

The Alchemist: Defining Islam and Arabs Through Defaming

رواية الخيميائي : التعريف بالإسلام والعرب من خلال التشوية

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Abstract:

This paper scrutinizes Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist* (1988). It sheds light on the serious and hazardous relationships between the Western and Eastern Worlds. These relationships are full of stereotypes which are dependent on ancient orientalist generalizations and simplifications which mostly show Muslims as fanatics and irrational, and Arabs as primitive, barbaric, violent and aggressive. Hence, this paper provides a critique on the authenticity and accuracy of the Orient's fabricated images and distorted notions presented in Coelho's novel *The Alchemist* (1988). This paper includes an introduction, two sections and a conclusion. The first section tracks

down the history of Orientalism from its first emergence until the 9\11 attacks on the USA. The following section provides an oriental analysis for some of the images and scenes found in *The Alchemist*. The paper concludes that *The Alchemist* is a real example of a neo-orientalist piece of literature that still shows the Islamic East as the Western dangerous 'enemy right door' and it, then, can never be considered reliable in presenting the Islamic East.

Key Terms:

The Alchemist, Paulo Coelho, Orient, orientalist, neo-orientalist

رواية الخيميائي: التعريف بالإسلام والعرب من خلال التشوية

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الملخص:

وحتى أحداث الحادي عشر من ديسمبر، في حين تطرق
المبحث الثاني إلى عرض تحليل أدبي دقيق لبعض
الصور والأحداث في رواية (الخيميائي) من منظور
الاستشراق. توصل الباحث إلى أن الرواية تمثل مثالا
حيا للأدب الاستشراقي الجديد الذي لا يزال يصور
العالم الإسلامي بالعدو الحقيقي للغرب والذي لا
يمكن أن يموت للشرق الإسلامي بأي صلة.

يقوم هذا البحث بدراسة رواية (الخيميائي)
للكتاب باولو كويولو (1988)، محاولا الكشف فيها
عن صور العلاقة الحساسة بين الشرق والغرب التي
تتسم بالنمطية المرتكزة على التعميم والتبسيط في
تصوير المسلمين في صورة المتعصبين وتصوير العرب في
صورة البدائيين والبربريين والعدائين، ويحاول أن
ينتقد صحة الصور المفبركة والأفكار المغلوطة
ودقتها. وقد تم تقسيمه إلى مقدمة ومبحثين وخاتمة.
عني التمهيد بتقديم صورة واضحة وشاملة عن أهداف
ومحتوى البحث، وعني المبحث الأول بسرد التسلسل
التاريخي لتطور مفهوم الاستشراق من لحظة نشوؤه

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخيميائي؛ باولو كويولو؛
الشرقي؛ المستشرق (الاستشراقي)؛ المستشرق
(الاستشراقي) الجديد.

Introduction:

The people in the West look at the Eastern people through the lens that distorts their real identity, religion, places and culture. This lens has been once called Orientalism and critics have recently termed it 'neo-Orientalism'. Both terms work as a framework used to understand what is unfamiliar and strange within the Islamic East, so it appears different and threatening. Early Orientalism has developed through the colonial history and resulted from the biased and false contributions and fabrications which the West sets for the East. Therefore, such Orientalism has influenced the way we, the Easterners, think, behave and react not only to the others but also with each other. It does convenience the Eastern people that they are mere barbaric and violent entities who terribly seek the Western help in controlling, civilizing and educating them since it is the super nation and power.

Being in 2020s and witnessing all the contemporary events and changes, this paper focuses on what is much more recent and serious: neo-Orientalism. Neo-Orientalism is the wider scope within which the orientalist establish the different images towards the Islamic East including the phenomenon of Islamophobia. The researcher is to provide a detailed discussion on the history of the antipathy between the East and West, its origins, the reasons behind it and its consequences found mainly in literature. As an example of a neo-orientalist literary work, this paper studies Paulo Coelho's (1988) *The Alchemist*. Like previous neo-orientalist literary works, this novel reflects the West-East hostility which appears in the form of distorted images and false representations of the Orient for the sake of the Western domination and superiority. Hence, this paper aims at revealing the real neo-orientalist aspects found in *The Alchemist*, their motives and imperial interests in our postmodern era.

