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**POST- MODERNITY RECONSIDERED:  
LIQUID MODERNITY  
IN PAULO COELHO'S THE ALCHEMIST**

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## **POST- MODERNITY RECONSIDERED: LIQUID MODERNITY**

### **IN PAULO COELHO'S THE ALCHEMIST**

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#### **Abstract**

The aim of this research is twofold: first, to examine the manifestations of Zygmunt Bauman's theory of "Liquid Modernity" in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, secondly, to appreciate the fundamental aesthetical (de)merits attending Coelho's portrayal of Liquid Modern characters. The former entails the study of five main features respectively: first, individuality manifested by the centrality of personal legend, secondly, Capitalism as the new 'Soul of the World', thirdly, mobility (change) as a necessity for liquid modern individuals, fourthly individual's emancipation from society and love, and fifthly, the value of work- regarding production and consumptive- in a liquid modern society. The latter aim comprises the (de)merits of the nature of Liquid Modernity itself as well as of Coelho's technique of portraying this concept in *The Alchemist*.

Liquid (or Late) modernity is proved to be essentially a reaction against post- modernism and, in many respects, a return to the ethics of modernism, without implying that it is a more effective concept than post-modernity. Both concepts are concerned with the problem of depthless social change. In *The Alchemist* the novelist's preoccupation with preaching a Capitalism- oriented form of Liquid Modernism has resulted in such ethical and aesthetical demerits as market orientation, individualism, the refusal of communal relationships including love and the adoption of an Orientalist arrogance. The novel seems to fall in the trap of preachment and self- help used for achieving the author's own "Personal Legend" rather than to celebrate a worthy doctrine.

## 1. Subject and Aims

This **study** aims at a critical analysis of Paulo Coelho's bestseller *The Alchemist* by employing Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity as a replacement of postmodernism in 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction. It reveals market orientation and individualism in *The Alchemist*, an allegorical novel following Santiago, a young Andalusian shepherd, in his journey to Egypt, after having a recurring dream of finding treasure there. My concern is not with Bauman's, or Coelho's, intellectual journey but with their new choices of term for a condition that was once considered postmodern and how his conception of Liquid Modernity is reflected in Paulo's *The Alchemist*. If liquid modernity is considered a better term than post- modernity, what would its usage imply for the meaning of the present context of modernity? Would this term make a difference to the development agenda of modernizing societies or to the novelist's use of his fictional tools?

Thus, the central aim of this research is twofold: first, to examine the manifestations of Bauman's theory of Liquid Modernity in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, secondly, to appreciate the fundamental aesthetical (de)merits attending Coelho's portrayal of Liquid Modern characters. The former aim entails the study of five main features respectively: first individuality manifested by the centrality of Personal legend), secondly, Capitalism (The Soul of the World), thirdly, mobility (change), fourthly individual's emancipation from society and love, and fifthly the value of work- regarding production and consumptive- in a liquid modern society. The latter comprises both the (de)merits of the nature of Liquid Modernity itself and with Coelho's technique of portraying this concept in *The Alchemist*.

## 2. Review of literature:

Central among the inadequate studies on the manifestations of Bauman's Liquid Modernity in 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction is B. Chandra Sekhar (2001) who applies Edward Sa'id's concept of orientalism to Coelho's treatment of Muslims in South Africa and refers to the liquidity in *The Alchemist*, but without analyzing the features of this liquidity in the novel or its relation to the 'solidity' of modern world. This theme was continued in Modernity and Ambivalence (Bauman, 1991: 29) where the metaphor of gardening was used to depict the solid complicity between the modern state and science to weed out elements detrimental to "the vision of good society, a healthy society, an orderly society". Moreover, similar deficiency is

marked in the studies on the manifestations of Bauman's theory in fiction. By drawing on the work of Freud, Kafka and Simmel, Bauman argued that each author represented an effort to disclose the ambivalence of modernity as reflected in their marginal experiences in European society. Thus, psycho-analysis "transformed the human world ... into a text to be interpreted. ... By asking questions, it sapped the structure whose substance was the prohibition of asking". (Bauman, 1991: 175, 184, 187) In the case of Coelho, market orientation, manifested in impermanence and mobility, individualism and anthropocentrism, and refusing social relationships, precedes, and ushers into, a modern world characterized by mobility.

### **3. Baumann's Theory of Liquid Modernity**

#### **3.1 Liquid Modernity and Coelho's *The Alchemist***

Coelho's *The Alchemist* "articulates a penchant for individualism, and discards community bonds in favour of self aggrandisement that has been brought in by Modernity." (Sekhar 1) The novel adores sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's concept "Liquid Modernity" which suggests that all forms of social construction are changing rapidly. Liquid Modernity undermines all notions of durability and implies, instead, a sense of rootlessness. In the field of development, such a concept "challenges the meaning of modernization as an effort to establish long lasting structures. By applying this concept to development, it is possible to address the nuances of social change in terms of the interplay between the solid and liquid aspects of modernization." (Raymond Lee 1) In the backdrop of anachronistic pre-Modern setting and "in the guise of incongruent pseudo philosophical sayings," the novel is a testimony to the blatant manifestation of the liquid times, deploying "an army of letters in the service of the yellow devil." (Sekhar 1) The elements of Bauman's concept "Liquid Modernity" need to be highlighted before analyzing its manifestations in *The Alchemist*.

#### **3.2 Liquid Modernity:**

Liquid Modernity (sometimes called Late Modernity) is the term coined by Z. Bauman to portray the present condition of the world in the phase of Modernity of the globalization era- as contrasted with the "solid" modernity of the earlier version "symbolized in his view by steel and concrete where as the liquid modern metaphor is cyber space." (Sekhar 11) It regards their state as a continuation or development of modernity, rather than as a distinct new state, post-modernity. The passage from "solid" to "liquid" modernity created what Bauman calls

a new and unprecedented setting for individual life pursuits, confronting individuals with a series of challenges never before encountered. Social forms and institutions no longer have enough time to solidify and cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life plans, so individuals have to find other ways to organize their lives. (Bauman 2007)

Unlike in solid modernity the hallmark of life in the liquid modernity is mobility. One has to run and to move forward, and uncertainty, loneliness and insecurity are all pervading. Life is liquid and it flows, melting all that is solid. Like all liquids individuals, relations and societies do not keep their shape for long. "It assumes any form but cannot hold it any longer. The liquid modern individual is confined and prefers to remain in his/ her shell [self] after getting out of the communitarian bond." (Sekhar 11)

### **3.3 Demerits of post-modernity and the rise of liquid modernity**

Raymond Lee (2005) rightly sees Bauman's liquid modernity as part of "a general response to the recent decline of postmodernism" and its failure "to go beyond the critique of foundationalism." (Lee 62) By its deliberate reduction of the social to a mere system of differences and the subject to an illusion of individuality or self-presence, postmodernism "exorcised actors and agents from society and therefore could not adequately explain the meaning of social action and change." (Raymond Lee 62) Despite representing a spirited attack on the power structures of modernity, its adamantly anti-foundational nature hinders it from laying down principles for an alternative structure. Postmodernism parodied modernity and, thus, took on a humorous structure that could not conceivably be translated into statements on temporal changes in society. Yet, since the social world had moved on and changed dramatically, social theorists had to invent new terms like neo-modernism to describe and explain these transformations. In using this term, Alexander (1995: 85 quoted by Lee 62) sought to present a view of contemporary society that included the victory of the neo-liberal right, the high-level transformations of the newly industrializing countries, and the reinvigoration of the capitalist market. (Raymond Lee 62) He concluded that the new social conditions prompted a return to many modernist themes relevant to the question of development.

Social theorists such as Lash (1990), and sociologists such as Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens, criticize adherents of postmodernity that presume "the ending of the modernization process and the dawning of a new era. Contemporary modernity, they argue, rather involves a continuation or even a radicalization of the modernization

process." (Marc Cools et al. 88) On technological and social changes since the 1960s, the concept of "late modernity" proposes that contemporary societies are a clear continuation of modern institutional transitions and cultural developments. Such authors talk about a reflexive modernization process: "social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character." (Giddens, 1990: 38) Modernity now tends to be self-referring, instead of being defined largely in opposition to traditionalism, as with classical modernity.

Anthony Giddens (1990) does not dispute that important changes have occurred since "high" modernity, but he argues that we have not truly abandoned modernity. Rather, the modernity of contemporary society is a developed, radicalized, 'late' modernity - but still modernity, not postmodernity. In such a perspective, "so-called post-modernism turns out to be a technological hyper-intensification of modernism... continued enmeshment in modernism." (Appignanesi et al 126, 172)

### **3.4 Is Liquid Modernity a Return to Modernism?**

Bauman's works on Late Modernity represent a return to such modernist themes as the revival of the market, the global spread of democracy, and the vital role of agency. His (1992) theory of postmodernity stressed "the vital role of agency in dealing with social change and the individual agents' choice under conditions of plurality." (Bauman, 1992a: 191–203) Yet a decade later, his concern with choice no longer addressed the postmodern but the uncertain future characterized by a "fluid world of globalization, deregulation and individualization." (Bauman, 2002: 19) He directs his metaphor of liquid modernity towards a critique of the aqueous foundation of modernity which reflects his probable "dissatisfaction with the inability of post-modernism to confront the emerging conditions of inequality" (Raymond Lee 62) not only in the West (as in his earlier works) but also around the world. The notion of liquidity is, thus, appropriate for conceptualizing the flow of modernity and its consequences around the world.

### **3.5 From Solidity to Liquidity**

But to understand this shift to liquidity, it is necessary to examine the theoretical context in which Bauman addressed the inadequacies of a solid modernity. Modernity appears solid due to the swift centralization of institutional power. Weber (1946) sees its solidification as analogous to the transition from traditional to legal-bureaucratic authority. "Bureaucratic

structures may seem to be more solid than traditional ones but are vulnerable to the softening' effects of charisma." (Lee 63) Similarly, Giddens's (1990) treatment of modernity attributes institutional power to

the nexus between capitalism, industrialism, surveillance and the military. Modernity is solid in the sense that the combined power of these interlocking institutions overwhelms any individual effort to keep tradition in place, and makes 'Western expansion seemingly irresistible." (Giddens, 1990: 63)

However, he construed "the reflexive process inherent in modernity to have 'softening' effects on institutional structures." (Lee 63) Thus, new knowledge generated by modernity is applicable reflexively to undercut its apparent solidity.

