

Paulo Coelho's Depiction of Human Conflict in *The Zahir*

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Abstract

This study is focused to identify the character and how the main character's conflict depicted in the novel of The Zahir by Paulo Coelho. In explaining the aim of the study, the writer applies the structuralism analysis which highlights to find the relation and connection among the elements of literature. From the analysis, the writer finds that the main character's traits are related to the setting and the conflicts that run in the plot of the novel. The main character faces two conflicts; they are external and internal conflicts. These conflicts occur through character and how he/she tackles the problems which are reflected in human life.

Keywords: character traits, conflicts of the characters, problems.

Human beings face many problems in their daily life. Problems are the process of life which plays the role in the shaping of the character of human being. In life human faces many problems such as problem of love, problem of work, problem of family, problem of themselves and others. People attempt to find solution of that problem in order to make their life better. Yet in life, human must face these situations, because it is normal for people in life. Problem or some people say conflict is to fight hard or try to hard to do something. Based on Oxford, conflict is "struggle, fight or serious disagreement" (89).

Conflict is experienced by each and everyone, children, teenager, parents and others. Conflicts may arise in several situations, such as conflict with other people, conflict with environment, conflict with themselves and others. Conflicts also can be found in a literary work. And just like an imitation and representation of human being, characters in literary work may suffer in a conflict that can affect their life. It can be in novel, drama, short story and others. One of the novels that depicts about conflict is *The Zahir* by Paulo Coelho. Conflict in *The Zahir* is a complicated conflict which is faced by one main character in this story.

Paulo Coelho is one of the most successful and popular in contemporary writers. He was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on August 24, 1947. He was a journalist, an actor and a theatre director before becoming an author. Paulo Coelho's novels have awakened a great interest in the international community of writers, while attracting the endless number of readers across the Earth's meridians. Today, Coelho's writings are established as

universal literary phenomenon. His literature is dynamically and vividly written; it rises from the human experiences and penetrates through every individual.

After reading the novel *The Zahir*, the writer decided to analyze this novel because the main character of the novel is encountered several conflicts which is reflecting in daily life of people. These conflicts taught him what he is and his life is and at last he regained his wife Esther. The writer believes that the conflicts that appear in the main character and minor characters, journey is become an interesting point to discuss by using the structuralism analysis. The writer discusses the story of the novel, major and minor characters traits and external and internal conflicts.

The *Zahir* is a novel published in the year of 2005 by the Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho. He himself is a narrator; love, loss and obsession of the basic theme of novel. The narrator of *The Zahir* embarked more on a spiritual journey in order to recover his wife; thus, in turn resulted to his personal transformation. He was a successful writer, a celebrity in fact, and possessed the same weakness of a typical married man: forgetful to demonstrate his love to his wife assuming that she had already known about it. His pilgrimage has subtly dawned on the day when Esther, his wife had disappeared. However, anger, pain, pride, and the need to move on clouded his desire to find her.

Then one day, he met for the first time Mikhail, the person he suspected as his wife's lover. Mikhail unconsciously rekindled in him the desire to find his wife; and eventually, the realization of his shortcomings; the acceptance of his own imperfections; and the resolve to be a better person in order to be deserving of Esther's love again. His search for Esther takes him from France to Spain, Croatia and eventually the beautiful landscape of Central Asia, Kazakhshtan. The journey takes him from the safety of his world to unknown path, searching for new understanding of the nature of love and the power of destiny.

The character that will be discusses and those who are having conflict with Narrator as the main character. The traits of the character will be discussed based on their speech, action and comment from other character. The characters of this novel can help to understand this paper very clearly.

First, the narrator is the protagonist of the novel and he is Esther's husband. Mentally, he has hobby to feast. In his life, he is free to get woman he wants because he has a lot of money. He is falling in love with many women. It makes Esther's husband was married with three woman before he married with Esther.

I get married for the first time to an older woman, I learn a lot – how to make love, how to drive, how to speak English, how to lie in bed until late – but we split up because she considers me to be emotionally immature, I get married for a second and third time to women I think will give me emotional stability: I get what I want, but discover that the stability I wanted is inseparable from a deep sense of tedium. (19)

Socially, he was married and he is an artist. “Perhaps artists have more freedom,’ he remarks. I say that I’m familiar with his world, but have no wish to enter into a comparison between our different views of society and people. I remain silent, awaiting his next to move.” (8)

Morally, he struggles to get special thing in his life. Specially, he fights to meet Ether again because she makes the special thing in his think.

It would be better merely to suffer as I had in the past, when other people I loved had left me. It would be better just to lick my wounds, as I had also done in the past. For a while, I’ll think obsessively about her, I’ll become embittered, I’ll bore my friends because all I ever talk about is my wife leaving me..... I’ll suffer day and night, night and day. This could take weeks, months, possibly a year or more (16-17).

