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# **An Archetypal Analysis of Paulo Coelho's Select Novels as a Heroic Journey**

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## Abstract

The present research paper has two objectives. The first is to analyze the archetypes of the hero's journey in the select novels; **The Zahir** and **The River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept** by Paulo Coelho. The second is to show the transformation of the protagonists of the respected novels through their heroic journeys. The archetypal analysis is based on Joseph Campbell's heroic journey monomyth as described in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Numerous people have been inspired by Joseph Campbell's influential study of the hero's journey throughout cultures, which has also uncovered new fields for investigation. The entire narrative of *The Zahir* and *By the River Piedra I sat Down and Wept* helps readers comprehend the hero's journey archetypes and vice versa. What quest the heroes are completing is revealed through the stages of the archetypes of the hero's journey." This paper also examines how the archetypes of the hero's journey have relevance to the life of any person seeking a fully realized existence today as the leading characters in the select novels go through the magnificent reshuffling, and that is from ignorance to wisdom and from dispiriting to spiritual awakening.

**Keywords:** archetype, hero's journey, zahir, Paulo Coelho, By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept

## Introduction

Literary theory is put into practice through literary criticism, which is how the ideas are applied to analyze and interpret literary texts. Today's literary criticisms are subject to various constantly evolving theories, each serving a particular purpose.

A literary work is interpreted according to the theory of archetypal literary criticism by focusing on repeating myths and archetypes in the story and symbols, pictures, and character types. The term "archetype" was coined by Swiss-born psychotherapist C.G. Jung to describe our predecessors' occurrences that become imprinted in the "collective unconscious" of the entire race. *The Golden Bough*, created by James G. Frazer, was the first significant work on cultural mythologies that sought to identify commonalities across stories from various historical and geographical contexts. The Canadian mythologist Northrop Frye (1912–91), whose book *Anatomy of Criticism* is regarded as a classic in the field, has made the most significant contribution to archetypal criticism. According to Frye, literary archetypes can be divided into many genres, which appear to reflect the seasons of the year and the human life cycle. Spring is the season



for comedy, summer for romance, autumn for tragedy, and winter for satire. Jung reportedly remarked, "There were as many archetypes as there were commonplace situations in life." One of the most effective situational archetypes is the hero's journey.

Talking about the author of the concerned novels, Paulo Coelho De Souza, was born on a soggy night on August 24, 1947, in the Sao Jose hospital in Humaita, a middle-class neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro. His life underwent a significant turning point when he was ready to make the customary Roman Catholic pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella in Northern Spain. This lengthy trek served as the inspiration for his 1995 debut book, "The Pilgrimage." He committed himself to write ever since. Much like his creative works, his personal story is also full of twists and turns. Like the archetypal hero, he has crossed the various stages of the heroic journey and achieves his dreams. The *Zahir*, first written in his native language, Portuguese, as 'O Zahir' in 2004, narrates an incredible journey of a man whose wife left home without informing him. *The River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, first written in 1994, was released and translated into English in 2006. It depicts the journey of Pilar. It centers on her journey to find herself. She is suddenly brought back to her life's long-lost treasures-love and faith- through this journey. The present study shows how the heroes of the select novels exhibit the stages of the archetypal heroic journey to reach their ultimate destination, which is not something outward, but a matter of their own inner 'being'.

## Objectives

- To give a new direction to the existing understanding of the author's selected works.
- To study an archetypal literary theory in the context of Paulo Coelho's select novels.
- To exhibit the inner transformation of the protagonists from ignorance to awakening.

## Research Method

In this research, the researcher has used the qualitative research method as there is no need for a calculation. The heroic journey archetype described by Campbell is aligned with the course of the protagonists' journeys in this study.



## Significance

Contemporary scholars have described the properties of numerous new archetypes. Due to the significance they add to literature research, understanding these archetypes is crucial. This study provides evidence that archetypes are essential to the development of the hero's journey in both of the chosen novels. Moreover, this study points out the inner transformation that the main characters go through, and that transformation is the very need of the present era as human beings today feel very much emptiness inside though fulfilled outside. As Sadhguru writes in Inner Engineering,

**“You may use the outside as a stimulus or trigger, but the real thing always comes from within.”**  
(Sadhguru, 31)

### 1) Hero's Journey- Archetypal Device

As Campbell has opined about the journey of a hero,

**“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”** (Campbell, 30)

Archetypal journeys come in a variety of shapes and stages. Although each person's journey may have a different goal, all archetypal journeys go through the same general stages. It has been established that physically traveling from point A to point B is not always as obvious as a journey. An external or inward search may be part of the archetypal journey. One of the foremost experts on comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell, identified this archetype in narratives from worldwide and throughout history. He wrote a book titled "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" in 1949 that contained his ideas on these patterns. Campbell maintained that the stories of Buddha on his journey to enlightenment and Odysseus on his journey home shared many of the same elements. In total, Campbell offers 17 steps for the hero's journey framework. Even said, not every monomyth always has all steps or occurs in Campbell's suggested order.

