

Dream, Love and Treasure-Hunt in Paulo Coelho's the Alchemist

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Abstract

Every work of art has a major theme and other minor themes. **The Alchemist** deals with the theme of the quest for a treasure that looks like a mirage. Santiago, the protagonist, is on a journey that brings him back to the place where he started. Paulo Coelho, a 'master story teller' deftly weaves the themes of Dreams, Love, Fate, and Treasure-Hunt in **The Alchemist**. These are typical Paulo Coelho's themes.

Keyword: quest, treasure, mirage, journey

Introduction

The Alchemist is infused with a spirit of adventure. Sleeping under the stars one night with his flocks Santiago, the hero has a dream that a child transports him to the Egyptian Pyramids and tells him he will find a buried treasure there. Santiago is willing to take a chance and decides to pay a Gypsy in the next town to interpret his dream. She tells him that "dreams are the languages of God" (12), and if he goes to the Pyramids he'll find a great treasure there. The boy is irritated and decides he is not going to believe in dreams anymore. He did not need to waste his time on the Gypsy's lousy interpretation. Later that day he is in town reading and trying to forget he even had a dream when an old man begins to speak with him. Santiago tries to ignore him but the man just won't let up. Finally the man tells him that if the boy will give him one-tenth of his sheep, he will tell him how to find the hidden treasure; Santiago is amazed at this, since he never mentioned his dream to the man. The man tells Santiago that he has succeeded in discovering his personal legend, and he must decide if he is brave enough to follow through on it. The man tells him that discovering one's true purpose is a person's only real obligation in this world.

Santiago has to take an important decision. He must either stay with his flock or go in search of his treasure. It seems like a crazy thing to do, but in his heart Santiago wants to carry on this adventure. He decides to take the risk. He gives one-tenth of his sheep to the old man and sells the rest. The old man, tells him he must follow the omens to find his treasure. He gives Santiago two rocks, Urim and Thummim, which will help him make decisions when he is really stuck while on his path. The king wishes him luck, and then Santiago is on his way to the Egyptian Pyramids of Giza, he discovers the wonders of Africa with its rich culture and bustling trade. When Santiago goes to Africa he is surprised to find that only Arabic is spoken. The city is strange, and the boy is bit afraid on the new people. He is relieved when he meets a man in a bar who speaks his language. The man promises to help to cross the Sahara but cheats him and disappears with all of Santiago's money and he is left penniless. Santiago wants to cry he is so upset, but he quickly decides to look at the situation differently. He is left penniless, but he is on a quest for his 'personal destiny'.

The theme of controlled luck is prominent in this book, as the old king and the alchemist both tells Santiago about how if one really wants to fulfill his or her Personal Legend, the whole universe will conspire to help make it happen. Coelho refers to this as the idea of "beginner's luck", or the concept of favorability. Santiago is blessed with beginner's luck. When he decides to go to Africa, he manages to sell all of his sheep very easily, and is given 'a taste of success' that whets the appetite to fulfill one's personal Legend.

It is a dream that first leads Santiago to pursue his destiny. It is also a dream (although someone else's dream) that sends him back. Santiago dreams of a child showing him a treasure at the base of the Pyramids; when we first read of the dream, we are led to believe that Santiago has had it before. When he tells the gypsy of Tarifa and Melchizedek about this dream, they both implore him to follow it, because, they argue, dreams are the language in which the Universe speaks. At the end of the book, it is the dream of the robber- which was the exact inverse of Santiago's dream, showing the treasure at the abandoned church that sends Santiago back to Spain and to the treasure.

The theme of dreams is linked, then with the theme of fate, since dreams are the way in which people come to know their destiny. Dreams in the sense of "goals" or "aspirations" also constitute a major theme. Santiago's dream of the treasure and by his decision to pursue this goal he is able to realize his Personal Legend One of the fundamental themes of **The Alchemist** is that our paths are pre-ordained or makeup, in the words of the shopkeeper. The goal of life is to live in harmony with what is ordained for one, or one's Personal Legend; happiness depends upon this harmony. The main problem is that as humans and adults, we strive to make things more complex than they really are. One's fate, or Personal Legend, is apparent in any aspect of one's normal life forms is one of the most important themes of **the Alchemist**. As Melchizedek says, "When you want something, all the universe is conspiring to help you achieve it" (22). He means that since it is fate that puts a desire in Santiago's heart, fate will not stop him from achieving it. The problem is focusing one's energy on determining what it is that one really wants.

