

The Alchemy of literature: Orientalist Perspectives in Coelho's *The Alchemist*

Masha'el Al-Sudeary*

Abstract

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* presumes to take on the challenging role of increasing man's knowledge of the world through the spiritual transformation of individual consciousness and discovery of the self, in as much the same way as 'alchemy' proposes to transform matter from one state to another. Though this book partly achieves this goal by teaching important lessons about the self, its message is very much undermined by the writer's inability to break free from old perceptions and stereotypes of non-western characters. In propagating this negative image of the Eastern world, Coelho's book becomes yet another work of literature that engenders the dichotomy of East versus West, and 'self' versus other that many Orientalists believe is responsible for the many sensitivities and misunderstandings between the two worlds. In applying Orientalist perspectives to Coelho's book, it becomes quite clear that his message of non-conformity and openness to the true language of the world become meaningless in light of his indiscriminate adherence to archetypal depictions of the East as the inferior 'other'.

More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.¹

Throughout the ages literature has had a great impact on the attitudes, beliefs and value system of people and cultures. As far back as Horace, poetry has been decreed to be both "dulce et utile," delightful and useful; its sweetness or pleasure coming from a variety of sources – from the pleasure of the senses to the relief of a cathartic purging of strong feelings.² More important than that is of course the serious function of instructing the reader. Wellek and Warren describe this instruction as one where language tends to influence "the attitudes of the reader, persuades him, and ultimately changes him."³ *The Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* gives a comprehensive description of literature "as a

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* English Language Department, Princess Nora University, Riyadh, KSA.

cultural and moral force in the twentieth century, institutionalized as canons of books whose textual words were to be emulated, teaching humane and dignified values, a counter-balance to philistinism."⁴

One such text that attempts to enlighten the reader and to transform his attitudes and perceptions of the world is Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. As its title implies, this novel proposes to act as a catalyst in the transformation of matter from one state to another. On a purely physical level, it seems to promise a conversion of base metals into gold, whereas on a spiritual level it seems to take on the more daring role of purification of the soul by "eliminating the 'base' material of the self and achieving the gold of enlightenment."⁵ As an ancient science, alchemy devotes itself to the pursuit of knowledge and "understanding of the self" that is similar to the noble role that literature has as a medium of knowledge and change.⁶ In choosing a title such as "The Alchemist," Coelho thus takes on the challenging goal of attempting to increase man's knowledge of the world through the spiritual transformation of individual consciousness and discovery of the self, what I like to call 'the alchemy of literature.'

The methodology implied in this paper attempts to strip away conventional perspective and examines how a society is sometimes denied of its true 'identity.' The postcolonial reading seeks out that indigenous representation of the 'self' which results from a unique amalgamation of history, culture, language and tradition. Apart from this, the methodology also focuses on the 'cultural hybridity' that occurs after an attempt to explore the concept of national identity and to establish it firmly. As Anderson observes, a race or nation may have to go through a phase of "dispute and debate regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail."⁷ This is exactly what's taking place when once again the 'West' sets forth to misunderstand and misrepresent the 'Orient' in *The Alchemist*.

Hence, although this book seems to have touched millions of lives and established itself as a modern classic, the important lessons that it tries to teach man about self-discovery, happiness and fulfillment are very much undermined by Coelho's inability to break free from old perceptions and stereotypes in his depiction of non-western characters. As such, these stereotypes reinforce the negative implications associated with non-western cultures and instead of opening up new vistas and channels of communication between cultures, as literature should do, it further increases the chasm between the Eastern and Western worlds. Coelho's message of non-conformity and openness to the true language of the world becomes meaningless in light of his inability to break free from stereotypical depictions of the East as the inferior 'other'.

Coelho fails in his attempt to use literature to bring barriers down and inadvertently propagates the dichotomy of East versus West, and 'self' versus 'other' that Edward Said says is accountable for the continued sensitivities between these two cultures.⁸ Coelho's story thus adds to the already large body of Orientalist literature that continues to denigrate and dehumanize the East for the purpose of having an effective control over it. Said says that by "setting itself against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self," the West believed that it "gained in strength and identity."⁹

