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Intricate Coalescence of Nature and Philosophy in Coelho's world: Ruminations from *The Alchemist*

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Abstract

In *The Alchemist*, Paulo Coelho projects Santiago communicating with Nature which he refers to as the common language of the world. A study of *The Alchemist* will reveal how Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who yearns to travel in search of a bounty treasure explores the wisdom of life. His quest for the treasure buried near the Pyramids propels him to enter an unchartered territory from his homeland in Spain to the Egyptian desert. This paper aims to explore the ecological reflections mired with concepts of slants in philosophy. Ecology on one hand is considered as a branch of science but, despite providing erudition on the subject it is understood that it provides sagacity to understand the universe better. This paper rightly discusses the amalgamation of nature and literature. It is indeed a manifestation of the recurrently believed ideologies that connect human psyche and platitudes of the cosmos. The logos that interrelates the existing connection between the non human and the human species require an exceptional mastery. This paper will analyze and depict the

emotions connected with nature from the spectacle of the Protagonist Santiago in *The Alchemist*.

Keywords: Ecology, Philosophy, Nature, Literature, Ideologies, Logos

Eco-criticism is the field which inspects the issues that connect literature and nature. Eco-criticism is the ground for literary experts to explore and probe the catastrophe between the convergence of nature and Literature. Eco-Criticism initially emerged as a major area called Literary Ecology and later 'ism' was an addition according to Meeker 1972 in General Overviews.

The first sign of Eco-Criticism nullified the historical approach to nature but, it celebrated the beauty in nature and the theme surfaced the healing and medicinal properties of the nature. The second sign grew providing new insights in analyzing Literature with nature. It indeed reconstructed new knowledge by theorizing existing notions of Ecology.

It focused more on deterioration of ecological wealth, it acted as an envoy to save animal and plant species and it highlighted the intensity issues connected to Ecology. The third sign of Eco-Criticism champions the all-encompassing problems like deforestation and Global heating. It targets on integrating all the three signs for the world's perception.

This paper encapsulates the treatment of nature by applying literary theories. Various critics and researchers in the literary study found the solution to the ecological crisis by studying the pulse of the universe and thereby create awareness to the fellow humans and such vibrant reflections are surfaced in the writings of many writers. One such expression is identified in the works of the Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho.

In *the Atharva Veda*, M.Vannucci quotes:

Nature is to be understood as a friend, revered as a mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as a beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it

because of it everything is sanctified, including man and the terrifying aspects of nature itself, such as glaciers, landslides, earthquakes, storms...(75)

Echoing the above lines, possessing an inexorable thirst in pursuing the emotions of nature and in discovering the dream of spiritual and intellectual awakening, Andalusian Shepherd Santiago, the protagonist of the novel, *The Alchemist* travels to exotic markets of Tangiers and finally reaches Egypt. The recurring dream disturbs and makes him reach his destiny.

This disturbing dream blossomed under the Giant Sycamore tree and this is where he encounters the first omen to get the personal legend. In the beginning, Santiago was unable to comprehend the meaning of life and dream and he was in the state of Limbo to choose a path to pursue his dream. He listened to his inner voice and became a Shepherd to travel the world despite being a learned person. He still felt that this is not his real destination and when this realization crept in, he sets his Journey in search of his treasure.

The next omen that Santiago encounters is butterfly. The butterfly omen was a sign of positivity to understand the hues of nature and to study the language of the soul. The intelligent interpretation by the old man made Santiago happy.

Learn to recognize omens, and follow them, the old king said. The omen. The boy smiled to himself. (39)

As Santiago's spirits are lifted in excitement, that he received the consent from the nature and blessings from the old man he questions himself.

Am I going to find my treasure ? (Pg.39)

It was the positive thought that reverberated in the heart of the shepherd.

Nature, according to Coelho teaches many things to man. Man has a connection with nature in various aspects, which manifests directly and indirectly in the physical, emotional and psychological well being. Santiago realizes this when he has an experience with cobra

while travelling with the Alchemist. The Alchemist calmly placed the cobra into a circle whereas Santiago jumped in fear. This omen happened to be the principle of a positive force among troubles. It had to teach Santiago that life will become better after undergoing troubles. The travel taught him to overcome fear which is a mystic force and better describes the inevitability of fate.

