

ANTHROPOCENTRIC ANALYSIS OF PAULO COELHO'S THE ALCHEMIST: HUMAN IDENTITY AND SELF-REALIZATION

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Abstract. This article provides a comprehensive literary and philosophical analysis of Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist*, focusing on the symbolic meanings and aesthetic functions of nature imagery, archetypal characters, and existential concepts. The study reveals that elements such as the desert, wind, sun, oasis, and stars serve not merely as background settings, but as active spiritual milestones guiding the protagonist Santiago toward self-realization and his "Personal Legend". Furthermore, the article explores the synthesis of Eastern Sufi philosophy-specifically the concept of *sayr-i suluk* and *ibnu waqt*-with modern existential and psychological paradigms, highlighting how external journeys reflect inner alchemy and spiritual purification.

Keywords: Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*, nature symbolism, journey motif, *sayr-i suluk*, individuation, Personal Legend, existentialism, inner alchemy.

Introduction. The novel *The Alchemist* created by Paulo Coelho occupies a special place in the treasury of world literature due to its profound wisdom, philosophical content, and wealth of symbolic imagery. The symbolic meaning and artistic-philosophical functions of nature images play an important role in revealing the ideological and aesthetic layers of this work. In this work, the writer elevates nature not merely as an ordinary lifeless background or descriptive tool, but to the level of a living subject organically connected with human psychology, possessing its own unique language, laws, and philosophical meaning. The interpretation of nature symbols in literary studies provides an opportunity to understand the idea of the work more deeply. Each nature image in the novel-the desert, wind, sun, sands, oasis, and stars-serves as an artistic expression of a specific philosophical concept, and they serve to illuminate the stages of the protagonist Santiago's inner evolution, his self-awareness, and the path to achieving his "Personal Legend". Every element of nature in the work appears as a unique stage or testing ground on the path of human spiritual maturation.

Research Methodology and Approaches (Methods). The Andalusian hills, green pastures, and the world of sheep, which serve as the starting point of the work, symbolically reflect the initial layer of human life-the comfort zone, which is peaceful, safe, but deprived of evolution. In such an environment, a person lives peacefully in the embrace of nature, but this tranquility stops their spiritual growth. Here, nature looks like a caring mother for a person, but at the same time it also performs the function of a cage limiting them; Santiago's living with sheep and making a living only by searching for pasture and water expresses his unconscious state prior to spiritual awakening. The shepherd boy's abandoning his birthplace and familiar pastures to turn toward an unknown world-deserts and wilderness-is the great spiritual leap of humanity and the first step taken toward spiritual maturation. The landscapes of 20th-century world literature and the principles of psychological analysis show that it is necessary for a person to break out of old molds in order to achieve self-awareness.

Results and Analysis (Results). The image of the desert is the largest and most multifaceted nature symbol at the center of the novel, and it appears not only as a geographical space, but as a universal crucible of catharsis where a person undergoes trials, the ego dies, and the spiritual "self" is reborn. The endless sands, scorching heat, and ruthless silence of the desert are the spatial

equivalents of disorders, fears, and doubts in the inner world of a person. As Santiago enters the desert, he gradually sheds his old worldview, excessive information from the urban environment, and life anxieties. The desert teaches him that every person has their own life trials and hardships, and true treasure cannot be attained without these trials. Philosophical currents and principles of psychological analysis in 20th-century world literature necessitated a new interpretation of human and nature relations. From this perspective, the desert is not just an arid territory, but the mirror of the protagonist's heart and a vast laboratory testing his inner potential.

The image of oases in the heart of the desert is the absolute opposite of this, representing peace, love, safety, and temporary stopping points in human life. In the oasis, Santiago not only meets his true love—Fatima, but also realizes that life does not consist merely of living peacefully, and any beautiful dwelling can also distract a person from their supreme goal. The oasis is a resting place for the soul, but it is not the final destination, rather it is a bridge to gather strength to continue the journey. According to the indicators of the analysis of the work, every resting place in a person's life must serve for them to prepare for future grand milestones.

