

In Pursuit of Angels And Self Discovery - Paulo Coelho's "The Valkyries" and "The Winner Stands Alone"

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Abstract- Paulo Coelho was born in Brazil and has become one of the most widely read authors in the world today. Coelho uses the supernatural element in all of his stories, "The Valkyries" and "The Winner Stands Alone" are two stories that employ the "The Valkyries" supernatural using the good powers in trying to let go of the evil. His other work "The Winner Stands Alone" is about a powerful obsessed character whose wife had left him for another man. At one end 'The Valkyries' is about seeking redemption, a search for the right to amend the wrong whereas at the other end 'The Winner Stands Alone' the supernatural seems to serve to justify the wrongs.

Keywords- Paulo Coelho; supernatural; Valkyries; Obsessed; The Winner Stands Alone.

Paulo Coelho is best known for 'The Alchemist', he has sold millions of books world-wide and has been translated into over forty two languages and won several prestigious awards. The book "The Valkyries" is an English translation by Alan. R. Clarke of the original Portuguese version 'As Valkirias'. It includes the author's note claiming the authenticity of the events accounted to have occurred between September 5 and October 17 1988 making it a autobiographical account. The main character is a magus or sorcerer who starts a journey with his wife Chris, from Rio, Brazil, into the Mojave Desert, South Eastern California. His journey into the desert is almost like a sacred one, a pilgrimage where he seeks something which humans might never have heard of because he was seeking his angel. Here the point being made was that he not only wanted to converse to his guardian angel but also to see it. The idea itself sounds as though it were a figment of a child's imagination, but these were fully grown adults who were masters of their professions. He was led to believe in this pursuit of by his teacher J, the teacher is known only as an initial, to create a rather mysterious anonymous being, adding to his superiority the teacher wants to remain anonymous he gave his tutelage to select few pupils, the pupils who revered him because he was 'The alchemist who knows and uses the secrets of the Great Work'. The author had to go into the desert because he was cursed and by following the directions of his teacher, he could break the curse. The learned teacher also thought that women and magic were the two most important things in life, though he revered his teacher he did not agree with this one idea that women could be important.

The teacher was more of a philosopher a spiritual teacher who not only taught magic but also guided them to the path of redemption. In his book "The Secrets of Alchemy",

J. said 'The clouds are rivers that already know the sea', he uses this reference to make Paulo believe that he already knew the result. The teacher seems to be multi-faceted who was a spiritualist, magician, and soothsayer rolled into one, someone who had an aura about himself that his students followed him word to word. Even a self-conceited person like Paulo followed him without question, because he had managed to pull him out of the quagmire.

When he reaches the desert the rules and the ethics of the ring of alchemists are visible the disciple of one teacher could not learn or teach from the disciple of another teacher and so they needed a secondary route a mediator to serve as the passage to transfer one disciple's knowledge to the disciple of the other. To complete the ritual of cross J. sends Paulo to Gene, a young man, who lived in a trailer out in the desert. Gene who was taught by another master could not teach Paulo, he taught Chris Paulo's wife instead, who would learn and then teach her husband. The ritual was to master her 'second mind', Gene succeeded in channeling his learning through Chris. Chris serves as the crucible to hold Paulo's search for the unknown, she would retain all she had acquired for him to use it when the time came. Even though Paulo was searching for an Angel, Paulo was self-obsessed and conceited of the knowledge and the skills he possessed treating both Chris and Gene as novice, he considered himself to be far more superior with years of magic both good and evil which he had used for and against himself. He had been a band member and he had used his satanic magic chants which unknown to the listeners always played in the background because of which he had become very popular and very rich. But when he wanted to break the cycle of using the magic when he had had enough, he tried to convince himself that he had acquired all of his popularity and wealth based on talent and quit using the satanic chants,

