [Three Daughters of Eve](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36429751-three-daughters-of-eve?ac=1&from_search=true&qid=BDPBzlGUgE&rank=4)

Author: [Elif Shafak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elif_Shafak)

Books give me joy! In abundance.

Have you suddenly stopped enjoying reading! And, felt frustrated. The feeling is not uncommon. After having read a series of unencouraging, over-hyped, and not beautifully written books; I too felt the same. (The last book I read was Gone Girl. No wonder this happened!)

But then I landed on the description of

**Should you read or not? Mostly Yes!**

The story revolves around a girl named Peri, born in Istanbul, and her journey to one of the best universities in the world--Oxford--and, back. Besides being about Peri’s journey the book covers multifarious topics--troubled family relations, individual aspirations, friendships, unrequited love, the delicate relationship between a student & a teacher, and God. The ending however leaves the reader both anxious and pacified.

Peri’s questions, thoughts, and commentary on several aspects makes the reader ruminate over the same too; and many times her thoughts just hit you at the right place. The book very beautifully describes our understanding of God, or rather a lack of it. And, the message that we do not know enough about it is recurringly enforced in the reader’s mind via the main protagonist, i.e. Peri’s confusion. The book also deals with religion, Islam particularly, and three women with different levels of comfort with the faith they practice or are supposed to.

The three women, also paint a picture of female friendships--albeit circumstantial--amongst

Three humans who could not have been possibly more different. Within the same tandem, it talks about the feelings of how intrusive these at times could be, not only this the book also touches upon a common theme--jealousy--associated with the female friendships in pop culture.

Peri’s journey is essentially a love story, albeit not a happy one. Not even sad. However, it does highlight how people could behave in love; and how at times we can hurt those people, deliberately too.

Lastly, Peri is not perfect, one can easily relate with the way she feels and acts. The side characters (let’s just use their names for once--Shirin, and Mona) are relatable too.This is perhaps the most beautiful thing about the story, that one could easily fit in Peri’s shoes, and in Mona’s and Shirin’s too.

Parting with not so few beautiful lines from the book…

*She had not inflicted harm on a fellow human being, at least not deliberately, at least not lately, except for engaging in an occasional bit of gossip or bad-mouthing, which shouldn’t count. After all, everyone did it – and if it was such a monumental sin, the pits of hell would be full to the brim.*

*To hurt and to be hurt – that was a human trait.*

*There was something inscrutable about the collective loss of reason: if enough eyes experienced the same hallucination, it turned into a truth; if enough people laughed at the same misery, it became a funny little joke.*

*She had always suspected that if chewing-gum flavours were political regimes, peppermint would be Fascism – totalitarian, sterile, stern.*

*There was a swagger in his manner, a challenge almost; he seemed not so much a tramp as an actor playing the part of a tramp and, confident of his performance, he was waiting for applause.*

*Perhaps, Peri thought, she had figured out that if one could not inspire mercy in that brief amount of time, one would never do so. Compassion never came as an afterthought: it was either spontaneous or absent entirely.*

*But her daughter was worried, embarrassed even. Deniz did not like to attract attention, only wanted to blend in, a drop of grey in a sea of grey. All her rebelliousness seemed to be saved for her mother.*

*Peri used to love running. Like other joys in her life, that, too, was no more.*

*Peri would come to understand that nothing swells the ego quite like a cause motivated by the delusion of pure selflessness.*

*Books were liberating, full of life.*

*She discovered that intelligence, like a muscle, needed to be exercised with increasing levels of stress, if it were to grow to its full potential.*

*That life was about enlightenment or ideals or love – that made sense to her. But fun – that was never her thing.*

*She would do anything to save her father’s life, even betray him.*

*A silent prayer was tantamount to an envelope with nothing inside.*

*How strange it was, when you came to think of it, that while moments withered, hearts stiffened, bodies aged, promises perished, and even the strongest convictions faded, a photograph, a two-dimensional representation of reality and a lie, remained unchanged, forever faithful.*