One of the most impressive and philosophically rich images of nature in the novel is the wind. The wind appears in the work as a symbol of unsteadiness, constant movement, freedom, and cosmic power. In the final stages of his journey, Santiago learns to converse with the desert, the sun, and finally the wind, and to understand their language. The dialogue with the wind shows that the protagonist is not outside of nature, but a part of it, and has achieved spiritual harmony with the cosmos. Research confirms that elements of nature are also interpreted in Sufi philosophy as manifestations of the Truth (*Haq*) and symbols of divine love. In Paulo Coelho's work, the boundlessness of the wind shows the immeasurability of the human spirit and its power to overcome any obstacles. When the protagonist realizes that his inner strength is not enough to turn the desert into a sandstorm, he unites with the wind, harmonizing the power of his heart with the vast energy of nature. This situation is a brilliant artistic finding proving that a person can change the cosmos not by exercising dominance over nature, but by understanding it and speaking in its language.

Similarly, the images of the sun and stars also constitute deep symbolic information in the novel. Stars have been guiding signs for travelers and wayfarers since ancient times, ensuring they do not get lost. Santiago takes bearings from the stars both during his time as a shepherd and during his journey in the desert; the stars serve as a map of destiny in the sky for him. The sun appears as the central power of existence, granting life to all living creatures. As Santiago argues with the sun and the wind, he comes to understand the fundamental law of the cosmos—the Law of Love. The Alchemist instructs him that everything in the world has its own "Personal Legend," and that stones, plants, animals, and all of nature together form the single "Language of the Universe". Such an interpretation of nature images is of immense importance from the perspective of modern ecological consciousness and philosophical anthropology, as it rejects humanity's consumerist attitude toward nature and urges living in harmony and unison with it. In literary works, nature often serves as a mirror of human psychology, revealing the inner experiences of the protagonist through artistic colors.

Discussion. In Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist*, there are not only nature images, but also a number of other deep philosophical-symbolic layers ensuring human spiritual evolution, which clearly reveal the ideological scale of the work. In particular, each archetypal character in the composition of the work—the gypsy woman, the mysterious old king Melchizedek (King of Salem), the crystal merchant, the English researcher, and the alchemist himself—represents important milestones that awaken the subconscious layers of the protagonist and elevate him to a new spiritual stage. Each of these images appears as an artistic equivalent of various psychological states, internal obstacles, and ways to overcome them encountered in human life.

Specifically, the image of the gypsy woman appearing at the beginning of the work signifies the initial attention to one's dreams and voices of the heart and the awakening of inner intuition, whereas the old king Melchizedek is a symbol of sacred knowledge that reminds a person of their "Personal Legend" and imbues them with spiritual strength to push forward. The image of the crystal merchant exposes the earthly urges and fears of a person who lacks the courage to follow their dream and remains trapped in an old environment and comfort zone. Through these characters, the author poses a sharp existential question: when faced with a choice in life, should a person choose safety or walk toward their dream even if it is arduous.

The image of the English researcher shows that book knowledge, scientific research, and theories alone are not sufficient to understand true life experience or the "Language of Knowledge / Language of the Universe". He seeks the secrets of alchemy from books, but he cannot feel supreme wisdom until he engages in live dialogue with nature in practical life, within the heart of the desert. This is a powerful philosophical idea proving how important the harmony of theoretical knowledge and practical experience is for human maturation. The image of the alchemist is the ultimate peak of the journey, concluding the process where the protagonist's external searches end and he discovers infinite power and perfection within his own interiority.

Concurrently, the concept of time and the existential approach hold special significance in the work. Santiago's movement across the desert denies the ordinary linear concept of time; there, past and future disappear, leaving only "the present moment". This situation is a consummate artistic interpretation in Western literature of the Eastern Sufi concept of *ibnu waqt* (being the son of the moment). Only when a person learns to live in the present moment and cherish it can they comprehend the secrets of the cosmos and gain the power to alter their destiny.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the nature images in Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist* form the ideological foundation of the work, serving not merely for drawing landscapes, but as a multifaceted symbolic system for human spiritual maturation, self-discovery, and comprehension of the secrets of the cosmos. The desert, oasis, wind, sun, and stars in the work harmonize to inspire the reader to journey from the outer world to the inner world—into their own heart.

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