



An exploration of the literary stylistic analytical techniques of postmodernism in Paulo Coelho's novel: *The Alchemist*

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Abstract: *The literary stylistic techniques are the techniques of rhetorical use of literary terms used by the writer for variety and novelty. The main purpose of this study is to illustrate the various literary stylistic techniques employed by postmodern writers, especially, novelists and the same techniques have been used by Paulo Coelho in his novel 'The Alchemist'. 'The Alchemist', one of the world's best-seller, translated into 80 languages, was written by Paulo Coelho, in 1988. He is the most prolific novelist and lyricist of Brazil. The novel consists of the journey of wondering boy Santiago who travels from Andalusia (Spain) to Pyramid of Egypt, in pursuance of his recurrent dream, the dream which he experiences repeatedly over a long period. The novel is analysed through qualitative method. The researchers have analyzed the data in the light of postmodern literary stylistic theories.*

Keywords: *postmodernism, recurrent dream and stylistic technique, novel, qualitative*

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Introduction

Postmodernism is a literary movement of the late 20th century and is a reaction to the odd and gaudy techniques either of styles or of themes of modernism. Thus, it is a host of movements that reacted against the tendencies of modernism in the field of culture, literature, art, philosophy, history, economics, architecture, fiction and literary criticism. The term postmodernism is mainly used for the period that takes place after the Second World War or Post-Colonial period. The term was used by Arnold J. Toynbee in 1939 as he says: “our own Post-Modern Age has been inaugurated by the general war of 1914-1919”. Thus, it is commonly assumed that the period was in full swing after the Second World War.

Postmodernism movement was a drive against modernism in all aspects of art. To avoid monotony of the style, postmodern writers introduced new literary techniques which changed literary techniques. Among these techniques, fragmentation, pastiche, intertextuality, irony, metafiction, minimalism, temporal distortion and magical realism are more popular.

Paulo Coelho is also one of postmodern living lyricists and novelists. He was born on August 24, 1947, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is known for his best-selling novel *The Alchemist*, which he wrote in 1988 in Portuguese. Later, it was translated into many languages. The plot of novel consists of the story of a wandering boy Santiago who sets on a journey from Spain to Pyramids of Egypt in search of a treasure that he dreams about. He remains persistent throughout his journey and endures torturing pains. He becomes victorious due to his decision making and dispelling the fear of loss one of the obstacles in the progress of human beings on this planet.

The novel is written in the postmodern era and is embedded with postmodern literary stylistic techniques like fragmentation, parody, intertextuality, pastiche, metafiction, minimalism, temporal distortion, magical realism and faction.

Literature Review

This section comprises of theoretical framework based on the different theories regarding postmodern stylistic literary techniques and would help the reader what previously has been described about the stylistic literary techniques of postmodernism.

Theoretical framework

Fragmentation

The work of literature is said to be fragmented when its plot, characterization, themes, events, actions, language, grammar, situations, and facts are distorted deliberately. Factual references are distorted throughout the literary work. Postmodern does not contain the flavour of anything obvious but in most cases, it is something that rejects any format or simplicity, whatever may be the field whether it is art, music, architecture, literature or sociological theory. This lack of format has become the identity of postmodernity. Nonetheless, the multifaceted characteristics of postmodernity make it bizarre (Nicol, 2009).

Parody

Postmodern writers made the use of parody and irony frequently by imitating the works of previous authors by changing the style, tone, attitude and ideas. Hutcheon (1988: 185) describes parody as

...is not the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth century theories of wit. The collective weight of parodic practice suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity.

The literary writers do not parody the works of previous writers merely for ridiculing and caricaturing, but they aim at bridging the gap between the past and present forms of art and literature with the use of irony. They re-write, change and transform the style of parodied works and present them in new realistic form with playfulness to avoid the monotony of style and form. They make parody of histories, religious books, biographies, myths, legends, works of traditional and popular literature, sci-fiction, and other genres of literature blending with irony and humour by using new stylistic techniques that the previous works seem to be fresh and innovative (Hutcheon, 1988). Radical irony is one of the tools of postmodern writers

for parodying the past works. In order to depict the ironic effect, the writers not only manifest the verbal or situational irony but also juxtapose all ironic forms in the text as a whole.