Comparing Weber and Giddens shows modernity as solid in so far as institutional power is consolidated through a process of seemingly "uncompromising changes in social structures." However, this power is not absolute since charisma and reflexivity comprise the solvents that can possibly liquefy the existing preparations of institutions. "The notion of liquefaction is built into this power-driven model of modernity that stresses the fluid nature of social practice" (Lee 63) where the exercise of power at a micro level imply using strategies to produce a highly intricate portrait of how modern institutions work. Hence, "it is not the solid formation of institutions that seems real but the practices within that soften the texture of reality." (Lee 63) Therefore, solid modernity is considered by and large a myth. Its solidity cannot be taken for granted but is qualified by resistance, contradictions and other softening effects perceived at the ground level. Like Weber and Giddens, Bauman perceived modern contradictions to be the source of social practices that challenged the appearance of institutional solidity.

#### **4. Liquidity in *The Alchemist*: Main Five Features**

##### **4.1 Feature (1) Individuality and Selfishness**

##### **4.1 A- The Centrality of Personal Legend**

The manifestations of Liquid Modernity in *The Alchemist* are cleverly depicted in five features. The first is the hero's Personal Legend, which is, like everything in the world, his reason to live. While reaching one's Personal Legend adds to the Soul of the World, one can never find true happiness without fulfilling it. Each of the central characters has his obvious Personal Legend: Santiago's is to find his treasure, the alchemist's

is to accomplish the Master Work, the crystal merchant's is to visit Mecca, and the Tarifa baker's to travel the world. Santiago's Personal Legend drives him to his treasure, and the alchemist to become the most famed alchemist in the world, whereas Santiago's father, the Tarifa baker and the crystal merchant choose to ignore their Personal Legend, and thus shape their life to be forever wanting.

In *The Alchemist*, Personal Legends serve as the individual's sole means for leading a satisfying life as well as the universe's means to achieve perfection when all natural things constantly go through a cycle of achieving their Personal Legend, and evolve into an elevated being with a new Personal Legend, and then pursuing that new goal. At the center of the unique theology of *The Alchemist* lies this belief that the individualistic pursuit of a Personal Legend is life's dominant- perhaps only- spiritual demand. The hero, Santiago, who has undertaken a selfish exasperating journey, is "an atomistic individual who defines the world for his own sake. Exalted in the novel is his expedition to become affluent" (Sekhar 12) by appropriating the hidden treasure. When material success and even love pose obstacles to Santiago achieving his Personal Legend, he delays or ignores them altogether. Those who put off their Personal Legends, such as the crystal merchant, suffer regret and fail to experience the wealth and other favors that the universe bestows upon those who follow their Personal Legends. Obviously, the primary theme of *The Alchemist* is the necessity for all individuals to live in the singular pursuit of their individual dreams.

The central idea of Personal Legend is given strength, with variety, through the character of the English man whom Santiago met after leaving the Crystal merchant in search of a caravan to take him across the desert. During his search of an alchemist who was said to live at the Al-Fayoum desert oasis, the Englishman was in a caravan,

sitting on a bench in a structure that smelled of animals, sweat, and dust; it was part warehouse, part corral. I never thought I'd end up in a place like this, he thought, as he leafed through the pages of a chemical journal. Ten years at university, and here I am in a corral.

But he had to move on. He believed in omens. All his life and all his studies were aimed at finding the one true language of the universe. First he had studied Esperanto, then the world's religions, and now it was alchemy. He knew how to speak Esperanto, he understood all the major religions well, but he wasn't yet an alchemist. (*The Alchemist* 67)



Their conversation showed that the Englishman had not only heard of the two stones, Urim and Thummim and learned of them in the Bible, but possessed two of his own as the only form of divination God permitted. It also showed the Englishman's fascination with the study of alchemy, and the boy's desire to experience the world and discover a hidden treasure. In different ways, both attempt to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, relying on their contemplation of nature and their idea of the Soul of the World. As the caravan set off into the desert toward Al-Fayoum Oasis.

The boy went back to contemplating the silence of the desert, and the sand raised by the animals. "Everyone has his or her own way of learning things," he said to himself. "His way isn't the same as mine, nor mine as his. But we are both in search of our Personal Legends, and I respect him for that. (*The Alchemist* 85)

#### **4.1 B- Dreams as a motif for Personal Legend**

In *The Alchemist*, dreams are used as a motif for Personal Legend. They represent not only an outlet into one's inner desires, but also a form of communication with the Soul of the World. Santiago's dream of a treasure in Egypt, for instance, reveals to him his Personal Legend and sets the entire plot of *the Alchemist* into motion. The extent of the characters' belief in dreams creates a dividing line between the "enlightened" and "unenlightened" characters. Santiago's dream of the hawks is taken very seriously by the tribal chieftain, and is understood as a message from the desert of an impending assault. This insight allows the chief to defend the oasis against attack. Eventually, Santiago is beaten by a man who does not believe his own dream. However, on describing his dream, Santiago recognizes it as an omen telling him where to find the treasure. The novelist draws a parallel between the importance of actual, sleeping dreams and the importance of personal, symbolic dreams which Personal Legends embody.

#### **4.2 Feature (2) Globalization, Capitalism, No morality**

Secondly, Coelho's dexterity mixes up his fable with sham philosophical aphorisms entitled 'The Soul of the World' which suggests that; "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (*The Alchemist* 21) provided that such aspired 'thing' should be the aim of your life and you restlessly move towards the destiny, the leitmotif of the novel. The dominant symbol in the novel that gives the novel its title, Alchemy, represents Santiago's journey to achieve his Personal Legend. Like the metal, Santiago can realize his own Personal Legend and achieve a higher state by ridding himself of impurities, such

as his desire for his parents' acceptance, his desire to live as a rich shepherd, and even his love. Learning the craft of alchemy parallels achieving his Personal Legend; from the alchemist Santiago learns that the various books written about alchemy have only complicated the craft because all the secrets of alchemy exist on the small Emerald Tablet and cannot be expressed in words. Similarly, the individual must follow his own instincts and the omens provided by the Soul of the World since no printed instructions can conduct a person to his Personal Legend.

It is largely for his listening to this Soul of the World and depending on books and reason to understand the world that the mysterious 200- year-old extremely- powerful Alchemist residing at the Al- Fayoum Oasis chose Santiago rather than the Englishman as his pupil. His wisdom connects Santiago to the mystical Soul of the World that provides him with his supernatural abilities and teaches him how to read and communicate with the world. Threatened by death, Santiago asked the sun for help but it acknowledged its own limitations. Instead, the sun suggested that the boy ask 'the hand that wrote all':

The boy turned to the hand that wrote all. As he did so, he sensed that the universe had fallen silent, and he decided not to speak...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 that the Soul of God was his own soul. And that he, a boy, could perform miracles. (*The Alchemist* 154)

Obviously Santiago's eventual transformation is reached by both listening to his own heart and communicating with his environment.

#### **4.2 The Four Pillars of Alchemy**

In *The Alchemist* four pillars of alchemy form the physical representations of the natural forces of the universe helping the individual reaching his goal. (a) The first pillar suggested by Coelho is the Soul of the World as an expression of all things that exist. It is a belief in the strong connection among all things in life as parts of the same whole where each individual affects, and is affected by, what occurs in the world and vice-versa. Since a thousand lifetimes would not be enough for most people to understand the enormity of this Soul, people ought to acknowledge its existence through their beliefs and spend their time more fruitfully by trying to find out what their aspiration and the unique part in it all actually is.

However, Coelho never says that the aspiration is a qualified one to be successful. It need not be a noble, respectable or upright one; "No

moral tags or normative taboos are attached.” (Sekhar 13) Melchizedek preaches to the hero that if the aim is yours- the one chosen for you by the universe, the soul of the universe conspires to make it happen. Don’t ask what is this soul of the universe and why is its intention a conspiracy. The king of Salem tells Santiago: “Whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it is because that desire originated in the soul of the universe. It’s your mission on earth.” The docile hero has an innocent query: “Even when all you want to do is travel? Or marry the daughter of a textile merchant?” The mythical king’s response is thus:

yes, or even search for treasure. 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 obligation. All things are one. ... And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” (*The Alchemist* 21)

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. Anna Hassapi reads the novel as “an exciting novel that bursts with optimism ... (and) tells you that everything is possible as long as you really want it to happen.” This is an “oversimplified version of new-age philosophy and mysticism,” (A. Hassapi, n. p.) but, as the alchemist says when he leaves Santiago, everything from a grain of sand to God himself shares the same spiritual essence. Such pantheistic view dominates the novel, and “along with the individual, evolutionary theology expressed in the theme of alchemy, it forms the book’s core spiritual message.” (SparkNotes Editors n. p.)

(b) The second of the four pillars of alchemy forming the physical representation of the natural forces of the universe is the voice of the heart. This is understood to mean the core of an individual, the part of them that is unique and distinct, whilst at the same time being connected to all things, connected to the Soul of the World. It is only by getting in touch with his heart and listening to what it has to say that Santiago can find his treasure and fulfill his Personal Legend. Coelho seems to say that if we listen to our hearts, we can understand truth because our hearts can tell us what is right for us to do in any situation. That said, it is not always easy to listen to what our hearts have to say, as the boy discovers himself.

**“But my heart is agitated,” the boy said. “It has its dreams, it gets emotional, and it’s become passionate over a woman of the desert. It**

**asks things of me, and it keeps me from sleeping many nights, when I'm thinking about her."**

**"Well, that's good. Your heart is alive. Keep listening to what it has to say." (*The Alchemist* 130)**

Days passed as both Santiago and the alchemist continued across the desert. As they progressed they came into contact with more and more armed tribesmen, reminding them of the danger that lay unseen all around them. During this time, the boy found his heart, his core. Through dialogue with his heart the boy understood what he needed to understand in order to be in communion with the Soul of the World.