the detrimental effects began to show and he was close to losing his life. The author says that when he was in the grip of Satan he actually thought he would be swallowed into the dark whirling pit at his feet he uttered God's name something which he had not done for a long time the pit disappeared. He realized his mistake and tried to change for the better. Because he had experienced the forces of evil and knew they existed he wanted to experience and see the forces of good too he felt that he not only wanted to be in connection with God but wanted to know how and what connected him to the supreme being. He wanted to know how Gene had managed to find his angel so soon in the very same desert. Owing to his resistance and reluctance to learn from a younger person like Gene or a woman like Chris whom he did not consider his equal made this revelation harder. First he had used magic to succeed and now that he had acquired knowledge he was in awe of it and considered himself a far more superior being while everyone else was inferior. Chris puts up with his temper, mood shifts and impulsiveness, because of her genuine love, she serves physically as the navigator showing him the way containing the acquired knowledge that he so desperately sought. When she was doing the map reading when they were travelling Paulo was nervous and uncertain thinking she was misreading the map and had to confirm at the gas station which goes to show how inferior he considered her abilities. Though Chris treated Paulo's practice which he referred to as a "Tradition", a conspiracy limited purely to men where some considered women an unnecessary distraction, a disturbance. She often contemplated, that Paulo had a strange restless life changing professions, jumping on planes and travelling into the unknown and waiting patiently for forty days in order to try to speak to his guardian angel, she had been his true companion all along. She believed in angels, she accompanied him into the desert and thought that 'we' ought to do it, he claimed that 'he' was the magus and hence it was his priority and not hers a being with not learning. She was with him all along even in their near suicidal noon walk into the desert, where they are revived back to life by a driver.

Interestingly Chris is the one who experienced the solitude, wisdom and vastness of the desert where she claimed that her 'mind had grown'. Because she was an unrestrained woman who was unselfish and humble, she succeeded in talking to her angel much before Paulo, who had traversed the distance to achieve just that and was intensely stressed at being unsuccessful. Chris kept him oblivious to this and as he would remain unwilling to believe that she who did not have any interest in magic while he had studied and practiced hard for seven years, it was unthinkable that Chris was anywhere close to or capable enough set aside having aptitude. Chris was fully aware of this and never complained keeping both her thoughts and feelings to herself, she was always hesitant and reluctant to ask questions lest he might belittle her. All her conscious thoughts were about how she might look stupid and ridiculous in front of the all-knowing Paulo. It was strange

that he had travelled all the distance for the spiritual ritual across the countries into the desert to look for something he thought he was looking for, his wife had served him relentlessly living his eccentric lifestyle, ignorant to what he was pursuing all along was with him in the face of his wife with him always, but he was oblivious.

Paulo was fed up of being married to Chris 'He needed some strong passion in his love, in his work, in almost everything he did in his life. And that went against one of nature's most important laws. Every movement needs to pause at times'. She sensed that her marriage was falling apart but did not want 'to be left in the middle of the road'. She knew her husband's frustration at not being able to communicate with his angel directly and requiring her as the medium. She wanted to pursue religion and find God by mass and prayers, unlike Paulo's who wanted to reach his guardian angel by alchemy.

With Gene's guidance they manage to catch up with the 'Valkyries', a band of motor biking women followers of the Saint Maria Egipciana, led by Valhalla who led her vagabond women and then preaching the religion of God in the most unusual way. Paulo without realizing falls in love with Valhalla who was the woman in control, a leader unlike his own submissive wife Chris. In reality Paulo was a person who was easily infatuated, who could not be fixed or grounded doing one job or with a person for too long. So he was incapable of appreciating Chris who followed him wherever he went just to be sure he was alright, she undertook a journey she did not believe in because she respected him and admired what he did.