Second main character Esther is the wife of the narrator who disappeared. Physically, she is thirty years old and beautiful woman. “She’s pretty, intelligent, quiet.” (16)

Mentally, Esther is smart, calm, and courageous in her actions.

I look across at the woman who has just made some coffee and is now reading the newspaper, whose eyes look tired and desperate, who is her usual silent self, who does not always show her affection in gesture, the woman who made me say ‘yes’ when I wanted to say ‘no’, who forced me to fight for what she, quite rightly, whose eyes said more than any words, who was often terrified inside, but always courageous in her actions, who could love someone without humbling herself.... (28)

Socially, she is a war correspondent, married but she has no child with her husband. She is such a great journalist, winning two international prizes for journalism. Narrator and Esther meet for the first time when she wants to interview him. Then they meet again at a party and their relationship grows into a more serious one. Esther moves her things to his apartment and they then live together.

One day, a journalist comes to interview me. She wants to know what it’s like to have my work known all over the country but to be entirely unknown myself, since normally it’s only the singer who appears in the media. She’s pretty, intelligent, quiet. (16)

Mikhail is a minor character in the novel. Physically, he is twenty five years old with dark skin, Mongolian features. There are many labels used by Mikhail to identify him. They are “missionary, voice-hearer, Mikhail, Kazakh, High powers, Epilepsy and Poor.

Socially, he is a translator. He as translator to Esther and was the last person to be seen with her.

If I had really been interested in Esther’s world, I should at least have asked what had happened to her translator and his ‘magical’ sensibility. I should have been suspicious of that silence, that lack

of information. I should have asked to go with her on one of those ‘research trips’ to visit beggars (48).

Maria is another minor character. She is a thirty-five year old French actress whom the narrator falls in love with after Esther goes missing. She understands the narrator and is genuinely pleased with his success because she too is a celebrity. The narrator breaks up with her before he goes to find Esther.

I encountered three or four women I felt drawn to, but then I met Marie, a 35-year-old French actress. She was the only one who did not spout such nonsense as: “I like you as a man, not as the celebrity everyone wants to meet” or “I wish you weren’t quite so famous,” or worse still: “I’m not interested in money.” She was the only one who was genuinely pleased at my success, because she too was famous and knew that celebrity counts.....We were often seen together at parties and receptions; She got on with her filming and I with my work; when I could, I would travel to Milan, and when she could, she would meet me in Paris; we were close, but not dependent on each other (57).

In literature, conflict is the central issue and makes the story to move. The conflicts of the characters happen through the plot of the story. It develops tension and interest to the audience. In other words, without conflict a literary work will be boring and bring no interest to the audience. The writer found several types of conflict in the novel *The Zahir*. The conflicts may happen in two ways: External and Internal conflicts. Writer discusses the conflicts which reflect in the novel and among the characters.

External conflict reflects in marriage life. Marriage is a bond a man and woman. It is a relationship where two people commit not only to live together in both good and bad times, but also share their life to their partner. Setyaningrum sates in her thesis, “Marriage is a permanent union between a man and woman and legalized by the authority of the state” (1). And also she defines “Marriage as a kind of relationship to human beings. Marriage is a vital relationship to human being for the growth and development” (1). If this process succeeds, it brings happiness to them otherwise brings divorce.

The narrator who lives in France and enjoys all the privileges his money and celebrity bring. Ten years of marriage life they don’t have children. One day he discovers that his wife disappeared without any trace. He does not have any answer but he has plenty of questions, Is she kidnapped, blackmailed, or murdered? He thinks his marriage is fine. Like other ordinary marriages, they argue sometimes, but they never talked about divorce. He reflects his past life of marriage. Already he divorced two:

I fought for the love of my first, second, and third wives. I fought to find the courage to leave my first, second, and third wives, because the love I felt for them hadn’t lasted, and I needed to move on, until I found the person who had been put in this world to find me—and she was none of those three (9-10).

External Conflicts between Narrator versus Esther. Ten years they lived their life happily. Esther is the one encouraged him to be a writer. He believes that, she was the one who saw the potential in him and kept pushing him forward to realize the potential. At time goes, he felt that she became unhappy and leave him soon. Once said, she got another boyfriend and fall in love. She is a journalist before being a war correspondent; she goes off to her work at the newspaper. He does not talk much instead he is focusing his works. No conversation and sharing between them. Narrater's words:

I make a list of things I need to do, I listen to music, I take a walk around the block, chat to the bakers, come home, and suddenly the whole day has gone and I still haven't managed to type a single sentence. I decide that I hate Esther, that she's forcing me to do things I don't want to do.
(23)

One day she came to home bearing plane ticket. He shocked and said, he got a career and need to look after it. If he goes, he has to lose a lot of potential music partnership. He continuous, "The problem isn't me, it's our marriage" but she whispered, "Your problem isn't me, but you, so it would be best if you spent some time alone" (24).

