



Journey Motif in Paulo Coelho's 'The Alchemist': A Study of the Role and Relevance of Archetypal Figures

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Abstract:

The Alchemist is a famous novel by Brazilian author Paulo Coelho that was first published in 1988. The work traces a young shepherd's journey named Santiago to the pyramids of Egypt in search of treasure. A recurring dream is the call for him to set on the perilous as well as adventurous journey. In this journey the boy faces many

hindrances and obstacles. The main theme of the novel is about finding one's destiny. Paulo Coelho explains that "when you really want something to happen, the whole universe will conspire so that your wish comes of true." This is core philosophy and motif of the novel. A hero follows his call from the unknown world which provides perils and pitfalls to test hero's strength and determination. The boy reaches an oasis when he meets and falls in love with an Arabian girl, Fatima who claims true love for him and later proves a temptress in his journey. The boy sells all his herds so that he could meet the expenditure of his journey but he is robbed. The boy takes such ordeals off hands until he doesn't meet an old wise man, the Guru figure an alchemist who guides him in the rest of his journey. The alchemist, teaches him to realize his true self, his persona. They together risk the rest of the journey through the territory of warring tribes. At last Santiago is informed by a stranger that the treasure he has been seeking is in the ruined church where he had his original dream. Santiago has achieved the goal of his journey by finding the treasure of realization within and he is no more striving for any mundane accumulations. The hero turns triumph on his journey towards self even after facing the hardships of it.

Keywords: Call to adventure, mentor, perils, pitfalls, atonement, realization, individuation, transformation, a triumph hero.

1. Call for Adventure

A recurring dream troubles Santiago, a young and adventurous Andalusian shepherd. He has the dream every time he sleeps under a sycamore tree that grows out of the ruins of a church.

"He had had the same dream that night as a week ago, and once again he had awakened before it ended. He arose and, taking up his crook, began to awaken the sheep that still slept. He had noticed that, as soon as he awoke, most of his animals also began to stir. It was as if some mysterious energy bound his life."

During the dream, a child tells him to seek treasure at the foot of the Egyptian pyramids. Santiago consults a gypsy woman to interpret the dream, and to his surprise she tells him to go to Egypt. A strange, magical old man named Melchizedek, who claims to be the King of Salem, echoes the gypsy's advice and tells Santiago that it is his Personal Legend to journey to the pyramids. Melchizedek convinces Santiago to sell his flock and set off to Tangier. When Santiago arrives in Tangier, a thief robs him, forcing him to find work with a local crystal merchant. The conservative and kindly merchant teaches Santiago several lessons, and Santiago encourages the merchant to take risks with his business. The risks pay off, and Santiago becomes a rich man in just a year.

"Everything is clear and everything is possible. They are not afraid to dream, and to yearn for everything they would like to see happen to them in their lives. But, as time passes, a mysterious force begins to convince them that it will be impossible for them to realize their destiny."

But Santiago decides to cash in his earnings and continue pursuing his Personal Legend: to find treasure at the pyramids.

2. Whimsical Pursuit: A Trap of Desert

He joins a caravan crossing the Sahara desert toward Egypt and meets an Englishman who is studying to become an alchemist. He deals with a lot of diabolic situations those he explains whimsical pursuits and distractions-

"The levanter was still getting stronger, and he felt its force on his face. That wind had brought the Moors, yes, but it had also brought the smell of the desert and of veiled women. It had brought with it the sweat and the dreams of men who had once left to search for the unknown, and for gold and adventure — and for the Pyramids. The boy felt jealous of the freedom of the wind, and saw that he could have the same freedom"

For one, he learns that the secret of alchemy is written on a stone called the Emerald Tablet. The ultimate creation of alchemy is the

Master Work, which consists of a solid called the Philosophers Stone that can turn lead to gold, and a liquid called the Elixir of Life that can cure all ills. Santiago learns the Englishman is traveling with the caravan to the Saharan oasis of Al-Fayoum, where a powerful, 200-year-old alchemist resides.

"You dream about your sheep and the Pyramids, but you're different from me, because you want to realize your dreams. I just want to dream about Mecca. I've already imagined a thousand times crossing the desert, arriving at the Plaza of the Sacred Stone, the seven times I walk around it before allowing myself to touch it. I've already imagined the people who would be at my side, and those in front of me, and the conversations and prayers we would share. But I'm afraid that it would all be a disappointment, so I prefer just to dream about it."