Intertextuality

The term was coined by Bulgaria-born, French theorist Julia Kristeva in 1966 to explain the interdependence of different texts of past and modern writers. The different texts are amalgamated with literary devices in the linguistic and cultural perspectives. The postmodern writers are of the opinion that no literary work is said to be the product of any single author but rather there is relationship to other works so far, their signs and symbols are concerned.

We cannot know the past except through its texts, its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are texts. Even the institutions of the past, its social structures and practices, could be seen, in one sense as social texts (Hutcheon, 1988). Postmodern intertextuality is a deliberate attempt to present novelty by abridging gap between past and present in the form of new texts. Attempt is made to take powerful allusions from other texts and manifest them through irony. The text is no more original but the part of earlier discourses and it signifies the meaning to the readers. (Hutcheon 1988; 119-128)

Metafiction

The term was coined by an American author and critic William Gass. It is a technique used to fictionalize fiction. Its aim is to make the reader realise the nature of fiction she reads. Authors make use of allegories via quotations, paraphrasing, irony and intertextuality to make parody of other fictions in order to maintain emotional distance as narrators. It deals with the facts which are false. The historical figures and events are presented as fictitious without any clear difference. It is the combination of history and fiction. (Hutcheon 1988)

Temporal distortion

This technique is used frequently in movies and texts. Its purpose is to distort the linear timeline. Authors jump from present to past and vice versa or fit the historical and cultural events which do not match to the running situations. McEwan (1988: pp.117-18) describes this technique in the following words:

Whatever time is, the common sense, everyday version of it as linear, regular, absolute, from left to right, from past right through the present to the future, is either nonsense or a tiny fraction of the truth ----- time is variable. We know it from Einstein ----- in relativity theory time is dependent on the speed of the observer.

Magical Realism

This is one of the most common techniques used by postmodern literary writers. Its purpose is to make fiction imaginary by blending dream-like qualities in order to make the work more effective. Realistic and imaginary time shifts are amalgamated by involving fairy stories, myths, unusual dreams, legends, and metaphysical events which give surprise, horrific and abrupt shocks to the readers. Between the “real” and the “magic” there is a third category of reality. It consists of a fusion of the visible and the tangible, of hallucinations and fantasy. It is similar to what the surrealists around Breton wished for, and it is what can be called “magical realism” Asturias 1968, pp. 215-227).

Research Methodology

This is a library research and the researchers have used descriptive qualitative method to analyse the data Hutcheon (1988; Nicol, 2009). The primary sources are Paulo Coelho’s novel, ‘The Alchemist’ and soft copy of Hutchison’s (1988) ‘A Poetics of Postmodernism’. Secondary sources are previous thesis, handouts of class lectures and internet. Therefore, the technique of documentation for data collection has been used. The data analysis is based on the descriptive qualitative method (Nicol, 2009). It means the researchers have described the text and content analysis, with close reading technique, to gain knowledge about the postmodern literary stylistic techniques used by the novelist.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Literary Stylistic Techniques of Postmodernism in ‘The Alchemist’

Fragmentation

The Alchemist novel depicts the story of a nomadic boy Santiago who travels from Andalusia to Pyramids of Egypt in pursuance of his dream. The plot of novel is not well organized. This novel consists of two parts and each part consists of sections without numerals and separated by stars. The only first line of the sentence of each section is written in the capital letters

though sentence is completed in the second line. The narrator is third person anonymous omniscient. The story is like an episodic mythical tale narrated subjectively and objectively simultaneously. The story is set in the past especially in pre-modern era that is, the era before scientific advancement. The plot is encircled by the magical events and characters overlapping the time distinction. The author has not laid emphasis on characterization. Characters are chosen from ordinary life and speak the same language irrespective of their role and position in the story. There are almost sixteen characters. Most of the characters are introduced with the names of their professions such as The Alchemist, Crystal Merchant, Gypsy Woman, Camel Driver, The Monk, Candy Seller, The Merchant, The Tribal Chieftan of Al-Fayoum, The Barkeep and The Caravan Leader, except Santiago, Fatima and Melchizedek. The plot is dominated by the recurrent dream of the boy and is persistently distorted by magical events throughout the novel. The events are not connected coherently. The novel starts with the story of Narcissus, in the prologue, which has no apparent link with upcoming story. The name of The Alchemist appears in the second part of the novel with whose name the novel is entitled. The exaggerated story of Melchizedek, an honest man, the camel driver and the alchemist does not fit to the plot. Actions of the novel shift from Andalusia (Spain) to Tangier (North Africa) and then to Pyramids of Egypt and again to Andalusia. This displacement of actions violates the coherency of the plot (Nicol, 2009:1). Nicol (2009) argues that no specific theme is disclosed in this technique. Themes like spiritual journey, personal legends, the unity of nature, the danger of fear, free will and determination, decision making, fate or fault and so on run under the philosophies like existentialism, transcendentalism and supernaturalism. Therefore, this novel manipulates the fragmentation (one of the postmodern literary techniques).

