
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Analysis of the Use of Symbolism in *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho

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| ABSTRACT

This research aims to read the novel closely and analyze Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and its symbols. Using Peirce's semiotic analysis approach, the research will assign the symbols widely accepted meanings and evaluate how these "accepted" meanings affect the same novel. The purpose of this research is to describe the personal legend concept of journeys that are both physical and psychological at the same time. In this novel, symbolism guides the protagonist's inner journeys, which form a significant part of the novel. While these novels are said to appear inspirational for depressed souls with a profound philosophical and spiritual dilemma, the study of symbols found in these novels gives implications for future research.

| KEYWORDS

Semiotics, Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*, Symbolism, themes, Motifs

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The goal of the most current study article is to present Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* as the focal point of the metaphorical allusion and the search for destiny. Paulo Coelho is known for employing a great deal of symbolism in his portrayal of his character's spiritually enlightening experiences. The books of Paulo Coelho provide readers with a means of self-actualization and self-discovery. Any recurrent element in a story with symbolic meaning is called a motif. The author's intended message for the reader is known as the theme. Using symbols to represent concepts and attributes in a way that deviates from their literal meaning is known as symbolism. Literature has themes such as love, redemption, corruption, good against evil, and mortality.

Through the protagonist Santiago, Coelho depicted a variety of journeys and quests for the fulfillment of destiny in *The Alchemist*. Using an object to convey an abstract idea is known as symbolism. The novel's author presents a life lesson using unusual symbols. All the *The Alchemist*'s words had a profound effect on Santiago. "These symbols collectively contribute to the overarching themes of Coelho's works, emphasizing spiritual awakening, self-discovery, and the pursuit of one's destiny. The allegorical nature of his storytelling invites readers to reflect on their own lives and find meaning in the universal truths presented in his novels.

Research Question

How does Coelho employ symbolism to highlight the concept of personal legend?

2. Literature Review:

The Importance of symbols in literature

According to Catherine Belsey, "realism is constructed out of what is (discursively) familiar, not because it reflects the world" (Belsey, 1980, p. 47). According to the conventional representation system for a certain culture or person at a particular period, realism becomes relative (Goodman, 1968, p. 37). Random symbols in *The Alchemist* seemed to "adjust" with codes rather than reality when we deduced and gave meanings that were socially "accepted" and "familiar" in literature (Chandler, 2007, p. 157).

The value of tradition: Santiago hails from a shepherd family and gains valuable knowledge about local customs from his father and grandfather. This emphasizes the value of cultural legacy and the knowledge that can be inherited by future generations. The universality of spiritual beliefs: "*The Alchemist*" emphasizes the universality of human spirituality by drawing from a range of spiritual and mystical ideas from around the globe. Instead of restricting themselves to a single worldview, the book encourages readers to be receptive to various viewpoints and views.

In *The Alchemist*, dreams serve as a channel for communicating with the Soul of the World as well as a means of expressing one's innermost desires. For example, Santiago's dream of a treasure in Egypt reveals to him his Personal Legend and initiates the Alchemist's storyline. A boundary is drawn in the narrative between the "enlightened" and "unenlightened" people based on one's belief in dreams. The chieftain of the tribe takes Santiago's dream about the hawks very seriously and interprets it as a warning of an approaching attack from the desert. In order to support his claim that people who genuinely believe in dreams can also read them, he also tells the tale of Joseph's ability to do so, which is that the capacity to read dreams is possessed by people who genuinely believe in them. We observe that the chief's wisdom enables him to effectively repel attacks on the oasis. When the man who beats Santiago explains his dream to Santiago later in the book, Santiago interprets it as an omen directing him to the location of the riches, even if the man does not believe his own dream. Dreams that are real and sleep-related are just as important as dreams that are symbolic and personal, like those found in personal legends.

