

## ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S INFLUENCE ON PAULO COELHO

(A Study with Special Reference to *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA* AND *THE ALCHEMIST*)

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### Abstract

*The Old Man and the Sea* was written in 1952 and the first edition of *Alchemist* appeared in 1988. Ernest Hemingway was a great pleader of man's greatness that lies in man's strength and struggle against the odds. Paulo Coelho also adores this great quality of man. Paulo Coelho just like Hemingway puts forward, through *The Alchemist*, his belief in the dignity of man. The protagonists of both writers sustain through striving even in such circumstances where most people would accept the defeat considering it a destiny. This paper explores some of the common characteristics in the mentioned two writers through their novellas i.e. *The Alchemist* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. The setting of the mentioned novellas, the heroes and the themes of these pieces of literature have surprising similarities. These comparable features are proof that like many other figures in the literary world, Hemingway has greatly influenced Paulo Coelho as well.

**Keywords:** Spanish background, Epic, Fable, Symbolism, Dreams, Endurance of man

Two Santiagos make towering positions in the world of literature. First Santiago was created by Ernest Hemingway in 1952 and it was emanated a second time in 1988, through the prolific pen of Paulo Coelho. The two novels share several analogous characteristics. The structure, the themes and the symbols have irrefutable similarities. Even the names of protagonists in *The Alchemist* and *The Old Man and the Sea* are the same. Santiago, the explorer of the sea in *The Old Man and the Sea* seems to reincarnate as an explorer of the desert in *The Alchemist*. Santiago of Hemingway is mistakenly considered to be from Cuba but he was originally a Spaniard, as the author explains in a letter to Lillian Ross, "The Old Man was a catholic born in the island of Lanza Rota in the Canary Islands" (Herlihay, 2009). Just like Hemingway's Santiago, Paulo's Santiago though born in Andalusia, bears Spanish characteristics this becomes clear when he finds himself unable to communicate in Arabic, in a bar, after he enters Africa.

However, he is relieved to find someone who can speak Spanish. "Who are you?"

He heard a voice ask him in Spanish. The boy was relieved (Coelho, 1988, p. 37).

Both characters dream and both dream of Africa. Nature in both novels is not an enemy instead Nature is shown offering a reward to those who prove to be assiduous and not profane. In one Novella the sea is the representative of Nature. It has a great hidden treasure for the old fisherman in the form of a big fish. The sea for the old man is not a huge body of water only. The old man talks to the sea as if it were a woman.

He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman (Hemingway, 1952, p.17).

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The sea is hiding the treasure which the old man is in search of and to keep its treasure uncharted the sea is not unhelpful. It invites the Old man to explore its huge stretch and unfathomable depth. However, Nature is not easy to hunt. It cannot offer its treasures to anyone without a hard struggle. That is why the sea becomes a testing ground for the strength and commitment of the old man. The same is the situation in *The Alchemist*. Here the nature assumes the appearance of a desert. Desert too, has extreme vastness just like the sea. And for Santiago of *The Alchemist*, even the desert is a sea,

Here and there, he found a shell and realized that the desert, in remote times had been a sea (Coelho, 1988, p.104).

As the sea is a romantic being for the old man, the desert also allures the young Santiago and just like the sea, in Hemingway's novella, in *The Alchemist* the testing ground is a desert. The desert wants to be explored and discovered for the hidden secrets because it wants to offer its treasure but only to those who struggle and stand by the hard times. Young Santiago proves himself to be worthy of being rewarded by the desert. Apart from this introductory discussion some of the very prominent parallels in the two novellas can be summed up under the following heading.

### **The similarity of Form: *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Alchemist***

Considering the length of *The Old Man the Sea* and *The Alchemist* - Both are short novels. Hemingway's masterpiece consists of about 26570 words and *The Alchemist* (English Translation by Alan R. Clarke) contains about 38900 words. This word count makes both writings be considered in the same genre of literature called Novella. Mary Doyle Springer in *Forms of the Modern Novella* (1975) says that the novella is 'a prose fiction of a certain length, usually 15,000 to 50,000 words (Springer, 1975).

The setting of both novellas has similarities. Forces of nature are the opposing forces for the heroes of both stories. However, it is undeniable that the heroes and the opposing forces in both plots do not have disgust for each other rather they are in love. Man confronts the traditions, and in this confrontation, we discover the decency of man, potency of man, and dedication of man. Most of Hemingway's novels show what men can do, his writings define the world's limitations, cruelties, and built-in evil (Gurko, 1955). *The Old Man and the Sea* like *The Alchemist* is extraordinary because it paints through the pen, the extraordinary world that man himself can create. Both stories tell what men can do and both prove that in the world arena, superhuman deeds are doable.