As a text that is not limited to a book, but is an act that "follows certain distinct and intellectually knowable lines," Coelho's story is inevitably rooted in what Said describes as old concepts and stereotypes of the East manifested in other works of literature.¹⁰ Edward Said's contention that "Every writer on the Orient assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies" applies to Coelho's relationship with Jorge Louis Borges.¹¹ Coelho's intrigue and admiration for this famous Argentinean writer comes out clearly in an interview published in the weekly *Ahram* in 2005, where he admits that he owes "a lot to three writers who changed my own life: Borges, the British poet William Blake and Henry Miller, who gave me the initial stimulus to write." It then turns out to be no coincidence that the plot line of Coelho's story is very much similar to a short story written by Borges called "A Tale of Two Dreamers" published in his Anthology *A Universal History of Infamy* in 1933. With Borges as Coelho's mentor, it becomes quite clear where Coelho's Orientalist attitudes came from. In a similar fashion, we find that Borges himself was greatly affected by his own translations of Burton's version of *The Arabian Nights*. Edna Aizenberg says that Borges "advocates the Orient at a distance, filtered through the European translations of Lane and Burton, Waley and Kuhn, with inevitable elements of Orientalism."¹² Burton, more than any other translator of these tales, tended to depict the Orient as a sensual, immoral, backward place suffering from despotism and inaccuracy. It is then no longer a mystery where Borges, and eventually Coelho acquired their distorted picture of the East. Borges' story "A Tale of Two Dreamers" actually retells the story of "The Ruined Man Who Became Rich Again Through A Dream" that is found in Burton's translation of *The Arabian Nights*. It recounts the story of a man whose fortune changes for the better after following a dream he had in his sleep which tells him to travel to a foreign land to find his treasure. After reaching his destination, he is then told that his treasure is to be found back home.

The similarity in the plot line of the three stories – "The Ruined Man Who Became Rich Again Through A Dream," "A Tale of Two Dreamers" and *The*

Alchemist is no coincidence. However, the similarity in the plot line is only one of many facts that will prove Coelho's undeniable conformity to negative stereotypical images of the East.

Edward Said says that

the large cultural – national designation of European culture as the privileged norm carried with it a formidable batter of other distinctions between ours and theirs, between proper and improper, European and non-European, higher and lower: they are to be found everywhere in such subjects and quasi-subjects as linguistics... philosophy...¹³

Looking at Santiago's dream, we find it is that of a white man from a western country traveling to the Orient in order to conquer and exploit its resources. The fact that Santiago is to find his treasure in the East, not the West, has clear colonialist implications. Like his forefathers before him, Santiago overcomes the obstacles along his way and claims his treasure in the East because of his superior mental capabilities and what Coelho calls his 'openness' to the Universe. Partha Chatterjee in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* says that the West colonized the East because it believed that its culture "possesses attributes which make the European culture equipped for power and progress, while such attributes are lacking in traditional cultures of the East."¹⁴

Despite the fact that Coelho goes to great measures to show how receptive Santiago is to the Eastern world and its culture, from the moment Santiago has his dream, we are bombarded with negative images of the Oriental as the different "backward" other.¹⁵ As a 'strange' and mysterious being, this Oriental is shown to have many odd rituals and habits that are often times associated with superstition and the supernatural. The first Oriental that he encounters in the story is the old Arab man wearing "strange" clothing and possessing supernatural powers.¹⁶ Calling himself "The King of Salem," this old man introduces us to the superstitious and often deceptive world associated with the Arab tradition of 'alchemy' or 'a-lchimia' that dates back to the Arab alchemist Jabir Ibn Hayyan in the 8th century. Though alchemy with time became a well-respected branch of science, it has never really shaken off its earlier association with the voodoo science that deals with the mysterious, dark and occult world of the supernatural. The old man's ability to list specific names related to Santiago and his possession of the two precious stones, "Urim" and "Thummim" that have magical powers leave no doubt as to the old man's association with this dark science.¹⁷

As soon as Santiago reaches Tangiers, he also feels alienated from this different 'strange' world. Recalling an image of Saint Santiago Matamoros on his

white horse that he often looked at at church as a child, he associates these dark 'others' with the barbaric figures lying at Saint Santiago's feet.¹⁸ Santiago's immediate association of the Tangiereans with these violent dark figures inevitably points to Western man's stereotypical biases against dark skinned people. With these black figures in mind, Santiago pronounces the Tangiereans as "infidels" having "an evil look about them."¹⁹ Edward Said says:

The entire history of the 19th century European thought is filled with such discrimination as these, made between what is fitting for us and what is fitting for them, the former designated as inside, in place, common, belonging, in a word above, the latter, who are designated as outside, excluded, aberrant, inferior, in a word below.²⁰

As Santiago has never been to Africa, it is quite clear that his biased image of the East is not based on any real experience, but is a by-product of his cultural heritage. Like many other westerners, he has brought the myth of Western superiority over the non-western, without any effort on his part to distinguish facts from fiction. Therefore, when he embarks on the journey, his decisions and actions are not his own, but he is greatly influenced by the preconditioned thoughts and ideas imposed on him by the outlook of his society. The great impact that a culture and its value system have on an individual's sense of right and wrong, good or bad, is represented in Santiago's constant carrying around of books. His avid interest in reading seems to have had its share in re-instating his distorted system of values that have created this warped picture of the East.