**The sun was setting when the boy's heart sounded a danger signal. They were surrounded by gigantic dunes, and the boy looked at the alchemist to see if he had sensed anything. But he appeared to be unaware of any danger. Five minutes later the boy saw two horsemen waiting ahead of them. Before he could say anything to the alchemist, the two horsemen had become ten, and then a hundred. And then they were everywhere in the dunes. (*The Alchemist* 140)**

However, fear (mainly of failure) persistently appears to be the primary stumbling block hindering Santiago from following his heart and fulfilling his Personal Legend. The several forms of fear Santiago experiences include "a childhood fear of having the gypsy woman interpret his dream; a material fear of losing his wealth by departing to Tangier or by joining the desert caravan; the physical fear of dying in the battle at Al-Fayoum; and the spiritual fear that he will fail to turn himself into the wind when the alchemist forces him to try." (SparkNotes Editors n. p.) "My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy told the alchemist who replies: "Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams." (*The Alchemist* passim)

However, only enlightened characters could defeat fear and consider it irrelevant, even in the face of death, if they faithfully pursue their dreams. In the silence of the desert, the boy learned about the magnitude and interconnectedness of existence, and of life. This education was compounded by conversations with the camel driver, one of the guides for the journey across the desert. To warn the boy against fear, the camel driver spoke of his past where he owned an olive orchard on the banks of the Nile. One day the ground shuddered, and the Nile overflowed flooding the surrounding areas, including the camel driver's orchard.

**The land was ruined, and I had to find some other way to earn a living. So now I am a camel driver. But the disaster told me to understand the word of Allah: people need not fear the unknown if they are capable of achieving what they need and want. (*The Alchemist* 78)**

While Santiago condemns fear by comparing it to materialism, and describes it as “a product of misunderstanding how the universe treats those pursuing their Personal Legends”, fear dominates *The Alchemist*’s weakest characters represented by the crystal merchant whose fear rules his life. Denying him a happy and fulfilled life; thus, he never takes action to fulfill his dream of making the pilgrimage to Mecca required of every Muslim for fear that once he’s made the trip he will have nothing else to live for.

The Desert, with its harsh conditions and tribal wars, is another symbol of the serious difficulties that await anyone in pursuit of their Personal Legend, but it also serves as an important teacher to Santiago on his journey to find the treasure. Tests are an inherent part of all Personal Legends, because they create spiritual growth. So, the desert heat, silence, emptiness, and monotony test Santiago and teach him about the desert as containing life and the Soul of the World. In a wasteland, Santiago comprehends his environment, sees the signs of life and, eventually, learns to recognize all of creation in a single grain of sand. The greatest test he faces made him discover his ability to procure the desert in his effort to become the wind. So, listening to one’s heart and facing fear are a vital part of alchemy.

(c) The third pillar of alchemy is destiny/ fate and its role in achieving Personal Legend. Its significance is outlined by Coelho in an interview:

**You have to follow your dreams. You have to try to be happy. You have to be faithful to your dreams because they are there for a reason. There is a meaning for them. God doesn't mean you to be frustrated. They are there to test you, but also to be fulfilled. (Berwick 1994)**

Each person’s pre-determined destiny is presented through the idea of the Personal Legend. Santiago’s destiny is alive in his heart, and it is presented to him through his dreams. The word ‘*maktub*’ (it is written) becomes a reassuring refrain for Santiago, reminding him to see his actions in the context of fate that always cooperates with those in pursuit of their Personal Legends, so as long as he remains focused on their goals.

Moreover, fate is constantly intertwined with will, and how much in life is under one's control, and how much is controlled by fate. In the town plaza, the boy meets the king of Salem, King Melchizedek. Taking the book from him the king divulged the world's greatest lie to the boy:

**“What’s the world’s greatest lie?” the boy asked, completely surprised. “It is this: that at a certain point in our lives we lose control of what’s happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That’s the world’s greatest lie. (*The Alchemist* 20)**

True this point of view seems provide confirmation that Will has a stronger hold on one's destiny, but such later events as the arrest of Santiago and the alchemist by warring tribes demonstrate fate's hold on one's life. However, the characters are capable to excavate themselves from every situation where fate does take over such as in Santiago's ability to demonstrate his power, turn himself into the wind, and is released from his capture.

(d) The omens are the fourth and last pillar of alchemy and are indispensable to Santiago's journey to achieve his Personal Legend. The king asserted that one will fulfill one's Personal Legend more easily by heeding omens. Moreover, since omens were not always the easiest things to read, he gave the boy a white stone and a black one called Urim and Thummin. “The black signifies ‘yes’, and the white ‘no’. When you are unable to read the omen, they will help you to do so. Always ask an objective question.” (*The Alchemist* 32) Through the omens one can listen to the universe, tune in to the Soul of the World, and understand the true nature of things. The omens tell the boy of things that have come to pass, things that are, and how things will soon be.

Thus the motif of omens serves a dual purpose in *The Alchemist*. First, omens guide Santiago on his journey and reassure him that the Soul of the World has endorsed his journey. To Melchizedek, omens are part of the Universal Language of the World, and Santiago can always find the meaning in his environment provided he taps into this language. Being advised to know what he wanted and, then, to ask very clear questions, Santiago asked if the old man's blessing was still with him. He took out one of the stones. It was ‘yes.’

**“Am I going to find my treasure?” he asked.**

**He stuck his hand into the pouch and felt around for one of the stones. As he did so, both of them pushed through a hole in the pouch and fell**

**to the ground. The boy had never even noticed that there was a hole in his pouch. (*The Alchemist* 43)**

When the stones drop from his pocket, Santiago chooses to consider the event an omen. In doing so, he preserves the feeling that the universe conspires to help him, and he finds meaning in the seemingly random event.

The power of omens continues with the boy at the crystal merchant's where cleaning the crystal was offered in exchange for food. As he was cleaning the merchant sold two pieces of crystal. Not being ignorant of omens himself, the merchant offered the boy a job cleaning crystal:

**"Do you want to go to work for me?" the merchant asked.**

**"I can work for the rest of today," the boy answered. "I'll work all night, until dawn, and I'll clean every piece of crystal in your shop. In return, I need money to get to Egypt tomorrow."**

The merchant laughed. **"Even if you cleaned my crystal for an entire year...even if you earned a good commission selling every piece, you would still have to borrow money to get to Egypt. There are thousands of kilometers of desert between here and there."**

**There was a moment of silence so profound that it seemed the city was asleep. No sound from the bazaars, no arguments among the merchants, no men climbing the towers to chant. No hope, no adventure, no old kings, or Personal Legends, no treasure, and no Pyramids. It was as if the world had fallen silent because the boy's soul had. He sat there, staring blankly through the door of the café, wishing that he had died, and that everything would end forever at that moment. (*The Alchemist* 48)**

Rather than considering himself to be a victim, the boy was empowered and given an insight as he decided that he was "an adventurer looking for treasure". This decision to continue brought himself closer to his dream.

Secondly, omens serve to demonstrate Santiago's spiritual growth throughout the story as they brought him closer to who he truly was, and, then, made him more aware of what the true nature of his surroundings is. The omens he experiences grow in relevance from being small, limited events to important visions that affect many lives. His vision of the hawks and approaching armies, for example, tells him of a deadly assault on the oasis. That his omens develop into more and more imperative signifies close approaching to a deep perception of the pure Language of the World. On

news of a forthcoming tribal war in the desert, the caravan stayed on at the oasis and the boy become more accustomed to desert life, and understood more about the Soul of the World. One day there, he saw a pair of hawks flying in the sky.

**He watched the hawks as they drifted on the wind. Although their flight appeared to have no pattern it made a certain kind of sense to the boy. It was just that he couldn't grasp what it meant. He followed the movement of the birds trying to read something into it. Maybe these desert birds could explain to him the meaning of love without ownership. (*The Alchemist* 101)**

On seeing the birds' frolic about the sky, Santiago started to feel that he understood their movements, and gained access to the Language of the World. When one of the hawks began attacking the other, the boy had a flashing vision, seeing an army invading the oasis. With the old king's advice to always heed the omens, the image left him feeling uneasy afterwards. When he shared his vision with the tribal chieftains who consider listening to the messages of the desert a part of their way of life, but suspect why the boy, an outsider, had been chosen to relay this message. The eventual settlement was that if the boy was right he would be paid in gold for his warning, but if he was misguided, he would pay with his life.

**The boy left the tent and started to walk back to his own.**

**Suddenly he heard a thundering sound, and he was thrown to the ground by a wind such as he had never known. The area was swirling in dust so intense that it hid the moon from view. Before him was an enormous white horse, rearing over him with a frightening scream.**

**When the blinding dust had settled a bit, the boy trembled at what he saw. Astride the animal was a horseman dressed completely in black, with a falcon perched on his left shoulder. He wore a turban and his entire face, except for his eyes, was covered with a black kerchief. He appeared to be a messenger from the desert, but his presence was much more powerful than that of a mere messenger. (*The Alchemist* 110)**

The horseman demanded to know how the boy had interpreted the flight of the hawks and how he could understand what the hand of Allah's almighty wrote. Soon enough, tribesmen made their way into the oasis but, being outnumbered by the men of the oasis, were soon quelled. On receiving his gold, he boy set off in search of the alchemist. Together, the response and



the prophecy were enough to convince the boy that he should continue his pursuit of his Personal legend at the pyramids.

#### 4.3 Feature (3) Mobility & Change of place and time

The third feature of Z. Bauman's Liquid Modernity in Coelho's *The Alchemist* is impermanence that took three forms: mobility, place and time.

##### 4.3 (A) Moving and Change

(a) The question of impermanence /moving was already central to Baumann's discourse on mortality when he asked how we can make sense of anything if "only the transience itself is durable." (Bauman, 1992b: 174) Similarly, the running thread in *The Alchemist* is mobility, and readiness for change and trekking new paths. "Change is not a natural one. It is quite achievable by the self, the individuated 'I' that is the driving force of the change. This philosophy is typical of Western individualism." (Sekhar 21) Bauman's Liquid Modernity is characterized by the privatization of ambivalence and increasing sense of doubt. In this kind of "chaotic continuation" of modernity, one can shift from one social position to another fluidly. Nomadism becomes an essential part of the liquid modern man who flows through his own life like a sightseer, changing places, vocations, friends, spouses, ethics and sometimes even more (such as political or sexual orientation), (self-)excluded from the traditional networks of support.

