

## Paulo Coelho's the Alchemist : A Dream Allegory

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### Abstract

Writers use allegory as literary device to convey hidden meanings through symbolic figures, actions, imagery or events. They together create the moral, spiritual or political meaning which the author wants to convey. It may be religious allegory, political allegory and dream allegory. Dream Allegory is one of the most effective kinds of genre. In dream allegory the narrator or the protagonist falls asleep and dreams. His dream becomes the main body of the story. This genre typically follows a structure whereby a narrator recounts his experience of falling asleep, dreaming and waking. The novel *The Alchemist* opens with the dream of Santiago. He is sleeping near the sycamore tree in the sacristy of an abandoned church. In his dream a child tells him that he will find a hidden treasure if he travels to the Egyptian pyramids. A gypsy woman tells Santiago that this dream is prophetic and that he must follow its instructions. In the beginning Santiago is uncertain about his dream. Melchizedek, the King of Salem also echoes the gypsy's advice and tells Santiago that it is his Personal Legend to make a journey to the pyramids. 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. The spiritual unity represented by the Soul of the World binds together all of nature, from human beings to desert sand. Santiago's sheep symbolize the sort of existence lived by those who are completely blind to their Personal Legends. Paulo Coelho through his dream allegory *The Alchemist* encourages his readers to follow their dreams, learn to listen to their inner voices and fulfill their Personal Legends. On the whole *The Alchemist* is a story with the power to inspire nations and change people's lives forever.

**KEYWORDS:** Spirituality, Dream, Personal Legend, Moral Values, Allegory

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Writers use allegory as literary device to convey hidden meanings through symbolic figures, actions, imagery or events. They together create the moral, spiritual or political meaning which the author wants to convey. It may be religious allegory, political allegory and dream allegory. It allows writers to put forward their moral and political point of views. It has been used widely because it can readily illustrate complex ideas and concepts in ways that are comprehensible to its readers. A careful study of an allegorical piece of writing can give us an insight into its writers' mind as how he views the world and how he wishes the world to be.

Dream Allegory is one of the most effective kinds of genre. In dream allegory the narrator or the protagonist falls asleep and dreams. His dream becomes the main body of the story. This genre typically follows a structure whereby a narrator recounts his experience of falling asleep, dreaming and waking. The story is often an allegory. The dream is often felt to be of divine origin. It generally contains moral. Most of the time the dreamer is accompanied by a guide. It is popular even from the thirteenth century. Some of the popular Dream Allegory are *Roman de la Rose*, *Book of the Duchesse*, *Piers the*

Plowman, The Thissil and the Rois, The Golden Targe, Pearl, The Pilgrim's Progress, The Great Divorce, etc.

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* is the best example for dream allegory of our time. Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian lyricist and novelist. He is considered as one of the most influential contemporary writers. He is the recipient of numerous international awards. Some of his works are *The Alchemist*, *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Brida*, *The Devil and Miss Prym*, *The Fifth Mountain*, *Like the Flowing River*, etc.,

*The Alchemist* was originally written in Portuguese. It was published in 1988. After that it was translated into 80 languages. This gave Coelho the position as the world's most translated living author. It is one of the best-selling books in history. The story of Santiago, the shepherd boy's journey to realize his "Personal Legend" has inspired people all over the world to live their dreams. As a dream allegory, *The Alchemist* follows a young Andalusian shepherd named Santiago in his journey to Egypt, after having a recurring dream of finding treasure there. His dream sends him on a transcontinental quest to discover an ancient treasure and eventually he learns to discover the true purpose of his life. Generally people have dreams that they never try to fulfill. They talk about them, even plan them, but when an obstacle gets in their way, they let their dreams go. In *The Alchemist*, Coelho's hero Santiago has a dream about treasure. To fulfill his dream, he has to make some drastic changes and take chances. He also has to learn to listen to his inner voice. His journey to find the treasure introduces him to new skills and new people. He even finds his love on the way.

The novel *The Alchemist* opens with the dream of Santiago. He is sleeping near the sycamore tree in the sacristy of an abandoned church. In his dream a child tells him that he will find a hidden treasure if he travels to the Egyptian pyramids. A gypsy woman tells Santiago that this dream is prophetic and that he must follow its instructions. In the beginning Santiago is uncertain about his dream. Melchizedek, the King of Salem also echoes the gypsy's advice and tells Santiago that it is his Personal Legend to make a journey to the pyramids. He 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 he encourages the merchant to take risks with his business. The risks pay off, and he becomes a rich man in just a year.