Next, external Conflicts between Narrator and Mikhail. Narrator's curiosity leads him to get closer to Mikhail, a man who is assumed to be the one with whom Esther leaves. One day, when he has to sign books of his successful novel, he meets Mikhail. He realizes that he can get the answer of why his wife disappears from him and that he must not lose him. He wants to know about Esther from him.

I say nothing. I must not lose him—a word, a sentence, a sudden movement might cause him to leave and never come back. In a fraction of a second, I understand that he and only he can save me from the blessing—or the curse—of the Zahir, because he is the only one who knows where to find it, and I will finally be able to ask the questions I have been repeating to myself for so long
(75-76).

Though Mikhail refused first later he revealed that she is with him; doing carpet works and teaching French lessons. Narrator asked him: "Please, you must understand what I've been going through for the last year or more. I'm no threat to your relationship with Esther. I just need a couple of hours with her, or one hour, it doesn't matter" (112). This quote expresses that they have conflict with each other.

The Internal Conflict between narrator versus Marie. The narrator spends much time with Marie. They share laughter, experience, and stories. Marie knows every story about him and Esther and he knows everything about Marie even her impossible love a married neighbor. On the other hand, narrator feels that what he does with Marie and what he feels to her is different to what he feels to Esther. Marie's presence can cure his loneliness but cannot fulfill his emptiness feeling.

Marie pretended not to know what was going on in my soul, and I pretended not to know what was going on in hers (an impossible love for a married neighbor, even though she could have had

any man she wanted). We were friends, companions, we enjoyed the same things; I would even go so far as to say that there was between us a kind of love, but different from the love I felt for Esther or that Marie felt for her neighbor (57-58).

Internal conflicts between Hate versus forgiveness. Narrator has internal conflict between hate and forgiveness. Marie advised narrator to forgive Mikhail, because he hated Mikhail and thinking that he is the cause for Esther disappearance. “The energy of hatred won’t get you anywhere; but the energy of forgiveness, which reveals itself through love, will transform your life in a positive way.” (69) And also still he has scars which experienced from the childhood.

Exactly, and you’re still carrying inside you the little boy, the school weakling, who had to hide his tears from his parents. You still bear the marks of the skinny little boy who couldn’t get a girlfriend and who was never any good at sports. You still haven’t managed to heal the scars left by some of the injustices committed against you in your life (69).

Circle of Love is another internal conflict. Mikhail tells the story of a farmer who gave him a bunch of grapes. Brother Porter then gives those grapes away to someone he was thankful for, the Abbot. The Abbot then gives them to an ailing monk who was sick. The ailing monk gives the grapes to Brother Cook who had take good care of him. Brother Cook proceeds in giving the grapes to Brother Sacristan who was considered to be a saintly man. Brother Sacristan gives the grapes to his younger novices and finally the grapes came back into the hands of Brother Porter. Brother Porter felt that the grapes were meant for him and enjoyed them. Mikhail claims that those who feel the energy of love are connected. By giving love to others love will find its way back to you.

Narrator is in crisis, aggression, depression and bitterness because of mysterious disappearance of Esther, his wife. He asked lot of questions within himself; whether she is kidnapped, blackmailed, or murdered? He couldn’t find any clue. Days, weeks, months and a year pass on he couldn’t find his wife and also he couldn’t concentrate on his works.

When the time goes, he started to love Marie and others. He started to work more delightfully the first edition of the book was sold within six months. “A year later three more print runs and I am beginning to earn money from the one thing I never dreamed I would – from Literature.” (31) His true love was bringing back his wife Esther. The world is surrounded by a layer of love. The author tries to enlighten the human life which is reflected in the society.

Love brought new life and his Zahir a woman, his wife, his guide and love of his life.

I recovered my old enthusiasm, because I had freed myself from my personal history; I had destroyed the acomodador and discovered that I was a man capable of blessings others, just as nomads and shamans of the steppes blessed their fellows. I had discovered that I was much better

and much more capable than I myself had thought; age only slows down those who never had the courage to walk at their own pace (341).

In Conclusion, *The Zahir*, Paulo Coelho's novel depicts to illustrate the conflicts/ problems of human life which has to be faced and to be overcome. The conflicts happen within the main character or the other characters in the novel itself. In the other hand, it can be said that the story of *The Zahir* contains two conflicts which is the external conflicts and the internal conflicts. The writer analyze that external conflicts in the story happen in the marriage life and narrator vs his wife Esther, and narrator vs Mikhail. Internal conflict happens between narrator vs Marie, hate and forgiveness, and circle of love where Esther becomes his Zahir. She occupies the narrator's mind until he cannot anything else. He looks Esther in every woman he meets. The phenomenon of broken marriage is seized well by Paulo Coelho in his novel, *The Zahir*.

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