Bauman stressed "the profound change which the advent of "fluid modernism" has brought to the human condition...the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure falling primarily on the individual's shoulders." (Bauman, 2000: 8) The globalized social world takes on "the pattern of a caravan site. The place is open to everyone with his or her own caravan and enough money to pay the rent." (Bauman, 2000: 23) The result is a normative mindset dominated by "the new pieties...that it is both more truthful and better not to know who you are, that it is preferable to slip, shift or float than to know, stop or stay;" (Adam Phillips 124) a mindset with "its characteristic conditions of perpetual motion as a mode of being", peopled by a subject "imprisoned, as it were, in an existential freedom of his own making." (Richard Brown 196 and 219)

*The Alchemist* "gives enough kick to those on either side of the Atlantic, the one in the race of Modern life and yearning to reach the shore of the Atlantic, and craves to be swept away in the dollar current." (Sekhar 15) The novel whose selling attended the rise of the globalization ideology

preaches the necessity for the individual to be ready to change him/her self and reorient it in the process of achieving Personal legend. Mobility in the novel is uninterrupted, starting with the mobile hero roaming the Andalucian countryside with his sheep and ending up in his rushing towards his beloved after finding the treasure chest at his very starting point. In between he encounters numerous surprises. Being mobile is an attribute of life in the liquid modern societies. "Interruption, incoherence, surprise are the ordinary conditions of our life. They have become real needs for many people, whose minds are no longer fed by anything but sudden changes and constantly renewed stimuli. We can no longer bear anything that lasts. We no longer know how to make boredom bear fruit,' says Paul Valery. The novel depicts this ideology." (Sekhar 15)

#### 4.3 (B) Forgetting the past time

In addition to mobility, the idea of transience in Bauman's Liquid Modernity captures change as the inability to stay with a tendency towards the acceptance of new values underlying our conception of existence, while the past is mainly forgotten and remains ineffective. For Bauman,

**Transience has replaced durability at the top of the value table. What is valued today (by choice as much as by unchosen necessity) is the ability to be on the move, to travel light and at short notice. Power is measured by the speed with which responsibilities can be escaped. Who accelerates, wins; who stays put, loses. (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 95)**

As a result, transience has a built-in value towards the obsession with novelty. A transient environment is one that continually generates new objects to be admired, possessed and consumed momentarily. It produces an attachment to the quick turnover of anything. An ethic of desultory consumerism ensues from such an attachment. As Bauman (1998a: 81) put it, "Ideally, nothing should be embraced by a consumer firmly, nothing should command a commitment till death do us part, no needs should be seen as fully satisfied, no desires considered ultimate." The sense of freedom experienced in the perpetual state of transience can be translated as "the plenitude of consumer choice." (Bauman, 2000: 89) According to Bauman a society is formed of individuals who are tied only to themselves and only to the present rather than to their societies or their past.

In a similar vein, the hero of *The Alchemist* is a historical figure who embraces nothing firmly, even his own relations to the past.

**He never feels affection for his native culture. Even if a little bit of it is there, he needs to distance with it to pursue his goal. He is an atom cut off from his past like his peers- modern individuals were born during the Industrial Revolution. For them past is a nightmare, a frightening bond. Freedom precisely begins when you chuck out of it. Father, mother, native village and its culture and nature - all are a liability and jinxed. The more you are away from the past, the more modern you are. And of course you may employ the past occasionally to serve your modern objectives. Modernity has no past. Its very foundation is the destruction of the past. Mobility makes one move out of the past and adapt to modernity. (Sekhar 16)**

Many a time Santiago derides village life. His initial desire to come out of his village for the sake of seeing various places is modified into an expedition for treasure. The hero is mobile for yellow metal as the avowed object of his devout long march is to become rich. He has “no good memories of his childhood. He never feels sorry for leaving parents and his village milieu. He thinks of his parents only in the context of what he calls monotonous life in villages where all days are spent in the same way.” (Sekhar 16) “His parents had wanted him to become a priest, and there by a source of pride for a simple farm family.” (*The Alchemist* 8) But, he refuses to be so and opts out to travel across the country. His father says that the poor shepherd is the only means to enable him to travel. He purchases sheep with the money [some coins] given by his father, and assumes mobility, leaving his parents, village and later even his country. He gets freedom from the community in which he was part of. Freedom presupposes the question where from, says Bauman. For the hero, “it is from community and consanguine bonds. Afterward, everything is individuated and throughout the novel he has never been part of any community.” (Sekhar 16)

Even Santiago’s shepherdness and his affiliation with the sheep are liquid rather than solid and are meant for his mobility. “A shepherd may like to travel, but he should never forget about his sheep” says the king of Salem to him.” (*The Alchemist* 31) However, he soon forgets the sheep and is no more a shepherd. Though he occasionally had some solid bonding with the herd- talking to them, responding to their vows and reading out books to them, “his loving relationship is akin to that of a modern with consuming goods and means of mobility like cars and motor bikes.” (Sekhar 17) He has only a “fleeting coalition and floating bond” with the sheep. He sells them for procuring funds to his treasure hunt. Thus, his initial inheritance was

initially transformed from a transport- friendly sheep into liquid cash. Thus, ceases his fragile corporeal bond with his family and village. It is also the end of his brittle bond with the nature. "It was as if some mysterious energy bound his life to that of sheep." (*The Alchemist* 4)

#### **4.3(C) Forgetting the place and attacking the countryside**

Besides mobility and forgetting the past, the idea of forgetting pastoral place is essential. Village life emerges as anathema to Baumann's liquid modernity and Coelho's novel. It is better qualified to be a holiday posture but not inhabitable for long. Lasting societies, like relationships to people and past, are built by people who have to find ways to live together and face the exigencies of their physical and economic environments. But with modern technology the dependence on territory is diminished and the technologically and economically enabled can simply move from one opportunity to another and are not tied to the economic fortunes of any one particular territory. Those tied to a territory are fated to experience booms and busts with no long lasting support from society.

Coelho's novel indicates similar despise for country life. In Santiago's village "every day was like all others." (*The Alchemist* 5) For the daughter of the dry fruit merchant "every day was the same." (*The Alchemist* 26) While talking to her 'he recognizes that he was feeling something he had never experienced: "The desire to live in one place." (*The Alchemist* 6-7) It is against the desire to be mobile of the liquid moderns. "His purpose in life was to travel" (*The Alchemist* 7) with preparedness for change, (*The Alchemist* 7) "seeking out a new road to travel whenever he could." (*The Alchemist* 9)

#### **4.4 Feature (4) emancipation from community/ Love**

The fourth feature of Bauman's Liquid Modernity in Coelho's *The Alchemist* is the individual's emancipation from all communal and personal ties. I'll concentrate in this context on the individual's liquid relationships with the community, and with love. Concerning the former

##### **4.4 (A) Liquid Relationships to the Community**

Bauman gives an account of how modernity's emphasis on the individual has resulted in the destruction of the traditional social norms all in the name of giving freedom and self-determination to the individual. However this freedom is in many ways illusionary. Society may have restricted an individual but in many ways it enabled him by supplying the support and infrastructure for them to live their lives. Being on their own,

individuals must construct themselves from the beginning without support and must construct the measures that allow them to assess the meaning and success of their lives. They are bound by their own freedom. Bauman shows how modern technologies that diminish the dependence on territory and facilitate mobility from one opportunity to another have led to the loss of interdependency. Long lasting relationships and societies are built by people who have to find ways to live together. Those tied to a territory are fated to experience booms and busts with no long lasting support from society.

Bauman's vision of the current world is one in which individuals must to splice together an unending series of short-term projects and episodes that don't add up to the kind of sequence to which concepts like "career" and "progress" could be meaningfully applied. Individuals' fragmented lives require them to be flexible and adaptable - to be constantly ready and willing to change tactics at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability. (Bauman, 2007)

Similarly, there is no communitarian life in liquid modern characters in *The Alchemist* where society is also "a zombie category." "Having no solid relationship with anyone and ever ready to leave one bond to enter into another gratifying one are the striking feature of the liquid modern world." (Sekhar 18) "Whether it is friendship, love or commerce there are only", to use Bauman's phrase, until further notice-relationships." *The Alchemist* symbolizes this as the hero is not made part of any community or society. This reminds the famous statement of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher in the British parliament in late 1980s: "Show me where is society? There are only individuals." Society "has been degenerated into networking, and human relations are reduced to the status of being in "touch." (Sekhar 19) The individual has liquid relationship with the community.

Moreover, liquid relationships are extended to the members of one's own family. Unlike 'relations', 'kinships', 'partnerships' and similar notions that make salient the mutual engagement, in a network, connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices that are exercised by the protagonist. The only friend he has is one with whom he has fleeting relationship that ends up with sale-purchase transaction (Santiago keeps his sheep with his friend and later sells them to him).

**The boy knew a lot of people in the city [Tarifa]. That was what made traveling appeal to him---he always made new friends, and he didn't need to spend all of his time with them. When someone sees the same**

**people every day, as had happened with him at the seminary, they wind up becoming a part of that person's life. (*The Alchemist* 15)**

In *The Alchemist* the flippancy of human relations is denoted by the contemporary city-style life. Even in Tangier Santiago has no in-depth relationship with anyone. The novelist designates the Salem king and the Gypsy woman as "solitary individuals who no longer believed in things, and didn't understand that shepherds become attached to their sheep." (*The Alchemist* 25) But the case is truer with Santiago who likes to have the same tangential rapport with everyone like what the hero has with lodge boys in the Kafka's short story *The Metamorphosis*. Unlike in Kafka's story, having such marginal tie-ups is not a quandary to the hero and, therefore, "there cannot be any blending of biographies. This reflects the trajectory of human relations that moved from solid to liquid modernity. Either in Andalusia or in the Tangier with people the hero has only monetary relationship. He is in a cash nexus." (Sekhar 19)

#### 4.4 (b) Love

Obviously, love emerges in *The Alchemist* as a part of the Soul of the World. It occurs in life and Nature, as everything supports and loves each other. Santiago tells the desert that it shows love for the alchemist's falcon by offering it game, after which the falcon shows love to man as it offers the game to eat, and the man shows love for the desert as after one dies, his body is reintegrated into the desert sands. There is also love in people, demonstrated by Santiago's love of the fruit vendor daughter and of the beauty of Fatima, a girl who lives at the Al-Fayoum oasis, and Santiago's knowing that it is part of his Personal Legend to love her. As with the village, parents and the sheep, the hero had only such a liquid relationship with his maiden lover and with Fatima.

