

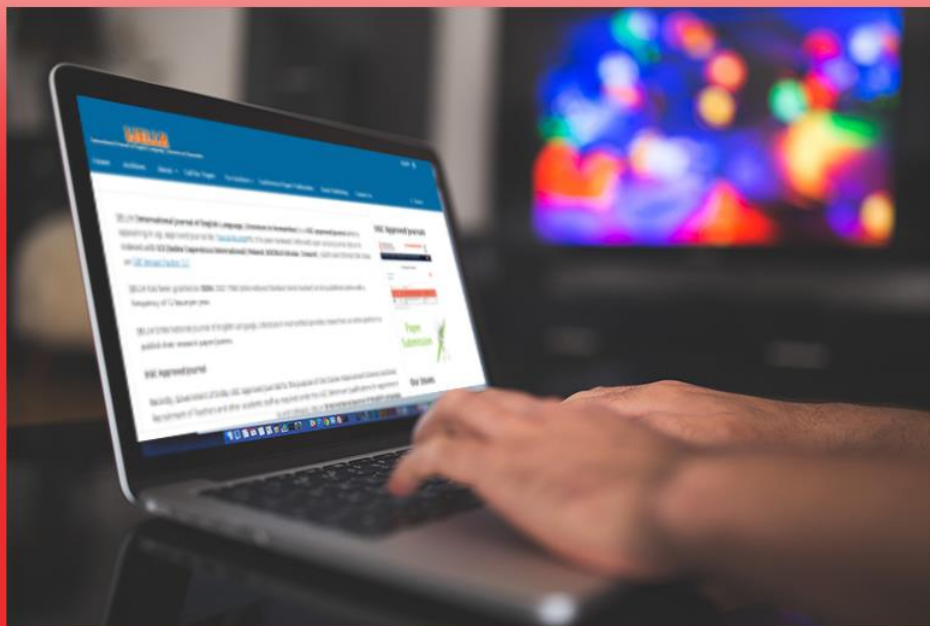
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The Language of the Future: Paulo Coelho's And on the Seventh Day

ABSTRACT

The Brazilian writer, Paulo Coelho with his “modern language” is creating wonders in the current literary scenario. Coelho’s ability to present the everlasting problems of humanity using simple literary symbols accounts for his success. Symbols are central to Coelho’s life and art and in effect his symbolic language speaks directly to our hearts. This study focuses on Coelho’s Trilogy ‘And on the Seventh Day’, to delineate the narrative simplicity which emerges as a powerful technique in his works inspiring millions of people. My study affirms his highly innovative and deviant use of language leading to the evolution of a “modern language”.

KEYWORDS: Archetypal image, Coelho, humanity, modern language, symbols.

Introduction

The Brazilian writer, Paulo Coelho with his unique language has been creating wonders in the literary world. Coelho’s ability to present the everlasting problems of humanity using simple literary symbols accounts for his success. Coelho’s strength lies in his simple, clear,

pure language which is at the same time profound and didactic. His background in writing music lyrics has helped him to synthesize his thoughts in a concise and precise manner. In an interview with *The New York Times*, he stated: “I am an extremely direct person. I dry up the language to the maximum precisely to be able to let the reader play with imagination. But I preserve the symbolism that is beyond the words. That is the language of the future, and I am its vanguard”.

Symbols are central to Coelho’s life and art and in effect his symbolic language speaks directly to our hearts. In his Trilogy *And on the Seventh Day*, the first book *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* is symbolic of the many mysteries found in love, religion and life; the second *Veronika Decides to Die* symbolizes the fact that “life is worth living”; and the third *The Devil and Miss Prym* embodies “the question of Good and Evil”. In short, all the three books are symbolic of “Life” and its various attributes. Again, the “spiritual quest” underlying in all the three books becomes an archetypal image.