Full of fear and expecting the worst, Santiago's negative attitude seems to precipitate the crime of theft that leaves him with no money or source of income. Feeling all the more alienated from these strange people, he sees himself as becoming "bitter and distrustful" because of this one bad incident.²¹ Recalling the old man's words that "when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you achieve it," Santiago decides to adopt a more positive attitude towards himself and others.²² He now believes that instead of thinking himself as "the poor victim of a thief" and thinking of these Tangiereans as enemies, he would be much better off seeing himself as "an adventurer in quest of his treasure." With this new positive attitude, Santiago starts to think of Tangiers as a "new" place rather than as a "strange" one.²³

Though Santiago seems to have learned the lesson that positive thoughts bring about positive action, he still carries around with him the imperialist thoughts of supremacy over the Orient. His sense of exhilaration that "Tangiers was no longer a strange city," totally revolves around his feeling that "he had conquered the place."²⁴ Feeling in control of his life and his surroundings,

Santiago starts to pursue his dreams with a sense of a legitimate right to 'conquer' this uncivilized world. Santiago's attitude turns out to be no different than colonial powers in the past who believed that "Oriental Peoples needed saving from themselves" and therefore imperial nations have not only the right but obligation to rule those lost in barbarism.²⁵ As Europe had colonized the East out of a sense of its own "superiority" in "comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures," so does Coelho show Santiago to conquer this country out of a sense of his own pre-eminence.²⁶ With a new resolve to realize his destiny, Santiago decides to work at a crystal shop in order to make enough money and continue his journey to Egypt. Like all the other characters from the East, the crystal merchant is presented in an unfavorable light in comparison to Santiago. He is described as being rigid in his ways and "unable to deal with change."²⁷ Ian Almond says that "Solemnity, inflexibility and absolute self-belief " are some of the many negative qualities that the Oriental is accused of having which often stands in the way of his progress.²⁸ The crystal merchant says: "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."²⁹ The crystal merchant has gotten so used to his old, slow life that change, even that which brings a better fortune, seems unfamiliar and beyond the reach of his capabilities. The crystal merchant even confesses that he has delayed going to the pilgrimage to Mecca, an old dream of his, because he is afraid that once he realizes this dream, his life will no longer have purpose. This fear of the unknown and absence of courage to explore the possibilities are familiar images of the Orient as "a timeless place, changeless and static, cut off from the progress of Western history."³⁰ In contrast, Santiago's adventurous spirit, his active, courageous and strong attitude towards life, embellish him with masculine, almost hero-like, qualities that are deemed to be an inherent part of European culture and civilization. Santiago is shown to actually be a savior to the crystal merchant from his old, degenerate and perhaps 'uncivilized' ways that have been keeping him from achieving any progress or advancement in life.

Satisfied with his accomplishments in Tangiers or let us say 'conquests,' Santiago sets off on his journey to Egypt. Here, again, the Orientals are described in less than complimentary words, with adjectives like "fat," "hooded" and "black garments" to describe a lazy and perhaps dangerous race.³¹ Unable to take the journey alone, Santiago decides to join a group of travelers on their way to Egypt. The Arabs leading this expedition are shown to be violent, bloody people with little or no refinement. As they embark on their journey, the leader of the caravans uses harsh words to alert the passengers to the dangers of the desert and from disobeying his orders. He tells them: "I hold the power of life

and death for every person I take with me" and then, a little later, adds "In the desert, disobedience means death."³² Having established his right of rule over his passengers, the leader of the caravans does not try in any way to win them over or to make them feel comfortable as they embark on this journey.

The symbols that are associated with these Arabs, such as the desert, are also loaded with negative connotations. Describing the desert as "a capricious lady," which sometimes drives men crazy, the Orient is feminized and made thus to appear weak, erratic and mysterious and at times tempting in an "immoral" and "degenerate way."³³ The Orient "with its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habit of inaccuracy, its backwardness" seems to personify itself in this mysterious and often treacherous desert that has captivated Santiago's heart and soul.³⁴ Finding himself hopelessly mesmerized by it, his actions take on an erratic and eccentric nature.