As the story begins, we learn that a year ago Santiago – the shepherd, who spends several years traveling the countryside of Andalusia in southern Spain, enjoying the care-free and adventurous life of a wanderer- met this beautiful girl- anonymous daughter of a dry fruit vendor- in a town he is soon to revisit. Even though he spent only a few hours talking with her, his strong feelings for her make him question his life as a shepherd and make him consider the merits of a more settled life. As soon as he feels worried that her memory might distract him from his treasure, he abandons the route to her place. "Earning riches necessitates discarding his lover. He nurtures justifications." (Sekhar 18) "Maybe the girl had already forgotten him. Lots of shepherds passed through, selling their wool." "It doesn't matter", he said

to his sheep. "I know other girls in other places." (*The Alchemist* 6) Coelho seems to have thought of deserting lover as a virtuous quality supporting his idea of liquid modern.

As the boy and the Englishman continue to make enquiries, the boy met that 'other girl', Fatima.

**At that moment it seemed to him that time stood still, and the Soul of the World surged within him. When he looked into her dark eyes and saw that her lips were poised between a laugh and silence, he learned the most important part of the language that all the world spoke – the language that everyone on earth was capable of understanding in their heart. It was love. (*The Alchemist* 94)**

On asking Fatima of the alchemist's whereabouts, she told him of a man who communicates with "the genies of the desert." Meanwhile the boy and Fatima continued to meet for a month. Though the boy had already confessed his love to Fatima on their second meeting, she responded after a month. Fatima told the boy what it was to be a woman of the desert. It is also symbolic that Santiago finds his soul-mate, and the secrets of wisdom in the wilderness of the desert, a symbol used in Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In the desert, Santiago meets his "twin-soul" and discovers that love is the core of existence and creation. As Coelho explains, when we love, we always try to improve ourselves, and that's when everything is possible. There love could only be possible if it did not entail possession. On asking Fatima to marry him, Santiago is perplexed by Fatima's insistence that he seeks out his Personal Legend before they marry and that she would be waiting for him. For if he did not he would always remain a man unfulfilled, and thus that would also be her burden. The Alchemist teaches him that "True love is love that allows you to reach your Personal Legend." It never gets in the way of fulfilling one's dreams. If it does, then it is not true love. Therefore, the tie-up with Fatima is as liquid as his yearning for money. He leaves her, moves forward in the dangerous path of the treasure hunt with the help of the money that the Arabs had gifted him. "Nothing is left to remain solid except with the yearning for money. Nothing should be allowed to be a solid relationship causing impediment to mobility. Everything is liquid that flows eluding captivity and changing its form and course. Everyone is a mobile atomistic being." (Sekhar 18)

#### 4.5 Feature (5) Work/ consumptive society

The fifth feature of Bauman's Liquid modernity in Coelho's *The Alchemist* is that society is mainly governed by capitalist ethics manifested

by three respective points: consumption versus production, devaluing academic speculations/ books and the absence of morality and religion.

#### 4.5 (A) capitalism: consumption vs. production

Concerning consumption, the hero never comes across a farmer in his entire journey across Andalusia. The scenario is identical on either side of Gibraltar Strait. While no production process is ever mentioned in the novel, the regular features the reader encounters are shops and sale transactions. The conspicuous happenings in the hero's travelogue include

**buying the sheep and selling its wool to the dry fruit merchant, having contractual relationship with the Gypsy fortune teller, selling the sheep and paying money to the Salem king for his services, purchasing ticket to cross Gibraltar Strait, purchasing drink in the Tangier bar, shops and finding men and women indulged in buying and selling on the busy streets of Tangier, the commerce in the crystal shop, establishing tea kiosk and attracting consumers to the crystal shop. (Sekhar 20)**

Despite the existence of Arab betrayers, violent clashes and blood flows, the hero's impervious gold rush continues all through.

The obvious absence of any production process and the emphasis on consumption in *The Alchemist* are justifiable. As society progresses, the creation of value liquefies and begins to flow unfettered. The production time it takes for value to occur declines. To survive, products and interfaces must quickly flow from spaces of high-resistance and poor usability to spaces of low resistance and user interaction. Successful interfaces induce a liquid state of flow in their users. Environments are becoming aware of relevant information, and are able to pull context-aware data into play when necessary. Devices can be small on the outside, but large on the inside. (Quote by Sheldon Renan in conversation with Amber Case, Jun 2010) The subject is constructed in late modernity against the backdrop of a "world of fragmented and incommensurate identities and personae" (Jennifer Craik 8) - something fully commensurate with the 'rise of "life-style" cultures...' "In buying one part of the system, one buys (into) the sign system as a whole... into a lifestyle." (Kim Toffoletti 75) The framing matrix of the late modern personality is the way 'uncertainty, fragmentation, and ambiguity issue from the disembedded social relations of high (or post-) modernity', impinging upon "the self-reflexive consciousness of the newly emergent multiple self." (John Mandalios 2)



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#### 4.5 (B) No value of Books

Moreover, academic speculations and books have no efficient practical value for Coelho's characters in *The Alchemist* or the individual in Bauman's liquid societies. In some of his views Bauman is inclined to the extreme. He describes the technological elite as bound both territorially and socially. "Knowledge is created socially" and its diffusion relies on "social conventions and proximity." On the caravan to Al-Fayoum, Coelho's hero, Santiago, meets and befriends a well-educated and aspiring English alchemist going, to study with a famous alchemist, rumored to have the capability of turning metals into gold. Both share a commitment to pursuing their Personal Legends, but only the anti- social Englishman prefers reading to interacting with others or taking interest in his surroundings. Despite teaching Santiago much about alchemy and challenging him with his intellectual, knowledge-focused approach to life, he must also learn from Santiago the importance of experience and friendship. Santiago utilizes the Englishman's books as pillows and thinks that voluminous ones are better pillows. The sheep teach him more than books do, says the novel, but "after he converted the sheep into cash, he has not learnt anything from the books and if at all, only alchemy that is relevant to his treasure hunt." (Sekhar 20) Seeing the Englishman's too much focus on books, the alchemist believes that his personal development is not mature enough to allow him to be the alchemist's protégé. "Using the Englishman as its example, the novel suggests that even though knowledge gained from books can be useful, one should not rely on it solely and unconditionally." (SparkNotes Editors n. p.) Coelho's message reiterates Bauman's idea that: True wisdom comes from experience, which one must earn through action.

#### 4.5 (C) Absence of religion and morality

For Bauman, liquidity is an existential dilemma that needs to be addressed practically. When he asserted that "It is difficult to conceive of culture indifferent to eternity and shunning durability," (Bauman, 2000: 128) he implied that the ability to maintain security and morality should not be lost or forgotten in the face of on-rushing liquidity. Yet, his reference to makeshift connections in the form of cloakroom communities, carnival communities and explosive communities (Bauman, 2000: 199–201) does not augur well for efforts in restoring or reinventing the type of social bonds necessary for actualizing security and morality. "Liquidity reduces our sense of durability to suggest new levels of freedom and at the same time dissolves the bonds that reify our sense of security." (Raymond Lee 67)

In *The Alchemist* liquidity extends its effect to reduce Santiago's sense of religion and morality. Though "he had attended a seminary until he was sixteen," (*The Alchemist* 8) seminary training left no traces on him. "His daily itinerary does not include praying the Almighty. He never counted any pious Sunday. He uses Christianity only to get rid of fears of the Other in his journey for riches." (Sekhar 20) In *The Alchemist*, a kind of spiritual enlightenment is accomplished by fulfilling one's Personal Legend, and adding to the Soul of the World, which is the "light" of most religions (as described in Coelho's Beliefnet Interview). Since Santiago learns the Language of the World, as well as that of the Soul of the World, which, in turn, is related to the Soul of God, Santiago can perform miracles. Other characters who refuse to follow their dreams are presented as those who deny to see God, and "every happy person carries God within him." However, only few people choose to follow the road that has been made for them, and find God while searching for their destiny, and their mission on earth. "These are traits of the liquid moderns." (Sekhar 20) Coelho seems to suggest that the alchemists found God while searching for the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone. The symbolism of dreams is presented as "God's language."

## 5. Techniques serving Coelho's ideology

### 5.1 Binary Structure: the Liquid vs. the Solid

These five features of Coelho's liquid modernity in *The Alchemist* are disseminated first through a binary structure, namely, the **contrast** between liquid modern characters and solid (or pre-) modern characters. The Personal Legend of a person surfaces at childhood, and one can never find true happiness without fulfilling it. Santiago's Personal Legend drives him to his treasure, and the alchemist's to become the most famed alchemist in the world. While others like Santiago's father, the Tarifa baker and the crystal merchant, choose to ignore the Personal Legend, and thus shape their life to be forever wanting.

#### 5.1 (A) Liquid characters

As a mouthpiece of liquid modern characters, Santiago's curiosity and open-mindedness qualify him to find his Personal Legend by traveling the world first by becoming a shepherd roaming the fields of Andalusia. His high appreciation of freedom makes him take risks to preserve his own freedom. In the town square of Tarifa he meets Melchizedek, the king of Salem (a mysterious far-off land), who introduces Santiago to the Soul of the World and his Personal Legend. Melchizedek always appears to people

who are trying to live their Personal Legend, even if they don't know it, essentially to motivate them to continue pursuing their Personal Legends in times of doubt. Despite appearing to Santiago in flesh and blood, he explains that he appears to people more often as a symbol or idea. At one point he pulls aside his cloak to reveal a gold breastplate encrusted with precious stones. As the first character to display magical powers, he convinces Santiago to pursue his dream and gives him the magical stones Urim and Thummim which represent “yes” and “no” respectively, to help guide him on his journey. By fulfilling his obvious Personal Legend- his reason to live – Santiago adds to the Soul of the World, the purity of the world. Similarly, the alchemist, who possesses the Elixir of Life and the Philosopher's Stone, fulfils his Personal Legend of accomplishing the Master Work and . Santiago reveals himself to be the Alchemist's true disciple.