*She wrote in her God-diary: I’m perpetually in limbo. Maybe I want too many things at once and nothing passionately enough.*

*What’s the point of safety in crowds? We are born alone, we die alone.’*

*From there, the couple would take the plane to Istanbul, where they had spent most of their thirty-two years of firmly unstable married life, like an old staircase that, though rickety, still stood against the ravages of time.*

*She recalled the expensive saffron – not the fake spice but the real deal – sold inside delicate glass tubes in Istanbul’s bazaars. Such was her optimism – limited, confined, perishable.*

*One always yearned for what one lacked.*

*‘When I look at you, I see a typical Oriental intellectual in the making,’ he had said. ‘In love with Europe, at odds with her roots.’ Why roots were rated so highly compared with branches or leaves, Peri had never understood. Trees had multiple shoots and filaments extending in every direction, under and above the ancient soils of the earth. If even roots refused to stay put, why expect the impossible from human beings?*

*‘Yup, if you are homesick, it means you have a home somewhere.’*

*‘It’s not about finding time. It’s simply about time management. That is why Allah gave us five prayers a day – to structure our lives.’*

*Some people want to change the world; others, their partners or friends. As for me, I would love to change God. Now that would be something. Wouldn’t everyone in the world benefit from that?*

*When confronted with others’ exuberance and unable to keep up, she always shrank, a hedgehog rolling herself into a ball – self-protection from joy.*

*she loved the touch and the smell of history, continuity.*

*Believers favour answers over questions, clarity over uncertainty. Atheists, more or less the same. Funny, when it comes to God, Whom we know next to nothing about, very few of us actually say, ‘I don’t know.’*

*The Guide to Remaining Perplexed: There’s no wisdom without love. No love without freedom. And no freedom unless we dare to walk away from what we have become.*

*This Peri knew from experience: it was possible to envy the dead and the hold they had over the living.*

*Stashed away in it were all the things that the mind neither wanted to forget nor dared to remember.*

*If I ever fall in love, she promised herself, it’ll be with someone’s brain. I won’t care about his looks or status or age, only his intellect.*

*Today she was the tutor; he, the pupil. Roles shifted, words never stayed still. The shape of life was a circle, and every point on that circle was at an equal distance from the centre – whether one called that God or something else altogether.*

*canimin içi: ‘core of my soul’.*

*three passions of Bertrand Russell: the longing for love, the search for knowledge and the unbearable compassion for the suffering of mankind.’*

*Fate did lead those who were willing to be led, and those who resisted the idea, like himself, were dragged forcefully instead.*

*Yes, he was as free as a bird and almost as unconcerned. But he knew, of course, that birds were creatures of habit, therefore not exactly free, and had plenty of things to worry about.*

*How did one atone for past sins if not by changing one’s ways?*

*If randomness ruled, what point was there in trying to be a better person?*

*Always in-between, afraid of drawing attention to herself, unwilling to choose sides, so focused on not upsetting anyone that in the end everyone was left disappointed.*

*He hated it when people asked for pardon for trivial things when there were bigger apologies in life that could never be expressed.*

*‘But wherever I live, I must see the water,’ she said.*

*Life looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait.*

*‘We don’t see things as they are. We see them as we are.’*

*‘In Iran there’s a proverb Mamani taught me. She who makes a mouse of herself will be eaten by cats.’ ‘What are you trying to say?’ ‘I say, stay out of my business, Mouse, or I’ll eat you alive.’*

*‘Not easy to stay, not easy to leave.’*

*They, too, longed for new skies to walk under. Over breakfasts and brunches they made elaborate plans to move abroad – almost always meaning the West. But their plans, like sand castles, slowly eroded with the rising tide of familiarity. Relatives, friends and shared memories anchored them. Little by little, they forgot their yearnings for another place – until the day they ran into someone who had actually done what they had once wished to do.*

*‘If I had to make a choice, I might have opted out of having a memory too. I can’t wait to get Alzheimer’s.’*