Santiago, with his store of knowledge acquired from books and the openness to learning more about the universe, stands in sharp contrast with these Orientals. He seems to fair well in this new harsh environment because of his ability to immerse himself "into the universal current of life" where he says "the histories of all people are connected."³⁵ Paying attention to the omens that the desert was offering to him in the form of direct signs from nature, whether it be from the stars, wind or animals, he feels proud of himself for his ability to speak the language of the universe. At one point, the narrator says: "He was excited at his intuitive understanding of the camel driver's comment: maybe he was also learning the universal language that deals with the past and the present of all people."³⁶ In contrast, the Englishman whom Santiago befriends on this journey is shown to be deficient in this language because of his lack of awareness and his disinterestedness in what the naturalness of the desert or life has to offer him. The narrator comments that "it was only the Englishman who was unaware of all this; he was, for the most part, immersed in reading his books."³⁷ Using the Englishman as a foil to Santiago, Coelho shows how the language of the universe can complement a person's book knowledge and reveal to him secrets that can enhance his life experiences. Ironically, when Santiago fails to understand the book the Englishman gave him, the Englishman pronounces him to be "too primitive to understand those things," a statement which shows the Englishman's lack of respect of Oriental cultures that have deep spiritual connections with the metaphysical world.³⁸

As a well read Westerner whose 'superior' powers and abilities enable him to learn the language of the universe, Santiago becomes the 'ideal' picture of the progressive "dynamic, innovative and expanding culture" of the Western man.³⁹

As such, Santiago is able to conquer the desert, reading its signs, talking its universal language and even captivating its women. Santiago's relationship with Fatima, the Arab woman, reminds us of those fairy tale stories, like *The Arabian Nights*, where the woman is swept off her feet and falls in love in a matter of seconds. Again, this depiction of the scenario by Coelho has strong colonialist implications. The woman, an Arab, is conquered by Santiago, a Westerner, who believes that his arrival is nothing short of a blessing to her. When asked her name, Fatima answers by saying: "It's the name of the Prophet's daughter... The invaders carried the name everywhere."⁴⁰ The pride that Fatima expresses as she speaks of these invaders also extends to Santiago, who from now on seems to pervade Fatima's life and captivate her every thought, wish and action. She tells Santiago: "I have been waiting for you here at this oasis for a long time. I have forgotten about my past, about my traditions, and the way in which men of the desert expect women to behave."⁴¹ Like other colonized people, Fatima becomes so involved in her situation that she loses touch with the traditions of her culture and starts to take on the colonizers' way of life which, for her, is synonymous with Santiago's lifestyle. For instance, she meets him on her own and converses with him despite the fact that the traditions of her culture prohibit women talking to strangers. When Fatima tells Santiago: "Ever since I was a child, I have dreamed that the desert would bring me a wonderful present. Now, my present has arrived, and it's you" reemphasizes the colonialist attitudes in the story.⁴² It seems that Santiago arrives on the horizon as a hero and saves Fatima from her otherwise uneventful life in the desert.

As Santiago conquers Fatima, he is also able to master the language of the desert. Walking one day in the oases, he notices a hawk attacking another hawk. "As it did so," the narrator says, "a sudden, fleeting image came to the boy: an army with its swords at the ready, riding into the oasis."⁴³ Believing that what he saw was an omen, Santiago tries to warn the chieftains of the impending danger. The question that the chieftains pose to Santiago: "why would the desert reveal such things to a stranger, when it knows that we have been here for generations?" sums up Coelho's unexplainable faith in Santiago's new found powers. Santiago's answer that "because my eyes are not yet accustomed to the desert. I can see things that eyes habituated to the desert might not see" is only another exaggeration by Coelho of Western man's capabilities.⁴⁴ It seems that in a few days Santiago has been able to become better than the seers and alchemists who have been learning the language of the desert all their lives. Having said this, Santiago can no longer be described as an average boy but more of a 'hero' who is to save the Orient from the evil growing within its home land. The colonialist attitude that the Orient with its "violence" and "untrustworthiness" needs to be "civilized" and "saved" takes precedence over any other positive