#### 5.1 (B) Solid Modern Characters

On the other hand, Coelho suggests that those who do not have the courage to follow their "Personal Myth" are doomed to a life of emptiness and misery. Solid modernity (pre- modernity) is presented by Santiago's father, the Crystal Merchant and the Tarifa baker. The Personal Legend of Santiago's father's is similar to his son's. When the father had given blessing at the time of Santiago's departure,

**the boy could see in his father's gaze a desire to be able, himself, to travel the world- a desire that was still alive, despite his father's having had to bury it, over dozens of years, under the burden of struggling for water to drink, food to eat, and the same place to sleep every night of his life. (*The Alchemist* 9)**

Here, the father works as a metaphor for pre-modernity while the son for Modernity. What the writer drives at is that “the pre-moderns have modern aspirations but they got killed as they could not venture to realize them. Pre-modern people have animal- like craving only for food, water and shelter and devoid of any pleasure.” (Sekhar 21) The hero's parents “worked hard just to have food and water, like the sheep.” (*The Alchemist* 8) This looking down attitude towards the villagers is repeated time and again in the novel. “In the village each day was like all others.” (*The Alchemist* 5) Immediately he says to himself that in villages there was no change and every day is same.

Santiago's sheep are used as a symbol of the sort of existence lived by those who are completely blind to their Personal Legends. Despite loving

his sheep, Santiago expresses thinly veiled disrespect for them due to their animal desires for mere food and water without appreciating all the wonderful lands that Santiago discovers during his travels. Also, in a disturbing image, he imagines that his sheep are so blindly trusting that he could kill them one by one without them noticing. Thus, the sheep symbolize such characters in the book as 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. Accordingly, they lose the ability to appreciate certain aspects of creation, and tend to miss out on many opportunities because of their limited perspectives.” (SparkNotes Editors n. p)

The crystal merchant serves as an important friend to Santiago during Santiago’s time in Tangier, but he also functions as a cautionary case of someone who has become complacent and given up the pursuit of his Personal Legend and as an example of the dangers of an unfulfilled life, evident in his disappointment over his own life decisions. He remains “the most fully fleshed-out irredeemable character in the novel where his fate is portrayed as one to avoid, despite his goodness. He maintains a crystal shop on the top of a hill in Tangier, and was rather successful until the city fell out of favor as a port. Although he is a good man who is devoutly religious and kind enough to take Santiago in, he fears pursuing his dream to make a pilgrimage to Mecca because he thinks he will have nothing to live for once he’s achieved his dream. The crystal merchant takes no pride in his conservative approach to life, but he feels rooted in his ways. (SparkNotes, 2012: n. p.) He had been selling crystal from the same store for some thirty years. He was not a man who welcomed change, nor one who was particularly prone to taking a chance.

**I’m already used to the way things are. Before you came, I was thinking about how much time I had wasted in the same place, while my friends had moved on, and either went bankrupt or did better than they had before. It made me very depressed. Now, I can see that it hasn’t been too bad. The shop is exactly the size I always wanted it to be. I don’t want to change anything, because I don’t know how to deal with change. I’m used to the way I am. (*The Alchemist* 59)**

Fear of failure seems to be the greatest obstacle to old crystal-seller’s happiness. As he tragically confesses: "I am afraid that great disappointment awaits me, and so I prefer to dream." This is where “Coelho really captures the drama of man, who sacrifices fulfillment to conformity, who knows he

can achieve greatness but denies to do so, and ends up living a life of void.” (Anna Hassapi n. p.)

Besides Santiago’s father and the crystal merchant, the Tarifa baker is the third irredeemable character in the novel. His Personal Legend to travel the world remains unfulfilled. Through him, Coelho presents his idea that a character who denies to follow his own dream is similar to the one denying to see God, and that every happy person carries God within him. However, “only few people choose to follow the road that has been made for them, and find God while searching for their destiny, and their mission on earth.” (Anna Hassapi no. p.)

The last of the four characters subject to the novelist’s harsh attack for being ‘pre- modern’ by not pursuing their Personal Legend is the leader of the group that eventually attacked the hero at the pyramids in Egypt. Santiago’s pursuit of his Personal Legend lured the universe to conspire with him and furnished him with supernatural power that reached a zenith when he turned himself into wind which saved him from death by a desert tribe on his way to the pyramids on his own. On the contrary, the leader of the people who found him digging for the treasure said that the boy was silly to have believed in his dreams, that he would have been better off staying at home, in Andalusia with his sheep.

**“You’re not going to die. You’ll live, and you’ll learn that a man shouldn’t be so stupid. Two years ago, right here on this spot, I had a recurrent dream, too. 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. But I’m not so stupid as to cross an entire desert just because of a recurrent dream.”**

**...the boy stood up shakily, and looked once more at the Pyramids. They seemed to laugh at him, and he laughed back his heart busting with joy. (*The Alchemist* 164)**

Had the gang leader believed in his dream and set off in pursuit of the treasure, his life would have been changed.

## 5.2 The Orientalist approach

The second technique manipulated to disseminate Coelho’s liquid modernity is the Orientalist’s, enlightening role of the protagonist. Modernity is the mother of racism of the Orientalist genre. “Orientalism has

grown in the hatred toward those who are outside to/ opposed the Modernity.” (Sekhar 8) Santiago compares his parents with sheep, and in the Arab world- “In that strange land, he was applying the same lessons he had learned with his sheep.” (*The Alchemist* 42) Orientalism is not just the theoretical expression of the unequal power relationship in between the Orient and the Occident, it is its very originator. Besides running a parallel to Samuel Huntington’s as the Spain-born hero passes through the North Africa in search of treasure, *The Alchemist* runs a parallel world:

**One is Occident and the other Orient. Here Occident is the European Spain. Orient is African Morocco and Egypt. One is Western, Christian, white world, and the other is the Muslim world, ‘Moorish’ (black)world. The first one, Andalusia (Spain) is green rich.” (Sekhar 8)**

The Gypsy woman is the only troublesome person in the region. Morocco and Egypt are the second region subject to attack and emerge as a sand stricken desert inhabited by ‘infidels’ whose sole language is Arabic and who form tribes fighting primordial battles without reason. Some of these Arabs emerge as thieves and tricksters, but all as “community-bound, and rotten with ignorance and are to be uplifted by the white-skinned hero.” (Sekhar 9)

As an Orientalist, Santiago is the enlightener of the unenthusiastic crystal merchant who lives in the same place and experiences the same days. By showing path of development to the merchant, he teaches him how to live and how to develop his shop. With all gratitude the Muslim merchant says to the hero: “I’ll have to change my way of life” ... “You have been a real blessing to me.” (*The Alchemist* 55) Later, the hero remembers his accomplishment while leaving Tangier, and “he felt that, just as he had conquered this place, he could conquer the world.” (*The Alchemist* 59) In the next page he once again reminds his achievement: “He was more confident in himself, though, and felt as though he could conquer the world.” (*The Alchemist* 60) Later, he could perform miracles in the desert and astounds the Arabs under his magic spell. “For generations thereafter, the Arabs recounted the legend of the boy who had turned himself into the wind, almost destroying a military camp, in defiance of the most powerful chief in the desert.” (*The Alchemist* 145- 146) As an orientalist, he warns the Arabs at an oasis camp of an impending danger and earns riches.

Santiago is, also, the enlightener of Fatima, the only named female character in the novel. The significance of Santiago’s love affair with Fatima is sometimes suggested as “allegory of the dominance of the

Western masculinity over the Muslim femininity. If feminine is considered as embodiment of nature,” (Sekhar 9) the novel ends up with the Western opulence subjugating it. Fatima assumes she was part of Santiago: “You taught me something of the universal language and the Soul of the World. Because of that, I have become part of you” says Fatima to him (*The Alchemist* 92) and adds, “And I am part of your dream, and part of your destiny, as you call it.” (*The Alchemist* 93) His is a cosmetic cant of mission civilisatrice and suits Rana Kabbani’s remark in another context: “The image of the European colonizer had to remain an honourable one: he did not come as exploiter, but as enlightener.” (Rana Kabbani in Sekhar 9) Orientalism is used side by side with contrast as central techniques disseminating Coelho’s liquid modernity.

#### 6. Critical Appraisal of Coelho’s Liquid Modernity

Evaluating the artistic (de)merits attending Coelho’s portrayal of liquid modern characters reveals a division in readers’ response to the novel. Coelho could perfectly play off the alienation, lack of spiritual and communal fulfillment, lack of real culture and tradition, and inherent selfishness and consumption-based acquisitiveness of the vast majority of his readers. Favourable reviews, therefore, hail the fable for its main message summarized on the back of the book jacket; “One’s only obligation in life is to pursue one’s Personal Legend” (*The Alchemist* back cover) and the Universe will magically make it all work somehow so long as you really believe in whatever you want to do. In the foreword Paulo Coelho wrote about how the book has been praised by different personalities. To Anna Hassapi, *The Alchemist* “skillfully combines words of wisdom, philosophy, and simplicity of meaning and language, which makes it particularly readable and accounts for its bestselling status.” (Anna Hassapi n. p.) Andrew Williams thinks that although Coelho writes the books for himself, “all humankind shares the same questions, even if we don’t have the same answers. So I guess that’s why they appeal to so many people. I don’t set out to address questions that people have, though. When I write, it’s to understand myself better.” (Andrew Williams n. p.) Therefore, the book has gone on to becoming an international bestseller and “winning prestigious awards in Germany and Italy” (The Weinstein Company to Bring 'The Alchemist' to the Big Screen Zoom In Online: Film & TV) “only relying on the word of mouth as its main marketing tool.”

However, Coelho's depiction of liquid modern characters shows certain ethical and aesthetical deficiency. Aesthetically he did not explain, for example, whether Personal Legends granted by the Universe are selfish or amoral. Indeed, since Santiago's journey aims ultimate at a pile of actual gold, one may wonder if Coelho is claiming that materialism and wealth is all that really matters in the end. And what happens when two Personal Legends directly conflict with or contradict each other?

Thematically, "gems of doublethink" in the story is clear in Coelho's claim that "the universe protects drunks, the elderly and children," but all the times it does not such as the recent earthquake in Japan which did not discriminate a bit in its victim-taking. It is also clear in his claim that if something goes wrong in your quest to fulfill your Personal Journey, it is your fault because you still need further study as you had not pursued the aim chosen for you and "you haven't dreamt your own dream. It is your personal failure. Failures are individuated and the success is universalized in the novelist's philosophy." (Sekhar 14) Moreover, Coelho has no answer concerning, for example, "What would be the course offered by this perception if two contrary aims are juxtaposed? Would the universal self conspire to get the opposing two come out with success?" (Sekhar 14) Indeed, any attempt on the readers' part to search a way out in the words of the caravan's leader would result in a deconstruction of the whole basis of the novel. This is a major short coming in the authors' 'philosophy'.