Parody, Playfulness and Radical Irony

This novel is full of irony and parody. Paulo Coelho has parodied religious and historical events by using irony. The writer has ridiculed religious institutions ironically. The novel begins under parodied ironical inferences when Santiago refutes his father to become the priest and chooses to be the shepherd, for him the shepherd is superior to the priest who only preaches the religion at the seminary.

I couldn't have found God in the seminary, he thought, as he looked at the sunrise. (The Alchemist, 1995:10)

The author has parodied the historical places like Tangier one of the ports of North Africa. The author conveys that how the people cheat as the boy was robbed off by the young man and how the people have dual nature as in the case of crystal merchant. The author calls the people of Tangier the infidels. The author has also parodied the Sahara desert one of the historical deserts of Africa. The writer has declared the desert, the place of killings and miseries. Moreover, the writer has presented the pyramids of Egypt merely the heap of stones.

The religious books are also parodied by the author. He brings out the specific events from the Bible and the Quran and re-writes them with irony. He ridicules the Christian seminaries and style of preaching when the boy rejects the proposal of his father to become the priest in the church and also mockeries at the ten commandments of the Jesus Christ being preached by the priests. He has pin pointed the weaknesses of the Muslims.

The shepherd is shown as an educated person who purchases books and has studied Latin, Spanish and theology. The laziness of human beings is compared with the eating, drinking and sleeping of the sheep. The character of Melchizedek is taken from bible where he is mentioned as the king of Salem (Jerusalem), and the greatest priest of God. He is also presented as the king of peace and the king of righteousness in the bible but in the novel, he is presented as an old man in simple dress who with his magical power guides the boy and demands the one-tenth of the sheep for interpreting the boy's dream. The author has parodied ironically those people who completely rely on fate under the umbrella of religion and quit using their potentialities as the old man tells the boy that the greatest lie of the world is,

It's 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, 1995: 18).

Moreover, the author has parodied the religious beliefs not only of Christians but also of Muslims as the boy reaches at Muslim habitat city Tarifa, one of the African cities. He apologises to the crystal merchant for meals but receives no response. The boy starts cleaning the shop meantime the customers arrive and purchase the crystals, the merchant considering the boy as good omen offers him meals and pretends to be the follower of the Quran which insists on offering commends meals to the hungry. The boy

asks the merchant if he had money what he would have done. The merchant replies that he would have performed the Hajj, the fifth obligation of Islam. Later, when his business flourished and had enough money to perform the Hajj he declines to go to Makkah. Therefore, the author has ironically parodied religious beliefs and human inability of doing works irrespective of their supremacy on the earth.

Pastiche

It is taken from the Italian word ‘Pasticcio’ which means a medley of various ingredients. Postmodern writers paste various ingredients of genres and styles of literature and art including words, sentences, complete passages, events, situations of one author or more simultaneously re-write and change linguistically by using parody, humour and irony.

But looking at both the aesthetic and the historical past in postmodernist architecture. is anything but what Jameson describes as pastiche that is “the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion” (Hutcheon 1988, p.186).

Paulo Coelho has borrowed different ingredients from other texts in the form of words, passages and events. The words Thummin and Urim (black and white stones) are taken from the Bible. The words ‘Makub’ (it is written), Hajj, Makka, Allah and Hookah are taken from the Arabic. He has pasted passages from the Bible and the Quran as the Englishman tells the boy that,

It’s in the Bible, the same book that taught me about Urim and Thummim. These stones were the only form of divination permitted by God. The priests carried them in a golden breastplate (The Alchemist, 1995, p 72)

One passage is taken from the Quran. The passage is mentioned in Surah xii, Yousuf (Joseph), verses 43-45. The elderly chieftain of oasis narrates to the boy that,

...when the pharaoh dreamed of cows that were thin and cows that were fat, this man I’ m speaking of rescued Egypt from famines. His name was Joseph. (The Alchemist, 1995. p 112).