image of the East that occasionally emerges within the stories plot line.⁴⁵ Santiago's last and final comparison occurs when he is equated with the Arab alchemist, who is greatly revered and respected by all clansmen because of his supernatural abilities, including the ability to turn metal into gold. However, not even this great man can compare with Santiago, who proves his superiority by turning himself into the wind, something which no Oriental has been able to do. When Santiago thanks the alchemist for the help he has given him, the alchemist's reply is: "I only invoked what you already knew," revealing Coelho's colonialist attitude that no matter how much this alchemist knew of the language of the world, Santiago, the Westerner, was better off because of his superior knowledge.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the fact that the alchemist believes that he had only been a means in bringing out what was already there in Santiago reflects the idea that Edward Said says is to be found in Gramsci's theories. Said says that "cultural hegemony," that is the domination and mastery of the East by the West through cultural paradigms and teachings, has made the Oriental accept his backwardness in relation to European "superiority" not through force but by submissive "consent".⁴⁷ Having been conditioned to accept European superiority over Oriental backwardness, the Oriental feels inadequate and always at a disadvantage whenever he finds himself being compared to the European. Confused as to his place in the universe, the Oriental unequivocally denies himself any sense of pride in his accomplishments or successes which, inadvertently, make him an easy prey to any and all who want to exploit him. The Arab alchemist's comment, then, that he had "only invoked" what Santiago already knew confirms Coelho's awareness and acceptance of this 'cultural hegemony'.

Santiago's most important conquest is to come in the form of a treasure that he is to find at the pyramids in Egypt. Before going to the pyramids, however, Santiago gets to learn about the great powers of the Emerald Tablet, also called the Philosopher's Stone or Elixir of life. He becomes amongst the lucky few who are able to acquire its secrets and to use its powers to purify their soul and become one with the world. He also acquires the impossible feat of turning actual metal into gold. Empowered with these unique gifts, Santiago feels that he has been blessed and that he could live a happy life without finding the treasure that he had been promised. Recalling all the people that he had come across in the desert and the lessons that he had learned, Santiago realizes that if he went back before reaching the pyramids, he would have stopped "in the midst of realizing" his destiny, a matter which he had long been warned against. The Arab alchemist had once told him that

before a dream is realized, the Soul of the World tests everything that was learned along the way. It does this not because it is evil, but so that we can, in

addition to realizing our dreams, master the lessons we've learned as we've moved toward that dream. That's the point at which most people give up. It's the point at which, as we say in the language of the desert, one 'dies of thirst just when the palm trees have appeared on the horizon.'⁴⁸

Reminding himself that he had only a little more left in achieving his destiny, Santiago heads to the pyramids and starts to dig for his treasure. In addition to his disillusionment at finding nothing, he is also robbed by a band of thieves who beat him in search of fortune. Once convinced that he had nothing more to give them than the piece of gold he had inside his bag, they decide to leave him beaten and bereft of any means of livelihood. As they depart, however, one man decides to impart on him these words of wisdom:

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.⁴⁹

Though Santiago hasn't been able to find any treasure and he has also been battered and robbed, he suddenly experiences a sense of elation as he realizes that he has finally been able to reach his final destination and overcome his last challenge. Smiling, "his heart bursting with joy," he now realizes where his true treasure is and is finally ready to head back home.⁵⁰ As his "project" has now been completed and his enlightenment of the soul, the 'holy grail' of Western alchemy, achieved, Santiago leaves feeling like the true 'conqueror' who was not afraid to travel to this scary and strange world of the 'other.' Having exploited its resources and learnt all that he needed to learn of its secrets, he is able to leave in full glory, with great bounties at his disposal, whether material, in the form of the Arab woman, or ecclesiastical in the form of illumination of the soul.

Coelho's *The Alchemist* has had great success because it endeavors to teach important lessons and secrets about life, love and the universe. Ironically, by nature of its success it has helped in propagating negative images about the Orient which have fed and encouraged "hegemony" of the West over the East.⁵¹ The book's lessons about receptivity to the world and to its universal language are thus undermined when this 'openness' turns out to be an acceptance of the 'other' not as an equal, but as a 'mutilated' version of the white male, a fixation on other races as being not different but lesser than the white race. Edward Said defines this unequal relationship with the 'other' as "positional superiority," one where the Westerner involves himself into many relationships with "the Orient without

ever losing him the relative upper hand."⁵² Throughout the story we see how Santiago was able to build good relationships with non Westerners, but always on his own terms based on his own sense of superiority over them! Whether it be the crystal merchant, the alchemist or the chieftains, Santiago thrived on his sense of 'positional superiority' over them. They all were a means to reach his ends. As Edward Said says, the Orient and Orientals are allowed to have "shape, identity, definition" only in relation to their "importance to imperial strategy" and to their "natural role as an appendage to Europe."⁵³