Both Novels show elements of epic. The two Santiagos have an out word journey and then a return journey. *The Old Man and the Sea* opens in A Cuban village and ends in the same village when the protagonist returns to it. *The Alchemist* opens in an old church and the ending scene of *The Alchemist* is again in the same old church when Santiago returns after having a clue about his treasure. Hemingway's novel, soon after opening in the Cuban village, shifts to the

great sea for the remaining action. In *The Alchemist* most of the action takes place in a great desert. The central characters in both stories exhibit heroic deeds during their journey. They face hardships for a noble cause and never gave in for their greater cause. Determination of the old fisherman can be felt through the words he speaks;

“Fish,” he said softly, aloud, “I’ll stay with you until I am dead. “Fish,” he said, “I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends.” (Hemingway, 1952, p.37).

The same strength of spirit and character can be felt in Paulo’s Santiago when he says, We have to be prepared for change, he thought (Coelho, 1988, p.08).

A fable-like environment can be felt in these writings in the sense that the protagonists of both stories have strong ties with animals. Just like in fables we see that the men talk to the animals. There is communication between animals and humans. Like in the traditional fables, the reader cannot note a dialogue between human beings and the beasts, however, message transmission can be noted between them and through them. The old man addresses the fish as if he were talking to his fellow;

“Come on,” the old man said aloud. “Make another turn. Just smell them. Aren’t they lovely? Eat them good now and then there is the tuna hard and cold and lovely. Don’t be shy, fish. Eat them.” (Hemingway, 1952, p.27). During the night two porpoises came around the boat and he could hear them rolling and blowing. He could tell the difference between the blowing noise the male made and the sighing blow of the female. “They are good,” he said. “They play and make jokes and love one another. They are our brothers like the flying fish.” (Hemingway, 1952, p.32).

The hero of *The Alchemist* also has a similar connection with sheep.

He had always believed that the sheep were able to understand what he said. So there were times when he read them parts of his books that had made an impression on him, or when he would tell them of the loneliness or the happiness of a shepherd in the fields. Sometimes he would comment to them on the things he had seen in the villages they passed.” (Coelho, 1988, p.04).

A very important message is conveyed to the young boy in *The Alchemist* through hawks that were flying over the desert. The old man of Hemingway is also attracted to the birds.

“Take a good rest, small bird,” he said. “Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish.” (Hemingway, 1952).

Another similarity in the setting of the two novellas is in the fact that both heroes find their reward when they return to the site where they had started their journey. The treasure which they had been hunting in far off desert and far off sea was lying where they had been residing since long. The robbers tortured young Santiago physically but they also ironically disclosed the

exact location of the treasure which was the same church where young Santiago had been staying. The chief of the robbers spoke thus;

“I dreamed that I should travel to the fields of Spain and look for a ruined church where shepherds and their sheep slept. In my dream, there was a sycamore growing out of the ruins of the sacristy, and I was told that, if I dug at the roots of the sycamore, I would find a hidden treasure.” (Coelho, 1988, p.171).

However, Hemingway avoids the over-romantic pleasing conclusion which would show Santiago bringing home the great fish undamaged and sell it at the market for a large sum of money. Instead, we see the substantially indigent but spiritually loaded old fisherman brings only the bare skeleton of the Marlin in parts. He is unable to earn any money with his hunted fish yet cherishing a far greater prize. That far greater prize is the strength of human willpower. The old man discovered that man is great power in the world. A man can be destroyed, he can be robbed of his life goal, he can be deprived of his reward but the soul of man is unconquerable and unbreakable.

The main characters of Hemingway have been categorized into two types i.e. The Hemingway Hero and the code Hero. These can also be termed as tyro” and “tutor. The Tyro or Hemingway Heroes are the heroes who have several flaws in their characters. They are in the learning process. While the Tutor or the Code Heroes are perfect characters. They are skilful in life winning practice. ‘Tyro, in general, is a projection of possibilities and tutor is the embodied wish-fulfilment of a successful response (Earl, 1963) The young Tyro is helped and guided by the Tutor in certain aspects required for a successful life. The Tyro and the Tutor go in a type of Apprentice-Master relationship. This apprentice-master link is obvious in both novellas the old fisherman has taught the boy many important lessons -- how to fish with skill and precision, how to live with wisdom and humility. A similar relationship is very clear in the Alchemist. Here the young shepherd is a tyro and the old man who appears in his life on several occasions is the tutor. Santiago meets his tutor finally in the desert as a practising alchemist. Here the tutor finally guides him on his way to find the treasure.