The soul of a man is bridged with the cosmos, when one infuses his spirit with the universe, he will experience the magic of nature. Refining ourselves from pessimism and trepidation will naturally bring out the inner-self and that demonstrates the pursuit of existence. It is expressed in the lines,

“That’s the principle that governs all things ,”he said. “ In alchemy, it’s called the soul of the world. He also said that this was not just a human gift, that everything on the face of the earth had a soul, whether mineral, vegetable , or animal-or even just a simple thought. Everything on earth is being continuously transformed, because the earth is alive ..it has a soul..(75)

The connection is established by seeking self realization and discovery of inner self, as nature helps in finding one’s true self. The alchemist, whom he gets acquainted, teaches him to listen to the music of the world and asks him to pursue his dream by travelling to Egypt.

Nature foretelling future to man is one of the major themes in Coelho’s philosophy. The magical element which appears natural forms the ideal writing style of Coelho. Though the narration looks simple, the powerful passion, enlightening knowledge and the pinnacle of optimism is explicit through the twist in the plot and the depth in analyzing the character of Santiago.

And when you want something, all the universe always conspires in you to achieve it, Courage is the most essential to understanding the Language of the World (21)

These lines resonates the central idea of the novel: The power in optimism can make a human to take control over nature. Throughout his journey, Santiago keeps exploring the world, in order to find the treasures in the Egyptian pyramid. The treasure he got was not only materialistic but it was spiritual in terms of allusions from Bible and physical in terms of taking control over the primordial mother (Nature). Coelho's commitment with words well explains his experience with pain and how nature appears to be a therapy holding its healing power over humans.

Santiago dreams with the help of the universe and attains his ambition only by the universe. He never gives up his dreams; he pursues it righteously despite all the barriers which include failures of love and money. He understood the symbols of the universe and created a stable connectivity to understand his existence. As it is rightly said "If we respect nature, nature respects and takes care of you." Santiago is a mere representation of all the human beings portrayed by Coelho.

As we know great wonders are there in nature it's time to return and be faithful to Mother Nature. It has been the culture to perceive the sacred communion between God and human. This can happen only through omens. Coelho promptly identifies this usual connect to place this emotion.

In order to find the treasure, you will have to follow the omens. God has prepared a path for everyone to follow. You just have to read the omens that he left for you."(27-28)

Nature keeps exhibiting its supreme powers in teaching its language. Coelho teaches this language of the world and soul through the character that Santiago meets. His knowledge about the world keeps altering as he meets new people in his life. This can be understood when Santiago sees a pair of hawks which is a clear symbol of the war that takes place in the oasis.

It conveyed the pain of death to Santiago and highlights the oft repeated phrase “Maktub” which means “it is written”. It conveys that life is unreliable and each person can control his or her own destiny and God will reveal it in certain hard times.

Why did you read the flight of the birds?..

I read only what the birds wanted to tell me. They wanted to save the oasis. Tomorrow all of you will die, because there are more men at the oasis than you have (105)

The language of the universe indicates that the unification of things and everything it holds in the world is interconnected. After all the trials and risks, he attains self discovery and understands the ways to create the unending bond with nature as he found the treasure he had been hunting for years.

From here on, you will be alone, the alchemist said . You are only three hours from the pyramids . Thank you , said the boy. You taught me the language of the world (146)

Santiago communicates with everything that is created in the Universe and concludes that his communion was divine, as he believes that nature is the manifestation of God. He also advocates that if we pay attention to small details of nature, we will understand the world better through his actions. The physical transformation learnt from the ideas of alchemy is considered as a spiritual destiny and it happened to be the highest step of evolution. The Alchemist hinted Santiago’s potential of transforming himself as a wind and the Alchemist didn’t offer him any help as he faced the strange test all alone. With all his might he believed in the magic of nature and turned like a *Simum*, a worse wind than a cyclone in the sea.

Santiago in fact communicates with the wind and sand and creates a tremendous sandstorm. His connection had an incorporeal flavor. The tribesmen are flattered by his ability of believing in nature and the connect he exhibited.

The boy reached through to the soul of the world, and saw that it was a part of the soul of God. And he saw the soul of God was his own soul. And that he, a boy, could perform miracles. The Simum blew that day as it had never blown before. For generations thereafter, the Arabs recounted the leg-end of a boy who had turned himself into the wind (Pg.145)

The omens, experiences in desert, life with merchant and teachings of the Alchemist acted as a unifying force to follow his dream. The Alchemist teaches human beings the great lesson to preserve the connection between us and nature and those who inspect the wonder of the nature sustains solidity when life presents us difficulties. The therapy for it is undoubtedly given by nature. Hence, the novel conveys us the message that Nature has the power to teach us more than books.

Echoing the lines of Wordsworth:

UP! UP! My friend, and quit your books

Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher.

...enough of Science and of Art

...Come forth, and bring with you a heart that watches and receives.

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