#### 6.1 Alienation, Love and Money

In much of what follows, attention is focused on six shortcomings in *The Alchemist*. First, the result of liquid modernity according to Bauman and Coelho is "a society of individuals who are tied only to themselves and only to the present." In a world of shape-shifting capital and labour, modernity is best defined as amorphous – in short, liquid. Hence, Liquid Modernity (Bauman, 2000) can be interpreted as Bauman's cumulative effort to document and understand the alienation of progress, or as Abrahamson puts it, "the road liquid modernity is going down currently leads to unbearable human suffering and injustice." (2004: 177) For Bauman, the process of liquefaction began with a solid modernity dedicated to the brutal elimination of any element that allegedly threatened progress. Alienation came to define modern existence, first giving the impression of overcoming but eventually manifesting as ambivalence that would not go away. In Bauman's words, "The trained urge to escape from the "messiness" of the life-world has exacerbated the very condition from which escape was sought." (1991: 230) Since escape is futile, a more



flexible strategy is needed to confront the existential condition of alienation. Therefore, Bauman redefined post-modernity as (Raymond 65) “modernity in its liquid phase” and “the era of disembedding without reembedding.” (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 89) It is the era of rolling impermanence where bonds are frayed and intimacy falls prey to the transitory nature of all social relationships. (Bauman, 2003a) Alienation has not disappeared but taken on a new demeanor as we witness the dissolution of “bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions.” (Bauman, 2000: 6) It is reintroducing conditions of risk and uncertainty that accentuate the vulnerability of the individual rather than uniting individuals to defend their rights. (Bauman, 2001 qt by R. Lee 65- 66)

Similarly, money earning is the anchor sheet of the Salem king’s preaching that inspired the hero’s pursue of his goal as it links one’s determined effort with confidence to a person’s going on mining to get emerald. “The Modern atomistic individual sees money as compensatory to the loss of community. What the community gave earlier has now been replaced by the market and hence money makes him secure.” (Sekhar 22) Santiago abandons his first lover as he felt she was a hurdle to pursue his treasure hunt. “The sheep, the merchant’s daughter, and the fields of Andalusia were only steps along the way to his destiny” (*The Alchemist* 27) He converts the sheep into money. Then the novel declares: “The boy knew that in money there was magic; whoever has money is never really alone.” (*The Alchemist* 33) He readily deserts his love to Fatima who is defined by her willingness to wait for him while he pursues his Personal Legend, realizing, as a woman of the desert, that a man has to leave his beloved for long then return if he loves her. With no Personal Legend of her own, her ultimate goal is to love Santiago. The same theme is anticipated in Coelho’s *The Winner Stands Alone* (2009) *Eleven Minutes* and *The Zahir* where the commitment to luxury and success at any cost often prevents one from hearing what the heart actually desires.

## 6.2 Anthropocentrism

Secondly, Coelho’s novel praises anthropocentrism, which essentially distances humans from nature, and is one of the greatest tragedies brought in by Liquid Modernity. Nature is used as a tool to serve human ends and “has no other business in the novel except to ‘conspire’ to help the individuals realize their desires or dreams.” (Sekhar 22) There is a potential danger that the whole universe is defined in terms of humankind.

**This perspective has enthroned the individual self that is freed from the community in the sovereign epicenter of the universe by dethroning the Natural/ Divine. Here community is not just community of humans but a community in which not only humans but also all animate and inanimate objects –all creatures,... converge and co-exist. Bringing out the human from all this cosmic community and projecting man’s self and reason as the grand narrative is the act of modernity. This has been eulogized as humanism. (Sekhar 22)**

The novel celebrates this phenomenal movement of man from nature to ‘human.’

### 6.3 A fable Re-telling earlier stories

The third chief complaint lodged against the book is that the story, praised for its fable-like simplicity, actually is a fable- a retelling of "The Ruined Man who Became Rich Again through a Dream" (Tale 14 from the collection *One Thousand and One Nights*). Also the life story of Takkeci Ibrahim Aga who is believed to live in Istanbul during 1500s, has the same plot. So too does the English folk tale, "The Pedlar of Swaffham." However, instead of crediting these source texts anywhere in the book or in the preface, Coelho passes the story as an original work of fiction. It is SHAM (the Self-Help And Actualization Movement) cross-pollinated with Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *The Little Prince* and the fundamental plot structure of a particular story from Jalal al-Din Rumi's Mathnawi entitled "*In Baghdad, Dreaming of Cairo: In Cairo, Dreaming of Baghdad*." Unfortunately, it lacks both the charm and originality of *The Little Prince*, and while the simplicity of Rumi's story had a certain appeal, that was way back in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when it was originally written. Likewise, many 21<sup>st</sup> –century reviewers see *The Alchemist* as a mere "calculated but clumsy fable, largely plagiarized from other sources and overly reliant on cheap cliché, written to appeal to the sort of hazy quasi-mystical sense of self and "higher purpose" that many people seem to find so appealing."

### 6.4 Stereotyping Muslims

Fourthly, whilst different religions and pious practices are represented within the text, it seems to be people’s faith in determinism and the unification of all things rather than traditional religion that is celebrated on the pages of *The Alchemist* whose spirituality has attracted people from many different cultures and religious backgrounds. Critics’ positive views show that in advocating no particular belief system, Coelho achieves something brilliant in appealing to some of the fundamental shared human

beliefs which help one understand the nature of existence and one's place in it. Those critics point out how the references to the different religions are apparent enough to warrant attention, but not so prominent as to provoke scrutiny. Coelho's religion emerges as distinct from spirituality and as a way for people to understand the world around them, to help them get to where they need to be in life, and ultimately to satisfy the necessary spiritual urge of contentment. Sheahen notes that although religion and faith are cornerstones of any given society, they are secondary to what they promote—namely spiritual satisfaction among the members of a community. Religions, he argues, “point towards the same light and help us answer the questions that lie between that light and where one is at in their life.” (Sheahen n. p.)

However, a deeper scrutiny of Coelho's depiction of different religions shows a deliberate anti- Islam bias. Generally, the matter of morality remains out of the question in Coelho's liquid modernity. Ultimately, each individual on earth has a purpose, referred to in the novel as one's Personal Legend whose fulfillment is one's only obligation in life. Religion emerges as a means by which individuals can achieve their respective end and it 'conspires' to see that the mission is accomplished. Even if your goal were a wicked one, it is quite unobjectionable for the soul to cooperate. The great soul will be behind you. Indeed, you need not cease to ponder the economic crises. “You are the sole monarch of your destiny in the company of the conspiring universal soul. What is to be done by you is ... not distract from your goal. Universal self is your insurer. You would soak in the dollar rain.” (Sekhar 14)

Moreover, as a Brazilian Roman Catholic, Paulo Coelho writes a novel that “pampers Christianity.” In its Orientalist perspective “lurks an element of degrading and subjugating stance towards Muslims.” (Sekhar 1) The novel reflects the tensions that have been there between the West and Islam since “the seventh century- that is, since Islam emerged as a political and ideological power able to challenge Christendom.” (R. Kabbani qtd. in Sekhar 2) Coelho could no longer conceal his intolerance towards Muslims the moment his hero set foot on Tangier. It is writ large in the reaction of the hero on seeing Muslims' religious practices. In a busy street in the city

**‘In just a few hours he had seen men walking hand in hand, women with their faces covered, and priests that climbed to the tops of towers and chanted- as everyone about him went to their knees and placed their foreheads on the ground. “A practice of infidels,” he said to himself.’** (*The Alchemist* 32)

Here the word ‘infidel’ has no pliable sense- person of a religion other than one’s own, but “it was used in the pejorative sense- religious renegades, those who breached religious trust.” (Sekhar 3) The literal meaning of the term is one without faith. Christians used it “to describe those who are perceived as enemies of Christianity, especially Muslims.” (*The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikipedia) With all disdain and scorn in his mind Santiago contemplated on the ‘infidels’ for they were absorbed in praying their God.

The animosity is more palpable afterwards. After convincing himself of Muslims’ prayer as “a practice of infidels” the hero is haunted by the image of Saint Santiago as a warrior, rather than as a disciple of Jesus, or a pacific Apostle or non-violent proselytizer: “As a child in church, he had always looked at the image of Saint Santiago Matamoros on his white horse, his sword unsheathed, and figures such as these kneeling at his feet.” (*The Alchemist* 32) The Muslims who knelt down in religious devotion were compared with their fear-struck ancestors who stooped down before the Moor Slayer of utmost religious importance. The author has deployed “a metaphorical language under the pretext of venting the memories of the hero.” (Sekhar 5) Moreover, the author’s comment “The boy felt ill and terribly alone. The infidels had an evil look about them” (*The Alchemist* 32) raises the question: How come the hero found evil look in the Muslims who were immersed in religious devotion? Coelho seems to have the temerity of a hate preacher whose lurking self reminds such critics as Sekhar of St. Martin Luther reference: “Who fights against the Turks [Muslims]...should consider that he is fighting an enemy of God and a blasphemer of Christ, indeed, the devil himself.” (E. Grislis, 1974: passim) *The Alchemist* exhibits anti- Gypsies racist tendencies as Santiago gets frightened on seeing the Gypsy fortune-teller.

Indeed, gypsies are said to spend their lives tricking others, to have a pact with the devil, and to enslave children that they kidnap and take away to mysterious camps. So, the boy’s childhood terrible fear that he would be captured by Gypsies “returned when the old woman took his hands in hers.” (*The Alchemist* 11) His informants are his own people –‘The We’, and on the other hand Gypsies, a la Muslims, are ‘the Other’, who “had no flocks of sheep” but indulge in travel. [They do not have fixed assets and defy sovereignties and travel across countries and hence in the European psyche they have always been suspect, says Z. Bauman elsewhere]. What was the course the novelist offered to the hero to come out of the nervousness? Santiago “didn’t want his hand to begin trembling, showing the old women

that he was fearful. He recited an Our Father silently.” (*The Alchemist* 11) The hero invokes Christianity to get rid of fear of Muslims as well as of the Gypsies.