Three major categories are used to classify the 17 steps of the monomyth: 1) Departure, 2) Initiation, and 3) Return. Each of these consists of several smaller stages, which are discussed here:



- Departure- 1) The call to adventure - The protagonist is leading a normal life when they suddenly feel called to make a change and venture into the unknown. 2) Refusal of The Call- Because they don't want to venture outside of their comfort zone or confront their worries, the hero is initially hesitant to embark on this adventure. 3) Supernatural Aid-The hero's mentor or guide, who is frequently supernatural and knowledgeable, manifests when they consent to answer the urge for exploration. 4) Crossing the First Threshold – The protagonist departs on his adventure. 5) The Belly of the Whale- The protagonist meets their first significant challenge after passing the point of no return.
- Initiation- 6) The Road of Trials - A sequence of challenges and tribulations confront the hero, putting his or her grit and skills to the test. 7) Encountering the Goddess - One or more companions are found along the way, assisting the hero in getting back up and continuing his quest. 8) Woman as Temptress - The quest and its ultimate prize tempt the hero to abandon it. 9) Atonement with the Father - A terrifying father-God entity that the hero must either defeat or make peace with appears to the hero. 10) Apotheosis - To prepare for the ultimate battle, the hero gains higher insight. 11) Ultimate Boon- The hero succeeds in completing their goals or obtaining their desired outcomes.
- Return- 12) Refusal of the Return- Returning to the real world after living in a magical one causes the hero some reluctance. 13) The Magic Flight - It's possible that the protagonist will need to flee to return with magical aid. 14) Rescue from without - To get home, the hero gets assistance from a guide or rescuer. 15) crossing of the Return Threshold- After reestablishing contact with the real world, the hero must find a method to preserve their blessing and incorporate their newly acquired knowledge into the way the old world runs. 16) Master of Two Worlds - The protagonist is aware of the gap between the "two worlds" and is able to strike a balance between them, frequently in some material and spiritual sense. The hero fills in the seeming gap between where they started and where they have come from. 17) Freedom to Live - The Protagonist is left content with his lot in life.

## 1.1) Hero's Journey in The Zahir

It has been founded in this novel that the narrator cm protagonist, here, does not pass through all the stages but he does come across many of the important stages. He was a famous writer and successful author at the start of the book. Esther, his wife, abruptly left his life without leaving any trace of his departure, which set off the stage of the call to adventure. He embarks on a search for Esther after his wife's absence raises



questions about his well-to-do life. When the hero considers giving up the thought of searching for his wife, he is seen going through the following step: **denying the call**. He reckons;

**“For a moment, I savor the idea of my new state: single and a millionaire. I can go out in broad daylight with whomever I want. (Coelho, 16)**

He therefore considers staying in his comfort zone but ultimately decides against doing so. The narrator meets Mikhail at a book signing event in France, who can hear voices as an indirect hint of the next step, which is known as **supernatural assistance**. In the book, Mikhail takes on the role of his father figure and creates the stage of **atonement with the father**. He frequently runs across the narrator and gives him suggestions to have Esther. He was inspired by Mikhail to seek out his wife and, in the end, to accept his flaws. Mikhail encourages him,

**“You must find not just her body, but also her soul.” (Coelho, 110)**

The hero's journey can be seen at the stage named **the woman is the temptress** when he finds Marie after losing his wife. But we cannot claim that she enters his life to divert him from his search for life and love. Marie tempts, orders, and commands the hero to break free of his bonds at the same time. She advises the protagonist to change his hatred for Mikhail into love, imparting yet another spiritual lesson. She explains,

**“The energy of hatred won’t get you anywhere; but the energy of forgiveness, which reveals itself through love, will positively transform your life.” (Coelho, 67)**