A lot of the people Santiago meets on his travels use this word, which means "it is written," according to the crystal seller. Usually, the word surfaces right before Santiago is ready to embark on a new phase of his journey. As Santiago discovers, fate always helps people who are pursuing their personal legends. Therefore, as long as he stays committed to his objective, he can take solace in the knowledge that his fate has already been recorded in global history. Furthermore, *The Alchemist's* biblical tone is reinforced using *maktub* repeatedly. Like the other capitalized nouns that predominate in the novel, such as the Soul of the World and the Hand that Wrote All, the word lends the universality and spiritual weight of a tale to Santiago's story

3. Research Method

This research has a qualitative research design. The researcher will analyze text from the alchemist for underlying symbolism and hidden meaning as portrayed by the author. Semiotics is a broad term that refers to the study of signs (Chandler, 2007, p. 1). Early in the 20th century, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure employed semiotics, sometimes known as semiology (Bouzida, 2014, p. 1001). Semiotics is the study of what we in common speech call "signs," that is, anything that "stands for something else" (Chandler, 2007, p. 2).

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 The Journey

A symbol is an object that, by connection or similarity, stands in for another object. It could be a physical object or a written symbol for an intangible concept. *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho is full of symbolism. It tells the tale of Santiago, a Spanish shepherd kid who sets out on a quest to pursue his goal. Like the search for the Holy Grail, he encountered numerous challenges along the route. However, he eventually found his treasure. All the alchemist's symbols and omens are linked together.

4.2 Omens and Signs

Omens and signs are signals from the cosmos that point you in the direction of the proper choice. Thummim and Umim Although Umim and Thummim are fortune-telling stones that Melchizedek presents to Santiago in *The Alchemist*, neither the words nor the stones they stand for have official definitions or meanings. Nonetheless, Umim and Thummim also speak to the human need to give up power and the capacity to make decisions, taking into account the stones in the setting of the book. Melchizedek once said, "The greatest lie on earth is that people have no control over their destiny." Although Melchizedek is the one who presents Santiago with the stones, they also stand for the very thing that he

Omens are crucial in revealing Santiago's destiny. In his dream, a young person took him to the Egyptian pyramids and assured him that there would be a hidden treasure there. Thus, omens aid him in choosing the appropriate course for his mission. God has

created a road for everyone to follow, as described in the literature, but in order to reach riches, you must follow the omens. All you need to do is peruse the omens he left for you. The novel's central theme is the realization that everything in life is an omen. After Santiago sought the interpretation of the dream from a gypsy lady, a mystery ruler known as the King of Salem in Tarifa persuades him.

4.3 Personal Legend:

The Personal Legend symbolizes a person's distinct life purpose or destiny. For instance, Coelho frequently employs the idea of a Personal Legend to help individuals find fulfillment. Every object in the world has a Personal Legend, and each person who fulfills theirs contributes to the planet's Soul, or its purity. The boy's personal legend is clear: he must locate his wealth among the pyramids of Egypt. In addition, he offered him two stones and urged him to pursue his dreams. He served as the boy's symbolic "divine helper." And whenever he needs assistance, his image reappears in the book. "...I'm going to become bitter and distrustful of people because one person betrayed me. I'm going to hate those who have found their treasure because I never found mine. And I'm going to hold on to what little I have, because I'm too insignificant to conquer the world [Coelho 37]. At the end of the novel he finally realizes "You have told me about your dreams, about the old king and your treasure. And you've told me about omens... so now, I fear nothing, because it was those omens that brought you to me. And I am a part of your dream, a part of your destiny, as you call it [Coelho 93].

4.5 Alchemy:

Santiago and the Englishman first only had a limited understanding of alchemy. The intricacies of alchemy serve as a metaphor for deeper life lessons in both situations. Generally speaking, alchemy is the process of purifying a metal to the point where it turns into gold. According to The Englishman, the search for the "Master Work," another name for alchemy, which requires chemists to carefully consider and sift metals over years, filters the alchemists themselves. Self-improvement and the enhancement of the "Master Work" are inextricably linked. Santiago deduces from this that an individual may pursue "a speculative chemistry of life," in which advancement stems from global exploration and distinct criteria of the same chemistry to everyday activities.