#### 6.5. Preaching and Personal Gains

Obviously, one may conclude that due to its adoption of Baumann’s conception of Liquid Modernity, the ultimate contribution of *The Alchemist* to world culture is ideological rather than aesthetical. One reviewer has gone so far as to describe it as an exemplary sign of how overwhelmingly many people there are who are incapable of even basic critical thought, and “how easy it is for even a clumsy snake-oil salesman to become a “guru” in this idiotic and under-educated era.” The book is easily dismissed by some reviewers as utter nonsense and its adherents as “getting what they deserve.” With its ‘flimsy structure’ that blows over like a paper shack when faced with any sort of serious scrutiny or critical examination, the novel was not designed to withstand intelligent investigation. “It was designed for people who will accept whatever feel-good nonsense they read unquestioningly... as it gives them license to act in a selfish and inconsiderate way in pursuit of their goal.”

Indeed, *The Alchemist* seems to have become a sort of new quasi-religion for many people. Checking out the Amazon reviews for it reflects the general pulse of the average reader’s response to it. Positive reviews outweigh the negative by nearly one thousand and read to the effect that “If you don’t like this book, or are critical of it, it’s because you JUST DON’T GET IT,” while negative counter-argument reads: “If you like this book, it is because you do not get it. You are apparently not equipped to realize you are being thoroughly snowjobbed.” The novelist spends far too much time pontificating on the centrality of Personal Legend. It honestly felt like he was just switching between writing a novel to writing a (badly-written) dissertation on the merits of capitalism. He focuses on it to the point of irritating the reader and making the story and characters secondary. Even the stories of the characters themselves are hard to get very invested in, partly because of the choices in writing and partly because of the overbearing feeling of “I am here to teach you a lesson!” The decent ideas he has about motivation were, unfortunately, ruined with a feeling of being preached to through a familiar story.

Moreover, *The Alchemist* is sometimes seen as the bastard child of that breed of horseshit known as the Self-Help And Actualization Movement (SHAM if you like, a movement exposed well in a recent

book of the same title by author Steve Salerno. The novel brought Coelho constant success, fame, and celebration/ honour. In an interview with Dennison Berwick (1994), Coelho offers the following explanation of why the book took the form it did:

**Each one of us is an alchemist, able to change everything into gold, not the physical gold but the philosophical gold...I decided to write a fable, instead of writing in a sort of scientific way, because it's easier to reach your heart. I had to trust there was a soul of the world and it would help me to write the book. (D. Berwick, 1994)**

Thirteen years later, while interviewed by Andrew Williams, Coelho's reaction to success as the 2003's best-selling author was that:

**It's abstract. I don't have much direct contact with the readers. I just meet them on MySpace or the website or at signings. It's not like being an actor or musician where you have more interaction with your audience. When I see hundreds and hundreds of people at a signing, as I have done in Britain recently, I remember I am not alone and people can somehow understand my heart. When you talk about how I've sold nearly 100 million copies – which means I have 300 million readers – that becomes very abstract. (Williams 2007)**

Coelho may not be certain that many people "can somehow understand [his] heart", but what remains certain is that the unprecedented success of *The Alchemist* launched Coelho to international literary fame and, in some circles, notoriety. "*The Alchemist* has become a textbook in several business schools in Europe and USA. The book's main theme is about finding one's self destiny. Dreams are divine language, longing for money is fine, pursuit of money could be one's legitimate life goal, and capitalism is quite natural: chief messages of the novel." (Sekhar 23) The novel was written in only two weeks in 1987. This pace Coelho has explained was because the story was "already written in [his] soul." (H. Pool n. p.) According to *The New York Times*, *The Alchemist* is "more self-help than literature." (G. Cowles n. p.) On reading the novel Kefka Palazzo comments: "This is sickening! You sound like chapters from a self-help book!" Sekhar sees Coelho as "the real alchemist who could convert words into money. He is the invariable special invitee to all the Davos summits of World Economic Forum, the foremost organization of the world capitalism. It felicitated him with its prestigious Crystal Award in 1999." (Sekhar 23)

In a similar vein, another reviewer (Jun 10, 2008) goes so far as to distinguish between Coelho the writer and Coelho the businessman:

When I say it is clumsy, I mean that only in a literary sense. What he lacks in literary skill, Coelho makes up for in an ability to read the mentality (and literacy level) of the modern consumer and gauge exactly what it is they want to hear about themselves. He is as good at it as Tony Robbins, Tommy Lasorda, Deeprak Chopra, and all the other peddlers of "personal empowerment" who have grown tremendously rich despite having just about nothing of actual substance to offer. He is a miserable writer, but a tremendous businessman, and has done a marvelous job of making himself a millionaire without offering anything of any real worth at all. (Online Sources n. p.)

Clear connections are in attendance between Coelho's own life story and that of the hero of his *The Alchemist*. Just like Santiago, a comfortable shepherd who decided to abandon everything to pursue a dream, Coelho lived comfortably as a songwriter when he decided to give up everything to pursue his dream of writing. Just as Santiago suffered many setbacks and temptations during his expedition to the pyramids of Egypt, Coelho went through many setbacks, especially the unsatisfactory reception of *The Pilgrimage* and the early failure of *The Alchemist*, and experienced material temptations represented by his monetary success as a songwriter. Yet, just like Santiago, Coelho kept focused on his dream, ultimately achieving literary success beyond his expectation. Interestingly, Coelho gained reputation and monetary success as a writer only after writing *The Alchemist*. Although his subsequent accomplishment more than validates the lesson he communicates through Santiago's journey, success such as Santiago finds in *The Alchemist* was something Coelho had yet to accomplish at the time he wrote the book.

## 7. Conclusion

The study has proved that Z. Bauman's Liquid (or Late) Modernity as manifested in Coelho's *The Alchemist* is essentially a reaction against what is seen as inefficient post-modernism and, in many respects, a return to the ethics of modernism. By substituting the idea of liquid modernity for postmodernity, Bauman (2003b: 19), as well as Coelho (*The Alchemist*), is able to address the transition of modernity as a 'forcefully built order' to a world which rejects any 'future burdened with obligations that constrain freedom of movement'. The novelist's preoccupation with the preachment of a Capitalism-oriented form of Liquid Modernism has resulted in such ethical demerits as market orientation that stresses consumption rather than production, anthropocentrism/ individualism, the refusal of communal relationships including love in the guise of emancipation.

Bauman's concept of liquid modernity offers an innovative approach to analyzing the complexities of social change in the contemporary world, but it does not imply that it is a more effective concept than postmodernity. Both concepts are concerned with the problem of depthless social change, i.e. the loosening of social bonds that disguises alienation as a celebration of diversity and flexibility. Being rooted in ideologies of solidity and able to address concurrently the meaning of teleological growth and the global reach of the new liquefying powers, the concept of development can bring together postmodernity's de-constructive agenda and liquid modernity's peripatetic purpose. Rather than traversing a straight path, it meanders through a postmodern scenery that is soaked in what Lee calls "the foam and waste of liquid modernity." (Lee 76)

In addition, Coelho's ideological obsession with liquid modernity has been proved aesthetically damaging to the novel. *The Alchemist* seems to fall in the trap of preachment and self- help used not for celebrating a worthy doctrine, but for achieving the author's "Personal Legend" to the extent that the lines distinguishing Coelho the writer from Coelho the businessman occasionally evaporate. The ideological apprehension affects his fictional tools that tend to undermine pre-modern characters and to negatively stereotype Muslims by adopting an arrogant, Orientalist approach.



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إعادة التفكير في "ما- بعد- الحداثة":

"الحداثة السائلة" في رواية الكيميائي للكاتب بولو كوثيلو

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نبذة:

يسعى الباحث من خلال هذه الدراسة الى تحقيق هدفين رئيسين: الأول هو دراسة مظاهر نظرية "الحداثة السائلة" للمفكر "زيجمونت بومان" كما تتجلى في رواية الكيميائي للكاتب "بولو كوثيلو" ومدى إرتباط نظرية "الحداثة السائلة" بنظرية "ما- بعد- الحداثة" أو انفصالها عنها. والهدف الثاني هو التقييم النقدي من مميزات وعيوب فنية لتصوير "كوثيلو" لشخصيات تتسم "بالحداثة السائلة". أما الهدف الأول فيتحقق بدراسة خمسة عناصر رئيسة تمثل محاور نظرية "الحداثة السائلة" وهي على الترتيب: أولاً: الفردية كما تتضح في مركزية "الأسطورة الشخصية"، ثانياً: الرأسالية في شكل "روح العالم" الجديدة، ثالثاً: التحرك والتغيير بوصفها ضرورة لنجاح الفرد "السائل" الحديث في تحقيق حلمه و"أسطوره الذاتية"، رابعاً: تحرر الفرد من كل الارتباطات الاجتماعية بما فيها عاطفة الحب وأخيراً: قيم العمل وأخلاقياته فيما يتعلق بالإنتاج والاستهلاك في مجتمع يتصف بالحداثة السائلة. أما الهدف الثاني فيشمل تقييم مميزات وعيوب طبيعة نظرية الحداثة السائلة نفسها إضافة إلى الأساليب الفنية التي اعتمد عليها "كوثيلو" في تصوير هذا المفهوم في رواية الكيميائي. وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى عدة نتائج، أهمها: أن الحداثة السائلة هي في الأساس رد فعل لما ظهر من جوانب نقص في "ما- بعد- الحداثة" وبذلك يمكن أيضاً عدها من نواح عديدة أحد أشكال العودة إلى أخلاقيات "الحداثة" وأفكارها. كما اتضح أن انشغال الكاتب الزائد بالدعاية إلى الشكل الرأسالي للحداثة السائلة نتج عنه عدة عيوب فنية وأخلاقية مثل التأصيل لفكر السوق والفكر الفردي الذي يعد الانسان غاية الكون القصوى ويرفض أشكال العلاقات الاجتماعية كافة بما فيها علاقة الحب بين الرجل والمرأة وبين الانسان وأسرته ومجتمعه. إضافة إلى ذلك ظهر جليا اعتناق الكاتب لفكر استشراقي متعجرف يصور المسلمين والعرب تصويرا سلبيا يفتقد الموضوعية وذلك لأسباب شخصية ودينية. كما يبدو ان الرواية سقطت في فخ الدعاية الشخصية و"مساعدة الذات"، تلك الدعاية التي تستخدم من أجل تحقيق "الأسطورة الشخصية" الفردية" للكاتب نفسه بدلا من اعلاء مذهب جدير بالاحترام به.