The protagonist's pursuit of Esther takes him from France to Spain, Croatia, and finally, Kazakhstan, a gorgeous region of Central Asia. This journey represents the **protagonist passing the threshold**. In pursuit of fresh perspectives on the nature of love, the self, and the role of fate, he sets off on a journey distant from his familiar surroundings. When he gets restless because he misses his wife, the stage known as the **belly of the whale** is apparent. He claims that only Esther, the zahir, can be found in the space of his inner cathedral. The narrator has **trials** that begin at the very beginning of the stage, forcing him to reexamine his marriage and his own life. The narrator participates in the conversations among the spiritual searchers. Due to the mishap, he eventually winds up in the hospital. The 10th stage of the hero's journey, known as **apothecosis**, begins when the hero discovers the divine inside himself. After the accident, the narrator has time to reflect and recognizes when his marriage began to crumble, as Dr. Mrinalini Thaker writes. He begins to believe



that all we need to know is always in plain sight; all we have to do is discern the direction in which God is leading us and the next course of action. The accident taught the narrator that he should never force something to stitch if it is not yet ready. As a result, he starts his inner journey, which creates the stage in his life known as **the ultimate boon**. Again, he narrates,

**“I had, in the end, decided to follow the signs and allow things to happen in their own time and thus free myself from the power of the Zahir.” (Coelho, 187)**

He's finally ready to meet his wife. He discovers new things about himself and diverse definitions of love during the flight from Paris to Kazakhstan. The next level, known as the **master of the two worlds**, can be observed when the character states, "But I am being reborn and I need to take new risks," after having the experience of approaching the fountain's center column. (Coelho, 232) During this encounter, he is walking on the ice when he states that he knows how to deal with it and how to ask for its assistance to keep him from experiencing. As he continues, he starts to slip into a joyful trance. When he is no longer constrained by his past and is able to understand love, he enters the final stage, which is known as the **freedom to live**. He states,

**“I recovered my old enthusiasm, because I had freed myself from my personal history.” (Coelho, 334)**

The equilibrium between the hero's internal and outward worlds is thus attained. Hence the protagonist in this tale is a hero or narrator who sets out on a quest to locate his wife, gains insightful knowledge about love, marriage, etc., succeeds with that knowledge in finding his wife, and changes as a result.

## **1.2) Hero's Journey in By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept**

In the novel *By the River Piedra, I Sat Down and Wept*, Pilar, the story's central figure, is on a quest for personal growth. All the steps of the protagonist's journey do not apply to Pilar's journey either, and the stages are not in the same chronological order as described by Joseph Campbell. When Pilar receives a letter inviting her to attend her childhood friend's lecture in Madrid, the first stage—the **call to adventure**—can be noticed. She had been leading an unremarkable life up until that point. Her childhood friend has departed and is now searching for himself and his purpose, so she focuses on a monotonous work that would earn money and keep her safe. She takes the call, and after travelling for four hours from Zaragoza to Madrid, the stage of **crossing the threshold** begins. In the fifth stage of the hero's archetypal journey, referred to as **the**



**belly of the whale**, the hero will frequently appear to be actually swallowed up in something far greater than himself. When Pilar and Brida, a young woman who had come to observe her childhood friend's presentation, first met outside the lecture hall, this period of her life may have been evident. She made it seem like falling in love with her would hurt her. She begs her,

**“...because he is important. Even though he says some silly things, at least he recognizes the Great Mother. Don't let him lose his way. Help him.”** (Coelho, 17)

Her statements upset her since, to Pilar, falling in love is risky, and being in love involves being alone and going through difficult times. When Pilar continues on her journey with her childhood buddy, the phase of **the road of tribulations** is seen in her life. When her childhood friend found her missing medal and, after all these years, declared his love to her, she wasn't sure how she felt. Her emotions and her cognition were at odds with one another. Although Pilar doesn't encounter a mother figure in the following stage, her childhood friend serves as a substitute for this **mother role** since he helps her through every step of her future life's journey. Her childhood friend, whose name is not given in this book, has grown to be a spiritual teacher and a miracle worker. As he leads her on a mysterious walk into the French Pyrenees, Pilar starts to realise that this fortuitous encounter is going to change her life for the better. A priest by the name of Padre has given her friend advice, assisted her in accepting what she wants and learning how to achieve inner peace, forming the stage known as the **atonement with the parent**. He puts forward,

**“I would not like him to adopt the conventional religious life. I would not like to see him ordained a priest. He can serve God in other ways- at your side.”** (Coelho, 144)

Pilar regains faith in her dreams during the course of her trip when she learns to exercise "the other," a part of herself that keeps her from fully feeling bliss. All of these experiences represent the stage known as the **apotheosis**, and she now feels as though her soul has bathed in the light of a God or Goddess in whose presence she had previously lost faith. When she and her buddy get to the location where charismatics congregate to pray, the stage known as the **ultimate boon** that follows occurs. According to the book, charismatics most closely resemble the early Christians, when anybody could do miracles. She was shocked by herself when she heard that everyone had raised a petition and that the prayers had been said. She claims that when it was her turn to submit a petition, a presence gave her confidence and the words flowed out of her mouth.