In the desert Paulo is surrounded by the eight Valkyrie women and his own wife Chris whose presence irritated him. Though he knew just how desperately he needed Chris without her his quest would be incomplete, though he needed her he couldn't stand her being around, now that he saw the stark contrast between her and others. Like Gene Valhalla couldn't teach Paulo directly and hence used Chris to convey instructions. Finally it is Chris and Valhalla who are witness to Paulo's darkest, deepest secret, about his pact with the devil, he had made in exchange for success and fame. This pact was the biggest barrier, something he had refused to accept he had to be true to himself and to others if he wanted to seek his angel. The secret that he had made was a trade, he had done everything without believing, for he had involved many people without knowing the Satanic darkness he had practiced was manifesting itself to engulf him, to his death. His acts were reckless just to accumulate wealth, fame didn't matter, and he had abandoned his middle class parents and given up his Jesuit school. Final realization dawns upon him that if the terrible dark world existed so did the kingdom of heaven, and realized that he had learned and denied that fact throughout his life.

Chris learnt another one of Paulo's secret that fourteen years ago, his twenty six year old girlfriend whom he had impressed with the Alternative Society she was filled with contempt, when she had witnessed him begging God's forgiveness for the man she had admired as powerful,

mysterious and courageous had crumbled in front of her. He lost not only his girlfriend, was imprisoned, split with his partners and expelled from the music world. For years he was afraid to step out that the engulfing darkness or the police might turn up, he regretted having to live that way. He had cheated himself and others around him and had faced the consequences to be liberated he had to acknowledge that only truth gave freedom, and would raise his spirit to light. Sara Beardsworth describes as being “caught in a present that is nonfutural because the sufferer cannot take up a relation to what has occurred” (Beardsworth 2009, 53). This kind of “traumatic suffering” is structured “by the persistence and dominion of a past within the present, turning it into an endless present” (Beardsworth 2009, 53). Chris was unlike his girlfriend she loved him for being on the right guided path seeking light. Paulo is portrayed as a self-conflicting man, he had realized that it was self-betrayal not wanting to face the demons of the past he was fearful that even the mere thought of it might have catastrophic results. Paulo fully realized he needed and sought help realizing his self-destructive drive and wanted to be elevated before he destroyed himself. “Because I’m desperately in need of help I have won important things for myself, but I am going to destroy them. Because I tell myself that they have lost their meaning. I know it’s not true. I know they are still important, and that if I destroy them, I’ll be destroying myself, as well.” This self-confession implies that he was aware of his weaknesses and conscious of the detrimental effect he had on those around him his relationships and consequently to himself.

For his self-discovery and regaining of faith he needed two women Chris and Valhalla who were total opposites of nature, attitude and wills were at loggerheads for one man Paulo, who had them for entirely different motives. Both help him in fulfill his quest, both serving him as channels in their own way. And both considering the other as a potential threat, unknown to Paulo, there was an interchange of roles where Valhalla and Chris were pitted against each other, each on assuming the role of the other, each understanding the other better than they themselves knew each other. Eventually each woman respected the other for what they had offered to the other, Chris learned something she hadn’t known about the strength of her defenses and her character that she would go to any lengths fighting for her man. Whereas Valhalla had considered breaking her proclaimed isolation to return to the world, and found Paulo as the first man worthy of being taken. Valhalla and Chris taught each other self-worth, this they wouldn’t have been able to recognize on their own.

Paulo was attracted to Valhalla because she had the tendency to be an angel and a devil at the same time, very similar to himself. He was infatuated and fascinated as long as they remained exactly what the other had imagined. Valhalla capriciously devised to complete her tenth and last round of the desert to return to the real world to love and care, which she thought Paulo could provide,

she understood the strained relationship he had with Chris. Taking him would be the price for her services she had offered.

The elusive angel appears and talks to Paulo in the end, he fails to see that the women who came and went in his life were no less than angels themselves who spoke to him and lead him in the right way regardless his arrogance or being unacknowledged. The book is self-introspective written in retrospection by one who was out to complete a task for himself, it would have remained incomplete if it weren’t for the women. This book ‘The Valkyries’ is not only a modern day adventure, it is the author’s battle written as a third person account, is not only his story but also the story of two people striving to stand with one another through adversity, by the end of their journey they know more about themselves than they ever did.