Fate is constantly intertwined with will, and a key theme of the book focuses on how much in life is under one's control, and how much is controlled by fate. The old king states that the world's greatest lie is that at some point during our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. While this point of view strongly supports that will has a stronger hold on one's destiny, later events, such as Santiago and the alchemist being caught by warring tribes, demonstrate fate's hold on one's life. However, in every situation where fate does take over, the characters are capable of excavating themselves from the situation.

Coelho plays with the dual (and of course linked) meanings of the word "dream" as both visions during slumber and far-reaching objectives. In this sense, the message of **The Alchemist** could be described as follows: everyone needs a dream. The vulnerable periods of Santiago's journey are when he has no clearly defined goal. This is true when he finishes working at the crystal shop, as well as when he contemplates staying at the oasis with Fatima. Both times he thinks about desisting, but winds up carrying on unwaged.

As a counterpoint we can think of the shopkeeper, who is afraid of realizing his dream of going to Mecca. He does not want to achieve his dream because he feels that it is the only thing that keeps him from looking forward to the future. Santiago tries to show him that if it is his destiny, he has no choice but to seek it out, or else he is not living. In this way, **The Alchemist** is not about what one should dream, but merely that one should dream.

Love is described as a part of the Soul of the World. Love occurs in life and Nature, as everything supports each other, they love each other. Santiago tells the desert that it shows love for the alchemist's falcon by offering it game, after which the falcon shows love to man as it offers the game to eat, and the man shows love for the desert as after one dies, his body is reintegrated into the desert sands. There is also love in people, demonstrated by Santiago's love of Fatima's beauty, and Santiago knows that it is part of his Personal Legend to love her.

When the story of **The Alchemist** begins, the reader finds Santiago looking forward to a rendezvous with a merchant's daughter he met the previous year. As soon as he is convinced to go in search of his treasure, however, Santiago forgets all about the girl. Then he meets Fatima at the Al-Fayoum oasis, and thinks about giving up his quest to be with her. The difference between the two cases is two-fold.

First, what Santiago felt for the merchant girl was not love. It was merely an attraction that had no spiritual element to it. For this reason it was very easy for Santiago to shrug her off and continue with his fate. In the case of Fatima, though, everything is different. The first time that Santiago and Fatima see one another, Santiago feels that the Soul of the World is speaking directly to him. Secondly, Fatima does not

encourage Santiago to abandon his Personal Legend. It is for this reason that Fatima's love does not prevent him from pursuing his fate. Since Fatima is part of Santiago's fate, she does not stand in the way of his Personal Legend. This is the fundamental difference between true love and all other love. One of the main themes of **The Alchemist**-namely, that true love never gets in the way of living one's life to the fullest. If one has to choose between a Personal Legend and love then that love is not true love after all.

Treasure-Hunt is one of the most basic themes in literature. Literature records the movement of human beings or the imagery created by human beings both in space and time. The essence of this movement is journey. Ancient myths both in the east and west often address this theme because journey is the best way for a person to know and explore the world. Human beings have wandered the earth since they were created. They got to know the world, enriched their feelings and extended the limits of their thinking by continuing to wander.

Journey is a very common theme in novels; there are countless books in which the characters are on one sort of trip or another. These types of novels are very popular for many reasons, but most of all because they are exciting. Many people daydream about going on adventures or trips to far off places, but impossible in their everyday lives. Novels with a travel theme make this fantasy possible for readers, even if it is only in their minds.