Intertextuality

Coelho's references to other literary works or oral traditions are subservient to a more predominant emphasis on the way. In 'The Alchemist', we find direct inferences, related to time and dreams, from a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentine writer, entitled, "The Story of Two Dreamers", from a universal history of infamy (originally published in Spanish in 1935), a collection of diverse fictional narrations. Another portion of the story is linked with the work of E.W.Lane's translation of a retelling "The Ruined Man Who Became Rich Again through a Dream" (Tale 14 from the collection 'The Thousand and One Nights'). Another version of the story can be found in Rumi's story, "In Baghdad, Dreaming of Cairo: In Cairo, Dreaming of Baghdad". Coelho has also borrowed metaphors and resonances from religious texts and writings of other authors regarding the questions of human existence.

Metafiction

In the novel, the narrator has fictionalized fiction. When the boy purchased a book, and was unable to read the first page of that book. The boy, even, was unable to pronounce the names of the characters. Contrary to saying of the narrator (the author of this novel) the novel comprises of more than fifteen characters.

He started to read the book he had bought. On the very first page it described a burial ceremony. And the names of the people involved were very difficult to pronounce. If he ever wrote a book, he thought, he would present one person at a time, so that the reader wouldn't have to worry about memorizing a lot of names (The Alchemist, 1995, p.16).

The author himself seems to be self-contradictory when in the novel the boy in conversation with Melchizedek says,

Sometimes it's better to be with the sheep, who don't say anything. And better still to be alone with one's books. They tell their incredible stories at the time when you want to hear them (The Alchemist, 1995, p 20).

Temporal distortion

Paulo Coelho focuses on fictional and abstract time with real time and associates them indiscriminately over centuries, and unifies them into their

reading of answers. The search for meaning is not bound by chronological time or space as absolute coordinates, but rather as positions to be taken and symbols to be interpreted. According to Soni (2014), Coelho paints the experience which is timeless and never dated. Within the text, the space time coordinates are apparent for the sake of the construction of the literary world. The story of the novel jumps in time almost a year, to four days before the boy's next visit to the village. The author has set the story in the pre-modern period that does not suit to the modernity. While dealing with ancient events the writer gives the clues of current political scenario as Fatima tells the boy about the war on oasis that

It's war between forces that are fighting for the balance of power (The Alchemist, 1995, p.101).

In the dream of old man who was taken by the angel to future to show the status of his two sons. The story of Narcissus legend has no connection with the rest of the novel and the story shifts from Spain to Egypt and again to Spain.

Minimalism

When authors use simple and common characters and events in literary works without exaggerating them is said to be minimalism. Its aim is to involve the readers.

Paulo Coelho has introduced the minimum characters. They do not excess to sixteen. Normally, the novelists use number of characters. Paulo Coelho has depicted characters by their professions rather with specific names. The events are also common and are presented without any over exaggeration.

Magical Realism

This novel revolves around the magical powers and stories. The novel begins with story of Narcissus where lake is shown speaking to the boy who dies later drowning into the lake. The boy pursues his recurrent dream in which he sees a child who takes him to the Pyramids of Egypt to find the treasure; the gypsy woman who interprets the boy's dream; Melchizedek who makes the boy blind with illuminating light and writes about his parents, seminary and merchant's daughter on the ground; the old man who is taken by the angel to the heaven to show the future of his sons; the magical power of The Alchemist and the extraordinary power of the boy who erupts the storm in the oasis with his intuitive power are the examples of magical

power. Dash (2013, p 242) argues “so far as Magic Realism is concerned, Paulo Coelho has frequently made use of this genre and *The Alchemist* testifies to it. The alchemist’s transforming lead into gold is nothing but magic in fiction.”

Faction

This term was frequently used in 1970s. Contrary to metafiction which deals with fictionalization of fiction, faction deals with juxtaposition of factual historical events with fictional events without delineating the line of demarcation between them.

In the novel *Tangier, Fort by Moors, Ceuta, Tarifa, Al-Fayoum Oasis, African desert and Pyramids of Egypt* are historical places where historical events took place in the past are juxtaposed fictionally in the novel without delineating the difference among them.

Multiculturalism

The postmodern literary writers frequently choose characters, historical references, religious events and diversity of language signs from not only their own country but also from various countries to make their work international. It also includes behaviour, pattern, belief, style of people of different races throughout the world.