Santiago decides to cash in his earnings and continue pursuing his Personal Legend: to find treasure at the pyramids. He joins a caravan crossing the Sahara desert toward Egypt and meets an Englishman who is studying to become an alchemist. He learns a lot from the Englishman during the journey. 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 comes to know that the Englishman is travelling with the caravan to the Saharan oasis of Al-Fayoum, where a powerful, 200 years old alchemist resides. 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 the violent tribal wars taking place in the desert. 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 result, Al – Fayoum successfully defends itself against the assault. The alchemist gets words 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. 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 capture 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 them 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. 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 tribesman, awed by the power of the storm and by Santiago’s ability. They let Santiago 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. When Santiago begins to dig for the treasure at the foot of the pyramids, two men accost him and beat him. He 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. 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. He says, “I’m coming, Fatima.” (161)

Dreams, symbols, signs and adventure follow the reader like echoes of ancient wise voices in *The Alchemist*. In the novel, dreams represent not only an outlet into one’s inner desires, but also a form of communications with the Soul of the World. Santiago’s dream of a treasure in Egypt reveals to him his Personal Legend and sets the entire plot of the novel into motion. In *The Alchemist* the main character Santiago goes in search of his Personal Legend. A Personal Legend, as it referred in *The Alchemist* is one’s destiny. It identifies his purpose in life and helps him to pursue it. It requires one to be open to interpret omens and act on them in a way to pursuit their dreams. Along the way, he encounters many people who directly or indirectly help him to accomplish his goal. Later in the novel, the man who beats Santiago does not believe his own dream, but when he

describes his dream to him, Santiago recognizes it as an omen telling him where to find his treasure.

The spiritual unity represented by the Soul of the World binds together all of nature, from human beings to desert sand. This idea underlies the parallel between the alchemist purifying metal into gold and Santiago purifying himself into someone capable of achieving his Personal Legend. According to Coelho, the Soul of the World has created an ultimate desire or Personal Legend, for everything. To accomplish its Personal Legend, each thing must learn to tap into the Soul of the world, which purifies it. That continual purification ultimately leads to perfection.

Santiago's sheep symbolize the sort of existence lived by those who are completely blind to their Personal Legends. Santiago loves his sheep, but he also expresses disrespect for them because of their animal desires for mere food and water. He thinks that his sheep do not appreciate all the wonderful lands that Santiago discovers during his travels. These sheep symbolize the characters – the baker and the crystal merchant who do not pursue their Personal Legends. Like the sheep, these characters content themselves with their material desires and social acceptance.

Alchemy functions as the dominant symbol in the novel. It represents Santiago's journey to achieve his Personal Legend. The Alchemist describes the process of turning base metal to gold as equivalent to the base metal realizing its Personal Legend. The metal must rid itself of all impurities to achieve a higher evolutionary state. Similarly, Santiago must rid himself of impurities such as his desire for his parent's acceptance, his desire to live as a rich shepherd, and even his desire to live with Fatima, in order to realize his Personal Legend and achieve a higher state. All the secrets of alchemy exist on the small Emerald Tablet, and these secrets cannot be expressed in words. Likewise, no written instructions can guide a person to his Personal Legend. He must follow his own instincts and the omens provided by the Soul of the World. By listening to the Soul of the World, Santiago ultimately enters into communion with all of nature, including the wind and the sun, and reaches a higher state of being.

The desert with its harsh conditions and tribal wars, symbolizes the serious difficulties that await anyone in pursuit of their Personal Legend. It also serves as an important teacher to Santiago during his journey to the pyramids. As the alchemist says, tests are an inherent part of all Personal Legends. They are necessary to create spiritual growth. More than the desert heat and the desert's silence, emptiness and monotony test Santiago. He learns that even that barren land contains life and the Soul of the World. Santiago finds his soul-mate and discovers that love is the core of existence and creation. When Santiago hesitates to leave Fatima, the Alchemist says, "You must understand love never keeps a man from pursuing his destiny." (115). As Coelho explains, when we love, we always try to improve ourselves, and that's when everything is possible. The subject of love inspires a beautiful lyricism when Fatima says, "I love you because the entire universe conspired to help me find you." (117).

The main theme of *The Alchemist* is about finding one's destiny. An old king Melchizedek tells Santiago, "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." (38) This is the core philosophy and a motif that plays

throughout the novel. With this symbolic masterpiece Coelho states that we should not avoid our destinies and urges people to follow their dreams to find our Personal Legends. The story is an allegory for those wishing to live an examined life. It is a story which requires the readers to make certain connections between Santiago's experiences and their own lives.

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho draws much its strength from the fact that its themes are universal. The novel appeals to everybody, because we can all identify with Santiago. Everyone has their dreams and own Personal Legend in life. But many of us never pursue it. Paulo Coelho through his dream allegory The Alchemist encourages his readers to follow their dreams, learn to listen to their inner voices and fulfill their Personal Legends. On the whole The Alchemist is a story with the power to inspire nations and change people's lives forever.

### **Works Cited**

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