A travel is a book of sensational voyages and hair-raising adventures. T.S. Eliot's **Journey of the Magi**, Chaucer's **The Canterbury Tales**, Judith Wright's **Journey to the Interior** are few examples. Coelho's novels tend to feature a sort of quest for self discovery, written in a language that leads inexorably to a moral climax. His writing is poetic and every novel has a message for its readers. His novels deal with the protagonist's journey is search of a treasure and they realize the journey itself to be a treasure, i.e., self realization.

In **Confessions of a Pilgrim**, Coelho confesses. "In every era men have searched for the unknown for what is not evident, tangible and material they have searched thousands of ways, sometimes making mistakes in first and starts, but the best men and women have always been pilgrims in search of the unknown".

The Alchemist is a thrilling and stimulating fable, full of paranormal events and subjects, a journey of exploration, of self discovery. In this book, Paulo Coelho presents magical story of an Andalusian young boy Santiago, who leaves the seminary's secured and prestigious life. He is captivated by his innermost desire to see the lives of people around the world. He only found his vocation in tending sheep because of his passion for travel. He is learned young boy unlike other shepherds. Until sixteen he attends a seminary and learns Latin, Spanish and theology as his parents wanted him to be a priest as they thought it would a source of pride for their simple farmer family. It was said as that "He had studied Latin, Spanish, and Theology" (8). Santiago from his childhood his childhood, he wants to know the world. He feels that knowing the world is much more important to him than knowing God and learning about man's sins. One day on his visit to his family, he summons up the courage and tells his father that: "he didn't want to become a priest. That he wanted to travel"(8). His father tries to convince him. He tells him that when he was boy he too had the desire to travel, but buried it over a dozen times under the burden of struggle for food and shelter. People leave their place in search of new things; climb Mountains to see the castles; visit new lands but on the whole remain the same people. "They come in search of new things, but when they leave they leave they are basically the same people they were when they arrived" (8).

The novel begins with a dream in which Santiago is offered a hidden treasure. One night in the journey, he has the same dream in which the destiny once again offers him the same hidden treasure. The recurring mysterious dream changes his whole life. He finds that because of the recurring dream his soul is yearning for the unknown destination. Being restless by irrepensible dream Santiago dares to accept its call and seeks the help of the old Gypsy woman- a dream interpreter and consultant. She tells him that dreams are language of God and if the dream speaks the language of the soul then only a person can understand it, and to find the treasure he needs to listen to his inner voice and seek internal counsel rather than rely on external resources. She simply interprets the dream that the treasure is hidden near the Pyramids and insists him that he must go to the Pyramids to find the unknown treasure. "You must go to

the Pyramids in Egypt...There you will find a treasure that will make you a rich man”(14). Santiago travels across the sea and desert. The dream leads him to seek divination from a king and an alchemist in order to find the treasure. The old king teaches him to read and understand the omens. He directs Santiago to follow his dream and also stresses the importance of listening to one's own heart. In searching hidden treasure near Egypt pyramids, he follows his intuition, connects his heart to divination and finally reaches the place in the dream, where he discovers instead of treasure his true self.

As Santiago is travelling around the city he happens to come across a crystal merchant who has a shop at the top of a large hill. He offers Santiago a job when he sells two glasses. The boy tells the merchant about going to find his treasure in the desert. He says he can only work for today because he has to cross the desert the next day. The merchant laughs, and tells him it would take years for the boy to save up enough to cross the desert because it's thousands of kilometers away. He tells that he has to use the money to buy some sheep. Then the boy has been working in the crystal shop for a month, and he is not very happy. He tries very hard not to think of the treasure, or the Pyramids, at all. He is only working to save enough money to get back home and buy some sheep. One day, the merchant reveals the boys that he had a dream since childhood, to travel to the holy city of Mecca. It is the thought of going to Mecca that keep him alive, and he wants to keep it a dream. It has been eleven months, and Santiago decides it is time to go. He has enough money to buy 120 sheep. And as he leaves he asks the merchant to give him his blessing. The man looks at him and tells him that he is not going to go to Mecca any more than the boy is going to go home and buy some sheep. As the boy walks through the town he thinks for a long time about his future and what his true oath is. He decides to risk his journey again and go looking for his treasure. He reasons that if he fails again, he can always make more money to go back home. When he finally reaches this decision he was tremendously happy, and goes off in search of a caravan to take him across the desert.