Coelho has depicted names of characters, places, languages, forts and countries of different regions. The journey of the boy starts from Andalusia Spain and walks through North Africa and reaches Egypt. He stays at Andalusia and Tarifa (cities of Spain), Tangier (a port), Sahara desert, Al-Fayoum Oasis (Africa) and Pyramids of Egypt. Soni (2014) also says that Coelho has made tremendous use of abstract and concrete symbols which represent various disciplines like History, Geography, Theology, Philosophy, Psychology and Mythology. The characters’ names suggest different religious and cultural identity such as Santiago, The Englishman, The Merchant, The Alchemist, Fatima and so on. The name of the historical fort is mentioned as

At the highest point in Tarifa is an old fort, built by the Moors (The Alchemist, 1995. p34).

Religions like Islam, Christian and Jews, their culture, way of worships, places of worships and languages are described. Languages like Arabic,

English, Spanish and Coptic are mentioned. Historical places like pyramids of Egypt, the fort built by the moors in North Africa and Makkah in Saudi Arabia are mentioned. These all are intermingled in the novel.

Sci-fiction

The postmodern authors have not avoided the influence of science on literary works. Einstein's theories of relativity and quantum physics have left great influence on the postmodern authors. Authors unfold the miraculous intensity of science and its impacts on human society.

Coelho observes the universe and has read Einstein's theories related to mass and energy. He is infused with the idea of energy and its relation to the metaphysical.

Everything on earth is being continuously transformed, because the earth is alive... and it has a soul (The Alchemist, 1995, p82).

Coelho has also reflected the idea of transformation of energy from one form to another form as Melchizedek tells the boy that he helps people in different ways as he says,

Not always in this way, but I always appear in one form or another. Sometimes I appear in the form of solution, or a good idea. At other times, at a crucial moment, I make it easier for things to happen (The Alchemist, 1995, p 24).

He also was inspired by the evolutionary theory that everything on the earth evolves as the alchemist tells the boy that,

When something evolves, everything around that thing evolves as well (The Alchemist, 1995, p 144).

Moreover, the transformation of the boy's soul to change the wind into the storm is the example of transformation of energy from one form to another form.

Findings

After data analysis of the novel 'The Alchemist', it may be concluded that the novel is written in postmodern era and is based on postmodern literary stylistic techniques. For instance, the plot and characterization is fragmented as per principles of the literary techniques. The religious and

historical places, persons and books of Muslims and Christians are parodied with irony and humour. In this regard, the novel reveals and parodies the culture of Muslims and Christians of pre-modern era, including their languages, religious beliefs, trades and customs. Words, passages and events, mentioned in the novel, are mainly taken from the Quran, the Bible and the other religious sources.

Furthermore, the writer has amalgamated the stories such as references regarding dream are taken from the works of Jorge Luis Borges, E.W. Lane and Rumi. The story of the novel is temporally distorted due to recurrent dream and supernatural events which are dominant throughout the novel. As regards, people and places, the writer has ironically ridiculed and parodied the bulkiest novels, with odd names of the characters, of modern novelists. There are almost sixteen major and minor characters and are introduced with the names of the concerned professions except three or four. In nutshell, the whole novel is full of magical persons, dreams, stories, events and feasts. The factual historical places like Tangier, Moor's fort, Tarifa, Al-Fayoum Oasis and Sahara desert are intermingled with the fictitious background. The glimpse of modern advancement in the field of science is prescribed in the novel, in the perspective of Einstein's theories related to mass and energy.

Conclusion

Paulo Coelho's novel, the alchemist is an embodiment of postmodern literary stylistic techniques. Like other postmodern literary writes, he also has narrated the story by using various narrative techniques. The plot and characterization of the novel is fragmented due to overlapping of time and magical events. The events either historical or religious are parodied not apparently but ironically. The author has pasted various ingredients from the previous works of writers and religious books including the Bible and the Quran. Intertextuality is observed in the form of references and inferences from works of Borges. Metafiction is found in his novel in the form of allegories, quotations and allusions. The time is distorted due to the recurrent dream and magical events in the novel. The story jumps forward and backward so for the actions are concerned. The characters are not more than sixteen, thus, the best suiting to minimalism, one of the important postmodern techniques. The novel is dominated by the magical events in the form of dreams, myths and legends. The historical and fictional events are amalgamated, representing the technique of faction. Multiculturalism is

depicted by selecting different characters, languages and places from different regions of the continent. Most importantly, the writer has not avoided the influence of science in his novel showing the transformation of energy from one form to another.

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