**“May the Immaculate Conception teach me to love as She loves. May that love grow in me and in the man to whom it is dedicated. Let us say an Ave Maria.”**(Coelho, 119)

She acknowledges that she felt freer after this and she admits,

**“For years, I had fought against my heart, because I was afraid of sadness, suffering, and abandonment. But now I knew that true love was above all that it would be better to die than to fail to love.”** (Coelho, 119)

As a result, near the conclusion, she realizes what her buddy was trying to convey: love can send us to hell or heaven, but it always leads us someplace. She was prepared for the sacrifices because she knew that the true meaning of sacrifice is love. The refuse to return stage of the hero's journey is where the hero decides not to fulfill their duty to return home and impart their newly learned wisdom to the rest of humanity. In this instance, Pilar's voyage presents a unique challenge. She is put to the test once more after receiving the grace of God's enlightenment when she learns that her boyfriend has chosen to sacrifice his talent and deny his nature in order to live a regular life with Pilar. Pilar's heart aches as a result. Pilar collapses next to the Piedra River in her grief. When Pilar is taken in by a woman from a covenant after nearly passing away, the stage known as **rescue from without** is what comes next. She heard the entirety of Pilar's account. Giving her a pen and piece of paper, the woman said,

**“Write down everything you are feeling. Take it out of your soul, put it on the paper, and then throw it away. Legend says that the River Piedra is so cold that anything that falls into it ....is turned to stone. Maybe it would be a good idea to toss your suffering into its waters.”** (Coelho, 205)

Following the ritual of putting her sorrows on paper and receiving mental nourishment from that woman, she feels,

**“I felt free again, ready to return to the world and be a part of it once again.”** (Coelho, 207)

This stage completes the step known as **passing the return threshold**. The work includes the final two stages, known as the **master of the two worlds** and **freedom to live**, together. Although Pilar seems to have lost all of her joy, the reader is astonished to learn that her love has returned. He says he has searched everywhere for her and makes a promise to go with Pilar and search for his present once more. Their direction is provided by love as they set off on their adventure together once more, this time filled with



delight. He tells her, "Thank you and please forgive me," (Coelho, 209) after reading the documents Pilar had written. He responded when Pilar questioned him about whether or not his present had been returned.

**“I don’t know. But the Goddess has always given me a second chance in life. And she is giving me that with you. She will help me to find my path again.”** (Coelho, 210)

Pilar corrected him at this point by noting that it was "our" path rather than "mine." Her friend's final statements are highly oblique and imply that they will both live lives that are well balanced between their inner and outer worlds and that they will be free from any fears. The following are the words that are motivating, effective, and influential:

**“Go and get your things. Dreams mean work.”** (Coelho, 210)

Hereby we can see how Pilar, the protagonist of the novel, passes by some stages of hero’s journey model as described by Campbell and achieves her dreams which she formerly has suppressed out of fear.

## Conclusion

Archetypal literary criticism aims to analyse a text by concentrating on repetitive myths and archetypes in the narrative as well as symbols, imagery, and character types. As Carl Jung said, “All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes.” In both the select novels, *The Zahir* and *By The River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, the protagonists go through, however not all, some main stages of hero’s journey model as described by Joseph Campbell. According to Campbell, in order to succeed, the heroes must leave their comfort zone and delve further into the story's labyrinth. Both, the unnamed narrator of *The Zahir* and Pilar, are suddenly confronted with the circumstances that lead on a journey to rediscover self-direction, love and faith. Both move forward into the direction of the Nature’s call and ultimately find the treasures of the love and the self and get transformed. The present paper also displays how one's search for their own self as well as one’s exploration of inner treasure of love leads to a new insight on the power of fate and the essence of love. Each archetype has been proven to have greatly aided the protagonists in realizing their own identities. Although the narrator in *The Zahir* and Pilar do not complete all stages, the hero's journey is nevertheless applicable to both books. Many literary works can be examined by future researchers utilizing Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory. This study also suggests that various aspects can still be developed and discovered from Paulo’s other novels too.



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