An Englishman sits in dirty caravan, flipping through a book on chemicals and thinking about his life. When Santiago enters the caravan, the Englishman seems unfriendly so they do not strike up a conversation at first. When the boy takes out Urim and Thummim, however, the Englishman explodes with excitement and pulls out two stones identical to the boy's. They quickly strike up a friendship and begin to talk about their personal destinies. There are more than two hundred people in the caravan crossing the desert. As they make their way through the vast emptiness day by day, the boy begins to understand, that realizing his personal destiny is his only real reason for being, and it is the same with the Englishman and everyone else in the world. The rumor of tribal wars elsewhere in the desert causes the caravan to move faster and quieter. The caravan travels day and night, and the silence of the desert grows deeper as time passes. He is very disappointed, when the caravan leader informs them all that they must stay there until the tribal wars are over. The boy is frustrated by the delay but resolves to have patience and not be hasty. He knows if he pushes forward impulsively he will miss the omens leading to his treasure.

As he wanders in the desert later that day he sees two hawks in the sky. Something about their movement intrigues him, and as he watches one of the hawks attacks the other. As soon as this happens Santiago sees a vision of an army riding into the oasis. He tries to forget about the vision after it's gone but his heart let him. He is troubled, and goes to see the tribal chiefs.

Santiago has to wait hours to see the chiefs. After much discussion, they tell them that they will heed his warning of an attack, but if it doesn't happen then the boy will be killed at sunset the next day. As he is walking back to his tent he is nearly attacked by a man in black on a gigantic white horse, and he asks Santiago how he read the flight of the hawks. Santiago tells him that the same hand that wrote the armies also wrote the birds and that he was simply seeing what Allah wanted him to know. Santiago is calm, even though he knows that the man might kill him. He bows his head, waiting for the blow to fall. He realizes that if he has to die tonight, he can die happy knowing he risked everything to follow his dream, and that he got to love the desert and Fatima who will be waiting for him proudly. Suddenly the man withdraws his sword, and tells him that he had to test the boy's courage. The man says that if the boy is still alive after sunset, to come and see him. Later, the boy realizes that he just met the alchemist.

The next morning every man at the oasis is armed for battle. Before noon an army of five hundred had tried to attack the oasis and all but one were killed by the men. The chief of the oasis is very happy that so many lives were saved, and he asks the boy to become the counselor of the oasis. That night Santiago meets the alchemist. As they talk in his tent, the alchemist says that he is there to help the boy to find his Personal Destiny. The alchemist tells him that he must continue his search for the Pyramids, and instructs him to sell his camel and buy a horse. The next night the alchemist presents a challenge to the boy. He tells him to find life in the emptiness can find treasure. The boy does not know what to do. He doesn't know how to find life, and the alchemist finally gives him a hint, telling him that life attracts life. The boy understands and lets the reins loose, allowing his horse to run freely through the desert. His horse leads him directly to a cobra.

The alchemist tells Santiago that this was the omen he needed and that he will lead him across the desert. Santiago's heart is heavy because he does not want to leave Fatima, but finally the boy decides to go with the alchemist in search of his treasure, and his heart is at peace to finally be on the way again.

Santiago and the Alchemist ride deep into the desert for a week, speaking very little. Santiago finally tells the alchemist that he has told him nothing along the way, and the alchemist tells him that the only way to learn is through action. He tells Santiago that in order to understand the world he must listen to his heart, always. The heart came from the Soul of the World, and speaks the truth. They continue on for two days, being cautious because of the tribal wars. As they ride the boy tries to listen to his heart and learn its ways. He realizes that his heart is afraid of failure and wants to go back to the woman he loves. They ride for many more days and Santiago begins to learn the ways of his heart, its dodges and tricks and moods. He finally realizes one day that he is completely happy, and that the longing and fear has disappeared. He learns from the alchemist that every second of his search for his Personal Destiny is a second spent in the company of God and eternity. The proverb "the darkest hour of night comes just before dawn", (127) rings true for the boy, and he resolves not to give up when he is tested.