*‘Remembering or forgetting?’ ‘They both have their drawbacks,’ Peri replied without hesitation. ‘But I’d rather forget. The past is a burden. What’s the use of remembering when we can’t change anything?’*

*One always knew the moment one fell in love.*

*Peri tossed the water into its wake, following an old Turkish tradition, Go like water, come back like water, my friend.*

*Peri, don’t quit. Remember, daring to ‘know thyself’ means daring to ‘destroy thyself’. First, we must pull ourselves apart. Then, with the same pieces, we will assemble a new Self.*

*Isn’t the search for Truth enough of an incentive to keep going?*

*All fanatics have one thing in common: they live in the past. As you do!’*

*‘Rituals are important, don’t underestimate them,’ said Azur. ‘Religions understand this well. But rituals don’t need to be religious. We’ll have our own shared practices in this seminar.’*

*Certainty was to curiosity what the sun was to the wings of Icarus. Where one shone forcefully, the other couldn’t survive. With certainty came arrogance; with arrogance, blindness; with blindness, darkness; and with darkness, more certainty.*

*‘Find new narratives, always plural. We often try to reduce our understanding of God to a single answer – a formula. Wrong!’*

*There was something frighteningly dangerous in the expectation that someone had the answer to most of our questions, and that through that person was a shortcut to all that was left unsolved henceforth.*

*‘Sometimes I’ve a feeling Peri likes people in fiction more than those in real life. Instead of tweeting her friends, she’d rather pin up her favourite poems on strings suspended across our bedroom.’*

*Azur said leave judging to judges. Philosophers do not judge. They understand.*

*‘For instance, if God is omnipotent and omnipresent, all-powerful and all-benevolent, does that mean that He – or She – embodies evil too, or does it mean that evil is external to Him – or Her – an outside force that He/She needs to fight? What exactly is the relation between what-God-is and what-God-is-not?’*

*“The degree of one’s emotions varies inversely with one’s knowledge of the facts.”*

*“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”*

*A serene smile crossed Azur’s lips. ‘ “Truth is so rare a thing; it is delightful to tell it.”*

*‘I say: everything is God. Whereas you say: everything is God’s. That little apostrophe makes a huge difference.’*

*‘Your idea of you creates your reality.’*

*But God had to be discussed in a circle, everyone on the circumference equidistant from the centre, looking at one another’s eyes.*

*‘As you may have already noticed, there are eleven of you – ten would have been too perfect, and perfection is boring,’*

*Beneath the initial sweetness a sharp citrusy tang hit her palate, both tempting and deceiving in a single bite – like the seminars of Professor Azur.*

*How easy it was to hate a loved one.*

*Most of the women opted for chamomile or black tea, while most of the men asked for coffee – espresso, Americano. No one at the table requested Turkish coffee, except for the American hedge-fund manager, who was determined to adhere to the maxim ‘When in Rome …’ although in this case the Romans themselves behaved as though they were not in Rome.*

*‘The highest activity a human being can attain is learning for understanding, because to understand is to be free.’*

*‘If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?’*

*Outside a bird chirruped and Peri wondered if it might be the siskin, back in the nature that, though full of danger and savagery, was nevertheless home.*

*Ah, Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire*

*Sometimes when she thanked him for the small things in life, she sensed, in truth, she was thanking him for those larger things that were better left unexpressed. Yes, she was grateful to him, grateful to the Fate that had brought him to her. But, then again, she knew gratitude was not love. Listen to me, Mouse, there are two kinds of men: the breakers and the fixers. We fall in love with the first, but we marry the second. She hated to think that life, her life, had vindicated Shirin’s theory.*

*Level-headed and sensible, Adnan enjoyed solving problems; and if he couldn’t solve them, he knew how to manage them. So different from Peri. For her, problems were like insect bites: she’d scratch and scratch away at them. She could neither allow them to heal nor leave them alone. Whereas he liked to repair broken things – and broken people. How else to explain his attraction to instability, Peri thought. How else to explain his attraction to me.*

*Uncertainty, gentlemen, is a blessing. We do not crush it. We celebrate it.*

And with this, bella ciao!