Dreaming plays a very important role in the setting of these two novellas. According to Macrobius and Artemidorus: "Dreams were divided into two classes; the first type of dreams was believed to be influenced only by the present (or the past), and was unimportant in respect of the future; it included the enuknia (insomnia), which directly reproduce a given idea or its opposite; e.g., hunger or its satiation; and the phantasmata, which elaborate the given idea fantastically, as e.g. the nightmare, ephialtes. The second class of dreams, on the other hand, was determinative of the future. To this belonged:

1. Direct prophecies received in the dream called chrematismos, oraculum
2. The foretelling of a future event called orama, visio
3. The symbolic dream, which requires interpretation called oneiros, somnium (Macrobius, 1469)

Santiago of the Alchemist dreams directly about his future goal so it can be considered a Chrematismo Oraculum. While the old man's dream is originally because of his current odd situation so his dreams fall in the category of enuknia (insomnia). Whatever the type of dream they experience it is doubtless that dreams move both heroes and the dreams energize them both.

Another similar technique employed by both writers is the use of soliloquy. The old fisherman talks to himself when he is alone in the sea. The young Santiago of Paulo Coelho also talks to himself. Through soliloquies, we discover the inner working of the minds of the heroes. The use of this figure is necessary in the sense that both heroes live lonely most of the time. There is no other character to who they would talk and will reveal their inner self. This deficiency has been overcome through soliloquies. The old man in his self-talking addresses the fish and the birds while the young Santiago addresses his sheep. The old man even talks to his cramped hand,

“How do you feel, hand?” he asked the cramped hand that was almost as stiff as rigor mortis. “I’ll eat some more for you.” He ate the other part of the piece that he had cut in two. He chewed it carefully and then spat out the skin. “How does it go, hand? Or is it too early to know?” He took another full piece and chewed it. (Hemingway, 1952, p.41).

### **Symbolism in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Alchemist***

A symbol is an object, animate or inanimate which represents or stands for something else (Cuddon, 1998). It can also be a word, phrase or expression having associated meaning. Both novels have made use of this technique. In *The Alchemist* symbols have been used so extensively that this novel can be considered a novel of Symbols. The same is the situation in Hemingway's novel. Hemingway presented the sea as a symbol of life. It feeds Santiago, and it teaches Santiago and it puts Santiago to certain tests just like life is doing with all the human beings. The sea has a significant role in the setting of the story as well as it is the most important symbol used by the writer. Sea is life and it is the test posed by nature and sea bears the reward for those who sustain. It is the sea as a life that makes Santiago a symbol of all humanity. The symbolic setting of the sea means that life is vast it has many rewards hidden in the depth but we must show courage to explore and search out those. In *The Alchemist* same symbolic role has been played by the great desert. The desert-like sea has great size. It is hard to explore but it has hidden rewards for the explorers. It is the desert that teaches the young boy everything that is required for successful living.

The sea contains many hidden messages for the old man. Depending upon those messages he can draw many conclusions which would affect his course of movement.

If there is a hurricane you always see the signs of it in the sky for days ahead if you are at sea. They do not see it ashore because they do not know what to look for, he thought.’(Hemingway, 1952, p.43).

The same is the situation in *Alchemist*. Here the desert is full of all such signs which the Old man was observed in the sea. The desert attracts him, the desert guides him. The young boy feels that the desert also talks to the travellers who explore it.

I've seen how the guides read the signs of the desert, and how the soul of the caravan speaks to the soul of the desert." (Coelho, 1988, p.83).

Marlin the huge fish is the symbol of life's great achievements, the old man is in search of. The old man employs all his physical power and mental courage in search of this great goal. This achievement is so important for the old man that he is not ready to abandon it even when he feels his life is in a dangerous condition. He remains determined and utters, "a man can be destroyed but not defeated" (Hemingway, 1952, p.76).