Language of the Future

Although narrative simplicity happens to be the powerful technique used by Coelho, a highly innovative and deviant language comprises his “modern language”. In order to bring in the desired effect he foregrounds the text with a whole lot of linguistic devices. Deviations like the use of interior monologues for representing the continuous flow of related ideas, memories and sense impressions of characters are very obvious. In *By The River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* Pilar’s inner thoughts are revealed all along the narrative and these deviations from the original narrative are highlighted by italicizing them. The Padre, who plays the role

of a psychoanalyst, has the privilege of reading others thoughts, and it is he who disentangles her inner conflicts. These are very much evident as Pilar thinks:

Damn! If it's true that he can read someone's thoughts, then let him read mine and know everything! Let him know that yesterday he wanted to make love to me—that I refused and that now I regret it. (BTRP 143)

The second and third book in the trilogy lacks any typographical devices to indicate the difference between ordinary narrative and interior monologue. Set in an asylum in Ljubljana, Slovenia, a lot of psychoanalysis goes into the second book, *Veronika Decides to Die*. Dr. Igor's treatment using the medication: "an awareness of death" instigates an anxiety to live and as a result the inner conflicts of the characters are noteworthy. Veronika thought: "If I had a choice, if I had understood earlier that the reason my days were all the same was because I wanted them like that, perhaps..." (VDTD 42). Similarly, *The Devil and Miss Prym* portrays the mental conflict of the characters as a result of the struggle going on between good and evil within them. The inner workings of the protagonist Chantal is very striking:

Yet here she was now with a gold bar in her hands, the treasure she had never believed in, her definitive freedom.

She was seized by panic: the one lucky moment in her life could vanish that very afternoon. What if the stranger changed his mind? What if he decided to go in search of another village where he might find another woman more willing to help him in his plans? Why not stand up, go back to her room, put her few possessions into a bag and simply leave?

She imagined herself going down the steep hill, trying to hitch a ride out of the village while the stranger set out on his morning walk and found that his gold had been stolen. She would continue on her way to the nearest town and he would go back to the hotel to call the police. (*TDMP* 31-2)

The frequent use of italicized words, paragraphs and even entire pages form yet another prominent but deviant typographical feature in *By The River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*. Italicization is chiefly used to give more emphasis as well as for expressing the strong feelings or thoughts of a character. At the same time italics are also used to give emphasis to quotations from the Bible.

The narrative style is non-linear and even flash backs are used at key points to refer to some crucial incident that happened in the past which is relevant to the present condition of the particular character. Coelho uses the technique like flashback not only to convey the past but also to bring in elements of curiosity. The love story, *By The River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* is told in form a flash back. The novel opens relating the legend regarding the river Piedra, that everything that falls into the waters of this river is transformed into the rocks that make the riverbed. Pilar is portrayed sitting by the side of the river Piedra and crying over her lost love. She reminisces about the monastery, the church in the Pyrenees, the mists, and the paths she and her lover walked together. She remembers her “magic moments”, that instant when “yes” or “no” can change one’s life forever. She finds it hard to believe that it was only last week that she had found her love once again, and then lost him. She is writing down her feelings in an attempt to turn sadness into longing, solitude into remembrance. So that when she finishes telling her story she can toss it into the Piedra as told to her by the old woman. This creates a kind of anxiety in the readers. We come across this again in the

epilogue where Pilar is still seen to be writing for days until her boyfriend comes in search of her. As he reads what she has written he becomes conscious of his destiny and together they embark upon their mission, to fulfill their dreams. We find the same technique used in the other two books of the trilogy also. In *Veronika Decides to Die* the past of each and every character is brought to the forefront during the course of Veronika's stay in Vilete. We come to know about how they ended up in the asylum through these flashbacks. In *The Devil and Miss Prym* also the past of the stranger is narrated in detail, and this seems to justify why he has decided to inflict his frustrations on others. The death of the stranger's child in the terrorist encounter is narrated more towards the end of the novel. All these can be considered belonging to the technique of deviant spacing in the graphological depiction of the story.

Deviation of register is yet another means of foregrounding where the use of language is contrasted with the language user. Register is a speech variety which differentiates between refined and common language, scientific, religious, legal language etc. That is, the use of language is determined by the social context. Coelho foregrounds his narrative by means of register mixing or by making use of different kinds of registers. Coelho's characters consists of Pilar, the frustrated university student, the spiritual healer, the Padre, Veronika who attempted suicide, Eduard the schizophrenic, Mari the lawyer who had panic attacks, Chantal the barmaid, the stranger, the priest of Viscos, Old Berta and so on. The spiritual healer's language with his unshakeable faith in Virgin Mary, the religious language of the Padre and the priest, the legal language of Mari and so on are very much evident in the text. Since religious aspects are in his blood he very often talks in terms of biblical references. For example, the way in which Pilar's lover, the spiritual teacher speaks to her:

“Your love has saved me and returned me to my dream,” he continued.

I said nothing.