That evening Santiago's heart warns him that they are in danger and suddenly over one hundred horsemen surround them. They are taken to a nearby military camp, where the alchemist informs the tribe leader that he is merely a guide for his friend, who is an alchemist. The alchemist says that the boy could destroy the camp by simply turning himself into the wind. The chief laughs, and grants them three days to perform this feat. If they cannot do it, their lives are forfeit. Santiago is terrified. He has no idea how to turn himself into the wind, and panics. The alchemist gently tells him not to be afraid, that his heart has the answer he needs to do this. Santiago seeks the help of the natural forces, and they help him. He speaks to the desert, "I have to turn myself into the wind. "The desert didn't answer him for a few moments then it told him. I'll give you my sands to help the wind to blow... you have to ask for help from the wind" (139). He turns to the wind. It begins to blow the winds howling kicking up sand: "The wind approached the boy and touched his face. It knew of the boy's talk the desert, because the wind knows everything... the wind blew with all its strength and the sky was filled with sand. The sun was turned into a golden disk" (139-141). The boy turns to the sun for help and finally he changes into wind with the help of the physical forces. The boy is able to perform miracles because he is able to understand the language of the desert, the wind, and the sun. As the old man says, "When you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping to achieve it" (21).

The next day they stop at a monastery. The alchemist tells Santiago that he is only three hours away from the Pyramids and that he will be going the rest of the way alone. Before they part, however, the alchemist shows the boy that lead can indeed be turned into gold. Hours later Santiago climbs a dune and beholds the Egyptian Pyramids. He weeps with happiness because he has finally achieved his 'Personal Destiny' and has seen it through to the end. As he looks down to where his tears hit the sand he sees a Scarab beetle, which in Egypt is a sign of God. He begins to dig deep into the sand, and is convinced this where his treasure lies. He digs all day, but suddenly is surrounded by a group of men who steal his money and then beat him severely. They force him to keep digging, and then when there is no gold to be found in the ground they left him. Before they move, go the leader tells Santiago that he is not going to die, even though he feels like he might. He tells him that he should not be so stupid to follow his dreams, however. The thief says those two years ago right at this very spot he dream of his own, that he

should travel to a ruined church in Spain where shepherds slept and dig deep at the roots of a big sycamore tree to find a treasure. The thief says that he did not do it because he was not stupid enough to cross an entire desert over a recurrent dream. After that, Santiago stands up and begins to laugh, because now he knows where his treasure is.

The Alchemist is just that, a statement of simplicity and the most basic aspects of human existence that can make each of us equally happy if only we take the time to stop and look at them for what they are. Santiago joins a caravan to make the dangerous crossing across the desert and as he rides along, he begins to listen to his heart and to the desert. He begins to understand what the soul of the world is, and how he fits in. Santiago meets many spiritual messengers along the way, who appear in the most unassuming of forms like the camel driver or the well read Englishmen. Interestingly it is through his encounter with the Englishmen that he first learns about the existence of alchemists and finally when he meets one, many of his confusions are cleared up and he is encouraged to say true to his dreams.

Conclusion

Santiago is curious of the world and is brave enough to try to achieve dreams. He overcomes every obstacle and conflict to achieve his dream. Santiago meets the alchemist in the desert; a mysterious man who reminds Santiago of the old king helps Santiago continue his journey across the desert and teaches him more important life lessons along the way. After many adventures, dangers, and important life lessons Santiago finally reaches the Pyramids. His joy at finally being at journey's end overwhelms him, and he is grateful that he got the chance to follow his dream. It ends up being right back where his journey began, under the very tree where he had the prophetic dream year before.

The young boy Santiago, whose quest takes him across continents to find the treasure, finally realizes the treasure is in his homeland, where he began his journey. Also he discovers the quest for journey is the treasure.

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