The fish is the symbol of great goals which are hard to achieve but they have beautiful aspects as the fish itself is. The same great goal assumes the form of a treasure in *The Alchemist*. The hidden treasure is the symbol of the boy's greatest aim. The treasure is hard to find but it has great joy to offer if successfully sought out. The boy, just like the old man, several times, puts his life in dangerous situations. But the young Santiago of *The Alchemist* is as much determined and resolute as the old Santiago of Hemingway was. The sharks symbolize all those difficulties which can be the possible hurdles in the course of life while adventuring for the greatest targets. The sharks symbolize those elements which try to destroy the course of struggle and the reward of hard work. Obviously, the sharks would not exist in the desert. Here these difficulties assume other forms e.g. the boy who robbed Santiago after he entered Africa which made the young boy dejected but not much to make him leave his target un-attempted. The war situation in the desert is also another hurdle for Santiago, which puts him into a state of indefinite waiting. The robbers near the pyramids are the greatest difficulty for the young boy as his life could hardly be saved there. But later in the course of the story, it was dawned that the most difficult times make us fly higher and higher.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the old man often remembers the boy named Manolin. That boy is a symbol of energy for the old man. Remembering that boy makes the old man galvanized. He feels new energy. He is the symbol of the old man's youth and energy.

I wish the boy was here, he said aloud and settled himself against the rounded planks of the bow and felt the strength of the great fish through the line he held across his shoulders moving steadily toward whatever he had chosen (Hemingway, 1952, p.34)

In *The Alchemist*, the function of the energy centre is performed by Fatima. Fatima is a girl who met Santiago amid the desert. She met him and brought the freshness of an oasis into

the hero's life. Young Santiago, at the very first sight, felt that Fatima was his soul mate. She became the axis of Santiago's thoughts. She became the source of energy for him. Whenever young Santiago feels a bit depressed, in his journey towards his treasure, it is the memory of Fatima which energizes him again and again.

Hemingway uses the birds in the setting of his story. The birds here have symbolic significance. With the help of the birds, the old man gets information about the condition of the sea and other creatures in the water. So the birds are like help from God.

Now the old man looked up and saw that the bird was circling again.

He's found fish, he said aloud . . . The bird is a great help," the old man said.

Just then the stern line came taut under his foot (Hemingway, 1952, p.24).

The old man, at another occasion, keeps on observing the birds.

He's got something," the old man said aloud. "He's not just looking." He rowed slowly and steadily toward where the bird was circling . . . The bird went higher in the air and circled again, his wings motionless. Then he dove suddenly and the old man saw flying fish spurt out of the water" (Hemingway, 1952, p.20).

In *The Alchemist*, again the birds have symbolic significance and help from God. It is through two birds that young Santiago gets his first intuition for which he gets a noble position among the chiefs of the oasis along with fifty pieces of gold.

The tribal chieftain called for the boy and presented him with fifty pieces of gold.

He repeated his story about Joseph of Egypt, and asked the boy to become the counsellor of the oasis (Coelho, 1988, p.119).

In *The Alchemist* the characters are themselves aware of the importance of the symbols. The English man who accompanies Santiago in his journey through the desert is himself in search of knowledge of symbols. Referring to that symbolic language the English man says.

There is a universal language, understood by everybody, but already forgotten.

I am in search of that universal language, among other things. That's why I'm here. I have to find a man who knows that universal language. (Coelho, 1988, p.73).

### **Themes in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Alchemist***

Multi-layered themes can be noted in *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. Similarly, *The Old Man and the Sea* also has several important themes. Hemingway's novella was called deep, impacting and multi-layered (Burhans, 1960). The struggle is the common theme in both the novellas. Going out too far may also be viewed through a Nietzschean reading of the novella which affirms that taking the greatest risk to achieve the greatest wholesomeness is the virtue of

the heroic individual (Charles M. Schulz, 2011). Both heroes presented in these two writings go too far in search of their treasure. The heroes experience physical struggle. One ventures alone in the open sea as far as most fishermen would not row. On the other hand, the young Santiago explores the desert. He starts his struggle just based on a dream. Or in other words, he puts into danger all his worldly wealth and life just on his intuition which he later proves to be correct. The old fisherman is well aware that going into the open sea can prove to be a fatal experience but to prove that he can make his destiny with his willpower, he performs that dangerous experiment. He knows that without struggle nothing can be achieved. Whatever he was in search of, he found when he returned empty-handed. He could find great fish in the coastal areas but what he learned could only be found with hard struggle. The situation proves that the fish was less important than the lesson of struggle. Same situation can be seen in *The Alchemist*. Young Santiago's treasure was lying where he had been spending nights. Nature could show him the location of the treasure directly. But without struggle he would not know the importance of wealth. Therefore, Nature first taught him the great lesson of struggle and then offered him what was his destiny. The boy later discovered the fact the alchemist was aware of the exact location of his treasure but he made him prove a hard-working boy.

You old sorcerer," the boy shouted up to the sky. "You knew the whole story. You even left a bit of gold at the monastery so I could get back to this church. The monk laughed when he saw me come back in tatters. Couldn't you have saved me from that?" (Coelho, 1988, p.176).