“Do you know Psalm 137?” He asked

I shook my head. I was afraid to speak.

“On the Banks of the rivers of Babylon...”

“Yes, yes, I know it.” I said...

“But after the psalmist cries along with longing for the land of his dreams, he promises himself...

I smiled again.

“I had forgotten, and you brought it back to me.” (*BTRP* 209-0)

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise is presented in a probing manner from the viewpoint of Mari who was admitted to Villette due to her panic attacks. Mari, the lawyer mixes legal language in a religious context:

God – it didn’t matter what name you gave him – did not live in this world today, because if he did, we would still be in Paradise, while He would be mired in appeals, requests, demands, injunctions, preliminary verdicts, and would have to justify to innumerable tribunals His decision to expel Adam and Eve from Paradise for breaking an arbitrary rule with no foundation in law: Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. (*VDTD* 95-6)

Again, the thoughts of Dr. Igor are always scientific and he speaks using appropriate medical terms:

‘Electroconvulsive therapy, please use the correct name, otherwise it will look as if we’re a mere band of barbarians.’ Dr. Igor tried to hide his surprise, but

later, he would go and find out who had taken that decision. ‘And if you want my opinion on the subject, I must make it clear that ECT is not used today as it used to be.’ (VDTD 150)

We also come across genre mixing in Coelho’s works by the use of linguistic and rhetoric devices that are more akin to the poetic mode than ordinary prose style, like metaphors, similes, personification, allusions etc. Coelho’s writing is simple but not simplistic and his images and ideas linger long after the book is read. He captures his reader’s mind with his alchemy of words. The description of the kiss between Pilar and her childhood sweetheart in the restaurant is an excellent example of Coelho’s poetic style:

“a kiss born by the rivers of our childhood when we didn’t yet know what love meant . . . in the moment of that kiss were years of searching, disillusionment, and impossible dreams” (BTRP 170-1).

Metaphoric language seems to be the code used by Coelho. Coelho employs metaphoric language to describe Pilar contemplating on her “love” and she explains love in terms of a fairy tale; that of the princess and the frog:

“There is nothing deeper than love. In fairy tales, the princesses kiss the frogs, and the frogs become princes. In real life, the princesses kiss princes. And the princes turn into frogs” (BTRP 42).

Again, as they approach the chapel in San Martin de Unx and an old man stops them from entering the chapel. Pilar readily gives up her desire to visit the chapel while her boyfriend gazed at her with disapproval. Here again Pilar talks in terms of the fairy tale:

'He thinks I'm weak, cowardly, unable to fight for what I want. Even without a kiss, the princess is transformed into a frog' (BTRP 44).

The use of simile can be seen when love is compared to a "dam":

But love is much like a dam: if you allow a tiny crack to form, through which only a trickle of water can pass, that trickle will quickly bring down the whole structure, and soon no one will be able to control the force of the current. For when those walls come down, then love takes over, and it no longer matters what is possible or impossible; it doesn't even matter whether we can keep the loved one at our side. To love is to lose control. (BTRP 36-7)

As he inspires people to discover their inner self and lead a life of hope and faith he alludes to a number of instances from the Holy Bible. The whole lot of allusions to the Bible upsets the ordinary prose style. These references are devised to reveal our place in God's program. It also answers crucial questions regarding our purpose and destiny. These function as guidelines that take us closer to our destinies. The trilogy abounds in biblical allusions ranging from the original sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Old Testament to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus in The New Testament. What is noteworthy is that he brings in a lot of verses from the Bible, discussions regarding biblical issues, prayers, illustrations of the lives of saints, illustrations of religious pictures and so on. This imparts religious fervour to his works. For example: Pilar and her love on seeing a dramatic fountain sculpture in which a serpent and a dove were combined into a single fabulous creature:

HE smiled when he saw it. “It’s a sign – masculine and feminine joined in a single figure.”

“I’d never thought before about what you told me yesterday,” I said. “But it makes sense.”

““And God created man and woman,”” he quoted from Genesis, “because that was his Image and simulacrum: man and woman.” (*BTRP* 84)

Similarly in *Veronika Decides to Die* as Mari contemplates about rules and laws that contradicted the rules, as she argues or in fact questions about God’s decision to expel Adam and Eve from Paradise, Coelho mixes verses from the Old Testament along with her argument:

‘Where art thou?’ asked God.