In his other book also a translation from Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa “The Winner Stands Alone”, the main character a Russian businessman Igor Malev whose wife Ewa had left him and found a fashion designer Hamid. As suggested by the title Igor works alone, he is unlike Paulo with his wife and their strained relationship based on lack of understanding. In the books forward Paulo Coelho states-

“One of the recurrent themes in my books is the importance of paying a price for your dreams. But to what extent can our dreams be manipulated? For the past few decades, we have lived in a culture that privileged fame, money, power- and most people were led to believe that these were the real values that they were to pursue.

What we don’t know is that, behind the scenes, the real manipulators remain anonymous. They understand that the most effective power is the one that nobody can notice- until it is too late, and you are trapped. The Winner Stands Alone is about a trap.”

Igor travels to Cannes, France to execute the plan he had been making for six months studying serial killers and terrorists. He being an orthodox Christian had prayed to Mary Magdelene and sworn that he would get the church a golden icon if he was able to complete his mission, and promised that he would do it with the least number of sacrifices. He meticulously choose his weapon a Berrata PX 4, because the person who was mortally wounded by this weapon would have enough time to see the killer’s face, suggestive that Igor wanted to kill someone and wanted the victim to know that it was he who had taken away “his Universe....I came here to send messages to the woman I love, and in order to do that, I need to destroy a few universes or worlds.”. His first victim twenty year old woman Olivia whom he considered a sacrifice, he “observes her tenderly ... that in a little while her soul would be wandering free from an idiotic job that will never take her where her dreams would like her to go”, even when she was alive he could visualize her impending death at his hands. He gets the girl into easy conversation after paying her handsomely for her handmade ware, there he tells her “God made the world in six days, but what is the world? It’s what you or I see. Whenever someone dies, a

part of the universe dies too. Everything a person felt, experienced, and saw dies with them, like tears in the rain". He was smooth talker and had used his good looks and maturity to impress the innocent girl into talking to him, discussing life. He tells her that he had seen his wife with another man and knew that she wanted to return to him, but was not forthright enough to ask. He also told her that he would accept her without question on her return and nothing would have changed between them. These details give the impression that he could easily select things he wanted and have them his way, he could remember if he chose to and ignore them if he chose to, the will of the other person in question never mattered as he considered himself infallible, incapable of erring. He further gains the young girls trust correlating his situation to that of a frog being gradually boiled to death in water from its own lake, it would die happily unaware of the changes around it and what the consequences would be. He told the girl he had gone through the same experience while his wife had left him.

"...when I realized Ewa was about to leave me, to make her postpone her decision and reflect a little and consider the consequences. When people start to reflect on decisions they're trying to make, they usually change their mind- it requires a lot of courage to take certain steps".

He had considered his wife too much in his power and awe to ever leave him, he thought his material wealth was reason enough for her to stay with him. His being a multi millionaire, owning a private jet were things he considered enough to keep her happy whereas on the contrary she considered him to be self-absorbed. He remembered that she was someone who always made her decisions and started her own haute couture boutique, he had warned her that he would destroy universes to get her back. Ewa might not have been able to decipher what that meant, it might have seemed like a metaphorical claim a disgruntled lover had made.

But then he gave the example of frogs thrown into already boiling water would jump out slightly scalded but alive, he considered his current situation that way. And because he feels that his wife still loves him and he was willing to take the first step. "...she wants to come back. But for that to happen I need to destroy a few worlds".