Hope is the second common theme in *The Old man and the Sea* and *The Alchemist*. In the opening scene of Hemingway's novella, the old man is introduced in a hopeless condition. He had not been able to catch any fish for the last 84 days. Even his apprentice had left him as commanded by his parents.

He had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. In the first forty days, a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish, the boy's parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally *salao*, which is the worst form of unlucky" (Hemingway, 1952, p.01).

However, being declared 'salao' does not make the old man permanently down in the dumps. On the eighty-fifth day, the old man again hopeful gathers his tools and sails towards the sea. Hope is a Christian virtue, which Santiago tries to follow in all earnest. The absurd hero finds solace in feeding his stubborn optimism (Eddins, 2001). The young boy of Paulo Coelho is also an embodiment of hope. In hope of seeing other lands, he abandons his father's profession and becomes a shepherd. Again in hope of finding his treasure, he abandons his herd. His hope becomes his power and finally, he proves that he was rightly hopeful.

Luck and determinations have ever been a great topic for the writers of literature in all the languages of the world. Some of the writers have tried to prove that luck, fate or destiny is the supreme driving force in man's life. Nobody can avert the decree of fate. Such views have been





proved by Sophocles in his drama, *The Oedipus Rex* and by Thomas Hardy in his novel *The Tess*. Others like Christopher Marlowe prove that determination can change destiny. *The Old man and the Sea* and *The Alchemist*, both present situations in which determination and luck play a vital role. The young boy has the destiny to own a great treasure. His treasure could be handed over to him at the very beginning of the novella. But he was made to struggle hard to prove himself a determined personality before receiving his fate. The same is the case with the old fisherman. He had been fishing all through his life. At a special stage in his life, he was made to realize that he has become a 'salao' but to prove the determination he keeps on trying. The old man is an embodiment of both determination and destiny in one personality. At one point, the old man states that even though he believes in luck, but skill and preparedness are more important than superstition. He bases many of his decisions and actions in a persistent belief in luck e.g.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen Then he added, "Blessed Virgin, pray for the death of this fish. Wonderful though he is." (Hemingway, 1952, p.46).

But soon he expresses his determination through such words: "But I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures" (Hemingway, 1952, p.46).

The greatness of man is an important theme that can be seen in both novellas of the two great writers. Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is often quoted for the lines, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." The line suggests that a person can be deprived of everything on the path of life, he can lose everyone however a struggle with skill, courage, determination and dignity brings the final victory i.e. the victory of the human soul. The young Santiago also proves human greatness. If he had received the treasure as a gift, without any struggle, he would have not become our hero. He is a hero because he is not receiving his treasure as a charity. First, he has proved his greatness as a human being then he got what he deserved as a great person.

The relationship between man and Nature is a very important theme in *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho and in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Nature is the greatest helping hand for man. It may test man, it may check the determination of man and it may examine the durability of man but it is never an enemy of those who try. If humans put all their energies to achieve their goal Nature itself steps forward to guide and assist.

The Soul of the World is nourished by people's happiness and also by unhappiness, envy, and jealousy. To realize one's destiny is a person's only real obligation. All things are one. And, when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." (Coelho, 1988, p.23).

The resembling situation can be seen in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Here Nature is training him to make his spirit stronger. The old man's greatest goal is his hunted Marlin, the Marlin is a representative of Nature and the gift of Nature. The sharks are representative of Nature and also the difficulties of Nature which would test man for his higher flight. At one point reader feels in Hemingway's novel that Nature is just an enemy and opposing force for man. It

destroyed the prize-fish hunted after a struggle of more than forty-eight hours. However, if we ignore the material goal that the old man was in search of and only consider the abstract victory of the old man's soul the same enemy sharks seem to become an important helping force of nature.

Hemingway has been one of the very influencing personalities of the world of literature. Paulo Coelho is a contemporary great literary figure but writing in the style of Hemingway can be a way of paying tribute to him. Even if Paulo Coelho did not copy Hemingway's style deliberately the similarities noted in the above discussion express the greatness of both writers. *The Alchemist's* similarities with *The Old Man and the Sea* are undeniable pieces of evidence of Hemingway's influence on Paulo Coelho. Hemingway's posthumous reputation demonstrates that interest in him—measurable in terms of entries in the *MLA Bibliography*—has increased by 125 per cent since 1961, typically placing him ahead of all 20th-century writers and behind only Henry James and Herman Melville from the 19<sup>th</sup> (DeFazio, 1998).

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