I heard thy voice in the Garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself,’ Adam replied, without knowing that my making this statement, he had confessed himself guilty of a crime.

So my means of a simple trick, pretending not to know where Adam was nor why he had run away, God got what he wanted...

‘Who told thee that thou was naked?’ said God knowing that this question could have only one possible response: because I ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (*VDTD* 96-7)

Again in *The Devil and Miss Prym* this is very frequently used. Coelho forces us to think about the real message behind the biblical verses by using it in a confusing mode. This suits

his mission to make his readers probe into the mysteries of their own life. For example during the sermon made by the priest to convince the villagers to sacrifice an individual he says:

‘In the Gospel according to Luke, there is a moment when an important man approaches Jesus and asks: *‘Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’* And, to our surprise, Jesus responds: *‘Why callest thou me Good? None is Good, save one, that is, God.’*

‘For many years, I pondered over this little fragment of text, trying to understand what Our Lord was saying; That He was not good? That the whole of Christianity, with its concept of charity, is based on the teachings of someone who considered himself to be bad? . . .’ (TDMP 126)

The blurring of distinction between the real and the surreal becomes another means of foregrounding. The scene in which Pilar’s lover is portrayed as communing with the Virgin is an illustration for this. He even describes this crucial conversation with the Great Mother which exemplifies Coelho’s use of the surreal to bring about the desired effect to his narrative:

“And just as I was asking that the Virgin take away my gift, I began to speak in tongues,” he went on. “The tongues told me, ‘Place your hands on the earth. Your gift will leave you and return to the Mother’s breast.’”

I was in a panic. “You didn’t...”

Yes. I did as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit bade. The fog lifted, and the sun shone on the mountains. I felt that the Virgin understood – because She had also love so greatly.”

“But She followed Her man! She accepted the path taken by Her son!” (*BTRP* 194)

Some treatments employed in Vilete are totally outdated, like that of insulin shock. Coelho in this context describes an astral journey made by Zedka who is administered with insulin shock. During her first experience of insulin shock she felt that her soul was flying, almost touching the ceiling, experiencing profound peace. During her astral journeys she started researching into the existence of the soul and one day stumbled upon a vast literature that described exactly what she was experiencing – it was called astral journey. She learned more about the techniques developed by others to provoke it and she used them every night to go wherever she wished. In an astral journey, you separate yourself from the body and then identify yourself with the mind. Then you function on the mental plane, with this fine body just as you do on this physical plane. Through concentration, you rise above the body-consciousness; through meditation, you rise above mind; and finally through Samadhi, you realize your spiritual nature. In *Veronika Decides to Die*, Coelho’s surrealistic description of those experiences and visions gives the sensation of a spirit world:

The strange, irritating noise that preceded the separation of the body from the spirit, followed by a shock, a rapid loss of consciousness, and then the peace and joy of floating in the air, attached to the body by a silvery cord, a cord that could be stretched indefinitely, although there were legends that the person would die if they allowed that silver thread to break....

Her experience, however, showed that she could go as far as she wanted and the cord never broke...an astral journey was made through mysterious tunnels. You imagined yourself in a place, you entered the appropriate tunnel at a terrifying speed, and the other place would appear.

Her first reaction was to assume that these were dead people, ghosts haunting the hospital. Then, with the help of books and of her own experience, she realized that, although there were a few disembodied spirits wandering about there, amongst them were people as alive as she was, who had either developed the technique of leaving their bodies, or who were not even aware of what was happening to them because, in some other part of the world, they were sleeping deeply, while their spirits roamed freely abroad. (VDTD 46-7)

In *The Devil and Miss Prym* also we find similar instances like the conversation between the good and bad angels of Chantal and the stranger struggling to gain supremacy over their souls; the souls of Berta's husband and Chantal's grandmother conversing with old Berta and warning her about the impending danger to her life; the flashback regarding the death of the stranger's child in the terrorist encounter even though her child's guardian angel tried to save her.

Her husband had appeared earlier that evening, and to he was accompanied by Miss Prym's grandmother....

The two of them told her to run away at once.

'You must be joking,' Berta replied....