Coelho, "They were men who had dedicated their entire lives to the purification of metals in their laboratories; they believed that, if a metal were heated for many years, it would free itself of all its individual properties, and what was left would be the soul of the world. This Soul of the World allowed them to understand anything on the face of the earth because it was the language with which all things communicated. They called that discovery the Master Work -it was part liquid and part solid" (1998, p. 61)

4.6 The Philosopher Stone

Mythical objects are representative of the Pyramids. The Philosopher's Stone, a legendary substance sought by alchemists, represents the ultimate spiritual transformation and the discovery of one's true self. The emerald Tablet is a solitary emerald engraved with guidelines for finishing the Master Work: the making of the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life.

5. Findings and discussion

Santiago is first shown in the book as a symbolic figure. A shepherd with sheep grazing at a pasture but then circumstances force him to chase his destiny by selling his sheep to go to the Pyramids in Egypt. The numerous teachings he picks up along the way confirm ideas he learned from being a shepherd. According to Coelho, "Here I am, between my flock and my treasure, the boy thought. He had to choose between something he had become accustomed to and something he wanted to have" (Coelho, 1998, p. 23). In addition to caring for them, Santiago enjoyed having conversations with his sheep. He was prepared to leave his people behind for something unknown, though, when the king Melchizedek offered him the opportunity to discover a treasure that had been buried for him in Egypt. We can conclude that the main symbols that were used for the reader to interpret were

a) The Soul of the World: The Soul of the World stands for the spiritual element that unites the universe and the interconnection of all things

b) Nature: A connection to the spiritual realm, harmony, and balance are frequently represented by nature. For example the desert symbolizes obstacles, suffering, and a place where one's resolve and fortitude are put to the test. Al-Oasis or Al-Fayoum In the tribe battles in the desert, the Oasis, also known as Al-Fayoum, is regarded as neutral territory. Santiago challenges the senior leader at the Oasis in the book by describing a future in which enemy fighters assault Al-Fayoum. The sign of the Oasis has two possible meanings. Firstly, it represents an oasis that both sides in the tribal battle need to defend. Thus, each has a fundamental flaw (or weak point). Second, there are common residents in the Oasis, a substantial proportion of whom are women and kids represent life and flourishing.

c. Symbols in Everyday Life:

Coelho sometimes used everyday objects like keys, and mirror as symbols. The closed church is also symbolic as the tale starts and ends at the Spanish abandoned church. As he sleeps in the collapsed church at the beginning of the book, Santiago can be seen yearning for his riches; at the conclusion of the novel, he returns to the same location to find his fortune. The warrior archetype frequently represents bravery, strength, and the capacity to conquer obstacles.

d. Relevance of Symbols and The Language of the World:

The concept of a universal inner language represents a more profound comprehension and exchange with the world and its enigmas. As they travel through the world, characters might pick up the ability to understand the Language of the World.

5.1 Conclusion

In Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* has two fundamental traditions of modern semiotics, attributed to the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). The main idea of Saussure's theory was born out of a dichotomy or duality basis. According to him, a sign is made up of two main components: signified, which is the concept (the meaning/conception of the signifier), and signifier, which is the sound pattern (marker sound image). Thus the author uses Santiago's *s* as a symbol for simplicity, humility, and serenity. Thus we conclude this novel has a recurrent theme of pursuing one's dream by overcoming fear and self-doubt while facing external and internal difficulties. Semiotics generates triangularization of "representamen or sign, object and interpretant" which helps us decipher words and sentences. Representative serves as a sign and interpretative refers to the meaning of the sign. These object and subject symbols form part of triadic process where maturity and virtue define the attitudes and disposition of the characters in the form of a systematic code to convey human activity. In the novel the two-hundred-year Alchemist teaches Santiago to always follow his heart to find out where his treasure is. Coelho, p.136) At this stage, Santiago can control himself against the fear, he feels and he is able to control it without hiding his feelings because he learns to deal with life fears. Thus this symbolism arises self-awareness and communicate philosophy of life to the reader.

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