It is this point he wanted his wife to know, that he was going to go on a killing spree for his wife to know that it was him and he was doing it all to get her affection back. His wife had left him after her realization that he was capable of committing murder with his bare hands and he took tremendous pleasure in the fact that he possessed that sort of strength. She knew that he had been a soldier who had killed with the feeling of patriotism. Though externally he did not display the characteristic symptoms of someone who had witnessed violence or undergone a traumatic childhood, because of which he was all the more dangerous. Neither did he suffer from low self-esteem rather he was over confident by his success, wealth and power. But he did bear the characteristic signs of being a psychopath. He felt no sense of repentance or remorse

after murder, rather he felt he had done the world and the victims themselves a great favor. His wife was intelligent enough to understand that he was a psychopath. He knew how to kill his victims he could access the level of pain he wanted to cause them to please himself, he knew the psychology of fear and how to use it in his favor, the thoughts running through their heads as they breathed their last. He told the girl that he had worked long and hard, had influential friends and was a good Christian in short he was always right and had done everything right, he had killed people in the war but was not traumatized by that. Here was a person who was not traumatized by the memory of war, surrounded by killing and death, where he had to kill to not be killed, yet he was not in trauma. But now that his wife had left him he was in pain, he was in the pain of love. A person who killed his victims in cold blood without feeling the slightest remorse and wanted the woman he loved to know the full intensity of his love. He felt elated after having killed his first victim happy in the knowledge that he still remembered his lessons- to kill swiftly.

"He can do it. And he's happier still because he has freed the soul from that fragile body, freed a spirit incapable of defending herself against a bullying coward. If her relationship with her boyfriend had continued, the girl would have ended up depressed and anxious and devoid of all self- respect, and would have been even more under her boyfriend's thumb."

He considered her killing as a freeing of liberating of a girl who was condemned to serve a hateful husband had she married her abusive boyfriend. After her killing Igor had conflicting thoughts momentarily, that he had destroyed coming generations that were to have been born from her, but he quickly reassures himself that he had chosen the wrong victim that it would not send the signal he wanted to get to Ewa, because Olivia was someone insignificant who wouldn't make headlines.

"He realizes he should not have asked that question. Firstly, because he doesn't need anyone's support to justify what he's doing; he's convinced that since everyone will die one day, some must do so in the name of something greater. That's how it's been since the beginning of time, when men sacrificed themselves in order to feed their tribe, when virgins were handed over to the priests to placate the wrath of dragons and gods."

He weighs what he was doing on grounds of theology considering his work as though he was God's representative, choosing to do what God wanted him to, not as an independent functioning human. Yet the fact that he had known the girl's name seems to be a slightly disturbing thought for him, he had killed in the past knowing they were the enemies of his country but now that he had been able to put a name for the victim- had raised her identity to a different plane with a lineage, immediately he rationalizes that the spirit has no name, the physical form alone does. He also makes a resolve that in the future he would not try to know the name of his next victim. He doesn't feel any sense of wrong doing in his

actions he was just a little disturbed for a short while which he quickly overcomes.

The man Ewa fell in love with Hamid Hussein, was a winner too, but in a different sense, he was the first from his culture and country to have been sponsored to travel abroad to learn fashion designing and he had succeeded. Ewa's love for Hamid was one of convenience though he was truly in love with her, she had used him as an escape to get away from her marriage. Sometimes even with Hamid she felt suicidal out of frustration, she was loved so intensely that she found it hard to understand, even her ex-husband's affection had proved to be dangerous for her, they cared for each other, doing simple things that made them happy going for long walks, having dinner together, things that normal couples did. Ewa knew she had been missing these simple pleasures for years as Igor's wife, with Hamid she felt special and loved to be treated that way. Even Igor had treated her well it was on their vacation to Siberia when Igor had killed a beggar who had been bothering them, she had seen a light in Igor's eyes that she had not seen before, and he was thrilled to have had a chance to use his skill. When she had questioned him about it he had a full justification that his action was the right one, that he had saved the beggar from a filthy life where he would inevitably die of the winter or because of drinking too much. Up until that point in her life she had felt Igor had had a disturbed childhood but was an angel and had cherished his hard work. Initially they had very little money and he had to work very hard and bribe officials yet they were happy and he opened up his heart to her about everything they did. Then his business started to grow and he made shady friends who financed him. He paid back all their money and made new friends and all his old friends were arrested, as his business grew so did the gap between them and they grew further and further apart. At one time when she was very drunk and had asked him what would he do if she left him, he had said that he would still get her back after destroying the universe. She realized that Igor was an assassin and that their marriage was not based on love but on something morbid, she wanted to be free from the trap of the dangerous marriage and the first opportunity that offered itself was when she met Hamid, She was very frightened when Hamid told her that he had seen Igor in Cannes and along with the fact that she had received his phone messages.