In conclusion, as a work of literature that is supposed to change lives and bring transformations through the 'alchemy of literature,' this book by its own dichotomies has failed to clear any misconceptions related to the Orient. In fact, in continuing to perpetuate stereotypes it has tarnished its own alchemical process of regeneration and kept the chasm between East and West wide open. Santiago's observation that: "It's true that everything has its destiny, but one day that destiny will be realized. So each thing has to transform itself into something better, and to acquire a new destiny, until some day, the Soul of the World becomes one thing only" becomes his own and Western man's imperialist dream for the future. Western man's prejudiced view of the world as revolving around him, working to bring about his needs and desires makes him oblivious to any injustices he might perform along the way. This condition of total self involvement or "Eurocentricism" makes him able to take from others but actually unable to give anything in return.⁵⁴ Thus, Santiago's dream of "the soul of the World [becoming] one thing only," is actually the Western man's colonialist wish to have all of mankind abide by its 'Universal' rules and teachings.

Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* describes this condition essentially as "a denial of all culture, history and value outside the colonizer's frame." He says that as "a systematic negation of the other person, it places focus on the colonizer's needs, wants and desires, leaving nothing left for this non-existent other."⁵⁵ Coelho's story encourages this same ideology in that he purposefully uses the negative images of the Orient in order to bring forth his message. He could have chosen to unfold his story in the Western world, but his deliberate choice of the Orient shows his premeditated intent to abuse its weaknesses and stereotypes for the purpose of enhancing his plot line. Like Goethe, Byron, Emerson, Joyce and Borges before him, Coelho uses images of the East to enliven his works and add a mysterious and supernatural aura to his story. However, like many Orientalists before him, Coelho's bias and his indifference to the 'other' undermines the effectiveness of his message and his words become a hollow echo in a world that is in desperate need of truth, meaning and hope.

When Coelho in his interview in the *Ahram* newspaper is asked if the purpose of writing his story was to look for answers, he responds by saying: "My works pose more questions than answers." With this in mind, let us hope that this story will become a catalyst for opening up new dialogues about the importance of objective judgment free of any and all outdated modes of thought. Michael Foucault once said that "To unlearn is one of the important tasks of self-cultivation."⁵⁶ Let us hope that self-cultivation or what Coelho calls 'alchemy' becomes an occasion for the unlearning of "the inherent dominative mode" and a re-learning of the value of independent objective analysis of non-Western cultures and its people.

Thus having illustrated the paucity in the attempt of Coelho's *The Alchemist* to render a clear formulation of a positive attitude towards the Orient, it is important to understand that we still need a genuine display of an unbiased representation of the true identity of the East by the writers of the West. There is still an imminent need for the Western writers to consider presenting a quintessential image of the Orient to illustrate the insurmountable difficulties inherent in creating a national identity amongst largely heterogeneous postcolonial societies like those in the East.

الكتابة الاستشراقية كما تظهر في رواية (الكيميائي)

مشاعل السديري، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الرياض، الرياض، السعودية.

ملخص

في روايته (الكيميائي) يرى كويلهو إمكانية تحقيق المزيد من الكشف عن أسرار العالم من حولنا بالتعمق في سبر أغوار النفس البشرية بواسطة التفاعل الروحي المستوحى من التفاعل المادي الكيميائي. إلا أن الكاتب لم يستطع الانعتاق من المفاهيم والأنماط السائدة للشخصيات الشرقية مما اضعف ما ترمي إليه هذه الرواية. كما أن تعزيز الصورة النمطية السلبية للعالم الشرقي جعلت رواية كويلهو من الروايات التي تبرز الفرق بين العالم الشرقي والغربي وأنا والأخر والتي يرى بعض المستشرقين مسؤوليتها عن التحسس وعدم التفهم بين الحضارتين. وبتطبيق معايير المستشرقين ومقارنة ما يرمي إليه كويلهو من الإنصات إلى لغة الكون والتحرر من المفاهيم القديمة إلى جانب عدم قدرته على التخلص من أفكاره الشائعة التي تصف الشرق بالعالم الأخر المتخلف، فإن ذلك التناقض بين التنظير والتطبيق يعد من أبرز المثالب في هذه الرواية.

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Notes

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