The Englishman plans to ask the alchemist the secret of his trade. As it turns out, the caravan must make an extended stop in Al-Fayoum in order to avoid increasingly violent tribal wars taking place in the desert. There, Santiago falls in love with Fatima, who lives at the oasis. During a walk in the desert, Santiago witnesses an omen that portends an attack on the historically neutral oasis. He warns the tribal chieftains of the attack, and as a result, Al-Fayoum successfully defends itself against the assault. The alchemist gets word of Santiago's vision and invites Santiago on a trip into the desert, during which he teaches Santiago about the importance of listening to his heart and pursuing his Personal Legend. Santiago understands the trap around him -

"The boy understood intuitively what he meant, even without ever having set foot in the desert before. Whenever he saw the sea, or a fire, he fell silent, impressed by their elemental force. I've learned things from the sheep, and I've learned things from crystal, he thought. I can learn something from the desert, too. It seems old and wise."

3. Perils & Pitfalls

"When someone was in such pursuit, the entire universe made an effort to help him succeed."

He convinces Santiago to leave Fatima and the caravan for the time to finish his journey to the pyramids, and he offers to accompany Santiago on the next leg of his trip. While the alchemist and Santiago continue through the desert, the alchemist shares much of his wisdom about the Soul of the World. They are mere days away from the pyramids when a tribe of Arab soldiers captures them. In exchange for his life and the life of Santiago, the alchemist hands over to the tribe all of Santiago's money and tells the soldiers that Santiago is a powerful alchemist who will turn into wind within three days. Santiago feels alarmed because he has no idea how to turn into the wind, and over the next three days he contemplates the desert. On the third day, he communicates with the wind and the sun and coaxes them to help him create a tremendous sandstorm.

"The wise men understood that this natural world is only an image and a copy of paradise. The existence of this world is simply a guarantee that there exists a world that is perfect. God created the world so that, through its visible objects, men could understand his spiritual teachings and the marvels of his wisdom."

He prays to the Hand That Wrote All, and at the height of the storm he disappears. He reappears on the other side of the camp, and the tribesmen, awed by the power of the storm and by Santiago's ability, let him and the alchemist go free. The alchemist continues to travel with Santiago as far as a Coptic monastery several hours from the pyramids. There, he demonstrates to Santiago his ability to turn lead into gold using the Philosopher's Stone. He gives Santiago gold and sends him off. Santiago begins digging for the treasure at the foot of the pyramids, but two men accost him and beat him. When Santiago speaks to them about his dream vision, they decide he must have no money and let him live. Before leaving, one of the men tries to illustrate the worthlessness of dreams by telling Santiago about his own dream. It concerns a treasure buried in an abandoned church in Spain where a sycamore tree grows. The church is the same one in which Santiago had his original dream, and he finally understands where his treasure is.

4. A Triumph Hero

He returns to Spain to find a chest of jewels and gold buried under the tree, and plans to return with it to Al-Fayoum, where he will reunite with Fatima, who awaits him. Santiago, who has a dream and the commitment to pursue. It also reveals how the boy, after listening to 'the sign, ventures on a journey of exploration and self discovery, symbolically searching for a hidden treasure. In the novel, Coelho lays great stress on the significance of good omen during a journey. The moral of the story speaks of the 'soul of the world' and that the Earth wants you to be happy. This story tells how each one of us has a single mission, goal or personal legend, though most of us do not realize it. After listening to 'the sign', Santiago ventures in his personal, Ulysses- like journey of exploration and self discovery, symbolically searching for a hidden treasure located near the Pyramids in Egypt. The mystery of the whole quest is that it amazingly ends in his own country, in the region of Andalusia in Spain. The surprise ending, in which the boy discovers that his treasure lies not at the pyramids, as his dream had foretold, but back at the abandoned church in Spain where his journey began, has powerful implications about the significance of looking into the roots and foundation of our lives, journeying outward to find the way back home, and trusting our dreams even when it seems they have slipped beyond our reach.

"There is a higher way of meeting him than that which leads us through subjection to the Gods. By perfect Love, by perfect Joy, by perfect Satisfaction, by perfected mind one can hear what the Voice truly says if not the Voice itself,—catch the kernel of the message with a sort of ecstatic perfection, even if afterwards the Gods dilate on it & by attempting to amplify & complete, load it with false corollaries or prevent some greater fullness of truth from arriving to us."(Essays Divine and Human, Sri Aurobindo)

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