His next victim was a famous influential movie producer who always carried a list of things that are defined as normal, he is injected discreetly in the presence of two bodyguards who didn't notice a thing. After completing the act Igor had gone to his hotel and slept. When he woke up he weighing out in his mind if his actions were justified, in the past what he had done was for good reason to rid the earth of worthless people but now he was measuring his actions, thinking that he was incapable of harming anyone that he had killed two innocent people, but immediately reasons that his actions were right and well deserved. Here he dreams of Olivia who instead of condemning him blesses him and assures him that she had

forgiven him because she was generous. Now he believed that because Olivia was so self-less and forgiving she was by his side, assisting him on a diviner plane and from then on she would be his guide taking him in the right direction and nothing would go wrong. He becomes even more resolute in his notion that all his actions were fair and he had divine guidance and he would prevail. For him Olivia the girl with the dark eyebrows bore the resemblance of Notre Dame de Pietat, the mother with her son in her arms, at once proud and long suffering. Igor while contemplating alone sometimes thought of surrendering himself to show Ewa that he could destroy other universes and also was capable of destroying himself, he even considered surrendering himself for double murder, but backs off from the thought that Ewa did not deserve his self-immolation. He considered his victims martyrs of love, who had died serving a greater purpose. His psychiatrist rightly diagnosed his mental state as 'The Lucifer Effect', where Lucifer God's best loved angel ended up rivaling God himself. While he was stalking her moves he recognized that he had Olivia's soul with him assuring him that he was not doing anything wrong and committed no harm, he feels her as though she were a saint because of the purity of her soul hovering around him guiding him, informing him that he had saved her from future pain. He can be compared to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde the best way to describe him, he had had a sad childhood, and then had served in the Afghan army, though he had nightmares, about his first victim in war, then when he wanted investors for his business and was rejected. This had had an adverse effect on his thinking where he would focus on only one thing single mindedly trying to achieve putting the rest of his concerns on hold. He rightly instigates a quarrel with Hamid challenging him to a fight, again he feels that Olivia's spirit whom he describes as the angel with dark brown brows was watching happily, interested in what the outcome would be. He was first under his self-declared divine guidance and then after killing Olivia he was being watched over by her accompanying him every step watching him succeed.

When Ewa had tried to sound subservient and said all the things he wanted to hear though she was pretending and biding her time to pacify him, he killed both Hamid and Ewa. He knew that the brown browed angel would explain the reasons for Igor's action defending him and proving him right. On the return route he decides that he had never loved Ewa much and now didn't hate her much and also trusted he had lost faith in human solidity he knew that he would have the dark browed angel showing him his future paths too.

Conclusion

The irony was that Igor had killed so many people and yet remained anonymous and got away with it. During the process of self-exploration during the ritual of hatred, is where Paulo realized that he had always forgiven not because of his goodness but because he was a coward. He concluded he was unworthy of seeing his angel as he had nourished hatred for years and avenged and grudged over

unimportant things and had never learned to forgive. All the characters possessed tremendous amount of fame and wealth yet they were all never truly happy, no amounts of soul searching appeased them instead making them more restless, they all needed something they couldn't name, they tried on their own to seek the unanswerable, something that could fill the void finally they all needed a guiding angel.

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