Paulo Coelho's (1988) *The Alchemist* is one of the most well-known novels during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Written only in two weeks, it is strange that the author has received all this cosmopolitan attention since the publication of its English version in 1993 onward. It has been translated into eighty languages and about 200 million copies sold worldwide making Coelho the all-time bestselling Brazilian author. *The Alchemist* was written after Coelho's pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, which made his turning point towards writing this assumed remarkable masterpiece. It is the reason behind naming his protagonist 'Santiago' in the novel and placing the main settings within the same borders. The protagonist's name is more than enough to show the blind critics Coelho's dangerous intention and poisonous content within his neo-orientalist work. Santiago is named after Saint Santiago who was a proselytizer and warrior honored for fighting in decisive battles against the Islamic Moors; later he has been called the Moor-Slayer since the ninth century.

Coelho's novel works like a bridge connecting neo-Orientalism to its early Orientalism. It is a novel written in a neo-orientalist style but inspired by the same orientalist biased traditions. It is the passage through which other neo-orientalists can pass in order to ensure their traditional views and fabrications about the Orient. Those future neo-orientalists can gain the same wealth and fame previously achieved by Paulo Coelho through *The Alchemist* if they follow his neo-orientalist perspectives. As matter of fact, Coelho succeeds in producing a neo-orientalist work which holds all the perspectives and ideologies whose origins go back to the time of the crusades till 2001 and onward. He has written a literary book that forms a perfect imperial, political and ideological encyclopedia within its covers. Through *The Alchemist*, the reader can understand the history, culture, ideology and nation of the

Islamic East but, of course, from a pure Western point of view; it shows a history full of false images and prejudice against Muslims and Arabs.

In studying *The Alchemist*, many concepts and attitudes have been conducted by many critics in the quest of exposing its different dimensions. Though trying to be neutral, the writers' personal background and imperial interests are still clear in their works. Almost all of them have completely subjected their time and effort praising Coelho's literary talent regardless of its dark tendency and celebrating *The Alchemist* as being unique and distinguished irrespective of its origin or scope. Some of the critics who have extremely praised Coelho's narration of *The Alchemist* are Paul, Indrajani T., Warso, Balajirao, Farizi, Sharma and Fajriani. Alsaedi, Widyastut, Hart and Qareerah glorify Coelho's remarks on Islam without questioning their authenticity or ends. The case is different when it comes to Fahad Malik's study since both of them, Malik's study and this paper, almost share the same novel and apply the same approach of Orientalism. There are many reasons clarifying the distinction between them. First, Malik concentrates on the classical Orientalism while this research focuses more on the recent incarnations of neo-Orientalism. They also differ in the way of presenting, supporting, defending and interpreting the different notions included. Differentially, this research includes the history from Orientalism to neo-Orientalism which helps facilitate the readers' understanding of the lifelong hostility and conflict between the West and the East.

Therefore, this paper is significant for all educated people who are interested in making a difference between representation and reality, and text and context. It shows them that an honest writer reflects the real image of a society regardless of his own background or his nation's ideology. His aim should be directed to the validity of the facts included and accuracy of the images presented. This paper also provides them with an example of the accurate way of analyzing and criticizing a literary work academically and neutrally. A neutral researcher should not only focus on the apparent allusive positive aspects of any work but he must also inspect the hidden negative ones as well. Doing so, this paper aims at proving that *The Alchemist* is a real example of a neo-orientalist work which is full of neo-orientalist aspects that aim at achieving the ideological motives and imperial interests of the Western agendas.

From Orientalism to Neo- Orientalism

The current conception of Orientalism differs from the one the literary world was familiar with around a century ago or so. Previously, Orientalism has reflected its so-called pedagogical interests referring to, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the “scholarship, learning or study in Asian subjects or languages; the study of the history, languages and cultures of the East” (“Orientalism”). However, as stated in Cambridge Dictionary, its definition has recently shifted to “the Western ideas about the Middle East and Southeast Asia, especially ideas that are too simple or not accurate about these societies being mysterious, never changing, or not able to develop in a modern way without Western help” (“Orientalism”).

The process of stereotyping other peoples, cultures and religions is neither a new phenomenon nor a solely restricted tradition to the West-East issue. However, the case becomes much more critical and acute when such negative stereotypes take the form of a systematic study and scientific knowledge. Orientalism, therefore, is the most serious field which receives such stereotypes as its main domain in dealing and revealing all West-East relationships for many centuries. Those stereotypes, which are full of biased stereotypes and projections, increase dramatically with the passage of time, which makes the problem worse and the West-East antipathy deeper. Salim Kerboua (2016) asserts that “Orientalism is not a static concept, rather; it refers to various historical frameworks of thinking. It serves as a system of knowledge which creates and propagates subjective representations of the Other from the Orient” (8).