It was a much more complicated situation than Berta could imagine, they explained: Good and Evil were locked in combat, and no one could interfere. Angels and devils were in the midst of one of the periodic battles that decide whether whole regions of the earth are to be condemned for a while or saved. (TDMP 157-8)

The use of anecdotes within the allegorical text to illustrate particular aspects seems to be another form of foregrounding used by Coelho: by means of parallelism. This gives emphasis and becomes a means to catch the attention of his readers. This seems to be a means to point out that the crisis he presents or his stand point are not bizarre. This “story within a story” device parallels the “plot within a plot” technique used by Shakespeare. Calling Coelho an adept story-teller won’t be wide of the mark. The presence of stories, legends, fairy tales, incidents from the bible, are indicative of Coelho’s mission to inspire simple people. Coelho through his fables seems to be implementing the methods used through ages: the method of conveying morals through simple stories. Just like small children are taught the basic principles of life through stories or like the parables used by Jesus Himself. Coelho too adopts the same technique to capture the curiosity and attention of his readers.

For example, towards the end of *By The River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* we find Pilar dreaming that her mother is narrating her story of a boy and girl who were insanely in love. Her mother was repeating the story she had often told her as a child, not realizing that it was a story about her own daughter. The story of a boy who sold his watch, his only worthwhile possession, to buy a silver barrette for his beloved. The girl too had no money to buy him a present and she sold her hair to buy a gold watchband for her lover. When they met on the day of engagement party, she gave him the wristband for a watch he had sold, and he gave her the barrette for the hair she no longer had. In fact this common story sums up the first book but with a slight change at the end. Coelho is seen demonstrating his theme in all possible ways so that the common reader may reach the core of his message.

In his psychological thriller Coelho uses a different story to elucidate his point that: collective madness is called sanity. Here Zedka is seen explaining to Veronika that anyone who lives in their own world is mad. She narrates a story in which she proves her point. In her story a powerful wizard, who wanted to destroy an entire kingdom, placed a magic potion

in the well from which all the inhabitants drank. Whoever drank that water would go mad. The next day, the whole population drank from the well and they went mad, apart from the king and his family, who had a separate well for them alone. The king was worried and tried to control the population, but nobody took any notice of his orders. Instead they thought the king had gone mad and was now giving nonsensical orders and they called for his abdication. To solve this, the king and his family too drank from the communal well. As soon as they drank the water of madness, they too began talking nonsense. His subjects repented at once and allowed him to continue ruling the country. Thereafter the country lived in peace, although they behaved differently from their neighbours. And the king was able to govern until the end of his days. Coelho doesn't just write; he proves to be an adept in crafting his magnificent tales.

In *The Devil and Miss Prym*, we come across the legend of king Midas being narrated by Chantal to convince the villagers about the folly they are about to commit by murdering old Berta:

‘At school, we are all told the famous legend of King Midas, who met a god who offered to grant him anything he wished for. Midas was already rich, but he wanted more money, and he asked to have the power to turn everything he touched to gold.

‘Let me remind you what happened: ...In less than week, Midas had died of hunger and thirst, surrounded by gold on sides.’

‘Why are you telling us this story?’

‘I’m telling you the story for one simple reason: gold itself has no value. Absolutely none. We cannot eat it or drink it or use it to buy more animals or land. It’s money that’s valuable, and how are we going to turn this gold into money? (TDMP 188-9)

Conclusion

More creative and innovative use of language brings in special effect or meaning into a literary work. Taking the above discussed points into consideration, it is evident that Coelho's *And on the Seventh Day* abounds in literary foregroundings. Coelho's deviant and parallel use of the devices of language within his philosophical yet simple plot draws his readers closer to the text. It readily blends philosophy with religion thus facilitating the task of enlightening humanity. Though often criticized for his simple approach, Coelho's works never fall short of other postmodern books. Coelho refutes such criticism and in an interview with Rainer Traub, he says: "The ocean appears to be nothing but surface, yet it is deep. The desert seems nothing but an immense empty space, yet it is beautiful. No one would wish snow to be anything but white and no one would ever blame creation for its lack of imagination in not having coloured it". His simplicity is an essential factor that makes him the most influential author of the present century; for him refinement means condensation. What is special about him is that he draws his materials from his own life story, which is inspiring to the upcoming generation. His narratives are so realistic that the readers very often identify themselves with the characters. This makes people rethink about their possibilities in life. Coelho lights a spark of hope in them to accept the challenges in life. He persuades people to probe into the self, to realize their potentials by rekindling their lost hope. Every book of Coelho has something for itself; there is always something to learn from every book.

Abbreviations used:

BTRP- *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*

TDMP- *The Devil and Miss Prym*

VDTD- *Veronika Decides to Die*

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