Orientalism is dynamic in nature and fickle in definition. Before the nineteenth century, it was known by actions rather than definitions since none had given it a name at that time. The double-dealing orientalists of that period have represented the Orient, mainly the Islamic East, as a peculiar entity, monolithic society, static culture and universally different creature from the West. Never had they given such actions a term or considered such a behavior as an academic discourse. Later, Orientalism has become the academic term that covers any literary work dealing with the Orient as either a person or nation. However, this term has gone through a process of having various definitions related to its different origins and contexts. So, many Western aspects, such as pedagogical, political, imperial and religious, are also enforced in almost all those orientalist works and definitions.

The most recent term which has been established by the 9\11 attacks on the United States is called neo-Orientalism. It has specifically focused on Islam and its peoples, even those Muslims living in the Western societies. Neo-Orientalism is, as

Kerboua believes, seen as “a body of knowledge, news, analyses, and current affairs comments, created and propagated by a loose coalition of intellectuals . . . [and] political figures of Western public life” (22). He believes that the twenty-first century neo-Orientalism originates from the neoconservative school of thought and other right-wing pro-Israeli circles. Hence, it is thought to be politically and ideologically motivated. This makes it completely different from the previous kinds of Orientalism as being less territorialized. It is also considered as the prism through which some intellectual circles produce new false knowledge about Islam and its adherents. For many writers including Karboua, neo-Orientalism generates an ‘us versus them’ schema that brings the differentiation and discrimination between individuals, religions, and cultures to the fore of any intercultural thinking. Hence, neo-Orientalist discourse and knowledge and their entailing connotations aggravate the division between the West and Islam in the sense that they fail to present authentic and objective understanding of the Islamic world as a nation and religion.

One of the acute outcomes of neo-Orientalism is the emergence of an identity-related social phenomenon within the West towards the Islamic world. This phenomenon is called 'Islamophobia'. Generally speaking, this term is taken from both Islam and phobia, which expresses the irrational American and European fear towards the Islamic world, faith and religion. Though the term Islamophobia was introduced earlier in the 1990s by many orientalist writers and critics, it reappeared in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks increasing the strong Western fear, rejection and antipathy of Islam and Muslims. Since then, Western writers and critics have used Islamophobia as a negative connotation to anything related to their greatest enemy, the Islamic East.

Beyond *The Alchemist*

The Alchemist as a Character

The alchemist, a major character, holds a considerable part in the plot and themes of the novel. Coelho avoids telling his readers about the alchemist's real identity and nationality, they should know it from the Arabic background of his nickname. Besides, he does not even give him a name; he only calls him by the name of his profession throughout the novel. He is the strange “enemy” who lives in a strange land which is “inhabited by genies” and “covered with mysterious designs” (Coelho, *The Alchemist* 61,63).

During the novel, it seems that Coelho wonders about which name should be given for a stranger who has nothing to be proud of. The alchemist has nothing worthy, neither his land which is full of tribal wars nor his people who look at him

as a sorcerer. For Coelho, only the profession of his Arabic character, the alchemist, can be used to address him. His role in the novel is similar to the role of a servant in a castle or a guide in a museum, helping and securing the great Western Santiago throughout his journey towards his delusive treasure. The alchemist is completely far away from being Santiago's master or instructor since Coelho himself writes that:

SANTIAGO. So you are going to instruct me?

THE ALCHEMIST. No. You already know all you need to know. I am only going to point you in the direction of your treasure.

THE ALCHEMIST. I'm going to guide you across the desert. (64)

The alchemist is a symbol of sorcery and selfishness. He is a man who professionally uses alchemy not for the sake of knowledge but to benefit from the Elixir of Life to live longer than 200 years. He also uses the Philosopher's Stones to only achieve his dream of changing metal into gold. Though he has learned this science from his grandfathers, his unforgettable advice to Santiago is "Don't think about what you've left behind" (69). He wants Santiago to forget Fatima, his beloved, just like the way he forgets his debts towards his ancestors. He never remembers them, glorifies their heritage or celebrates their history. Later, he feels proud of Santiago's spiritual advancement when he successfully reads the omens of the hawks. Nevertheless, he envies him and deliberately kills the hawks though they represent Santiago's first successful reading of the desert omens. It is clear, then, that Coelho's alchemist is too selfish to allow anyone else to adopt his profession which is the only thing he has. Accordingly, the readers observe the fact that the alchemist is not a scientist as the Englishman may imagine, however, he is a normal person full of greed and ingratitude.

Despisingly, Coelho portrays the alchemist as a spiritual man who abuses his religion, Islam, and culture for his own interests. He blissfully drinks wine, proudly lies, malignantly deals with other people and suspiciously looks at the desert and camels. Obviously, he is almost the only one who spiritually helps Santiago to achieve his personal legend and find his best self as well. However, for Coelho, the alchemist is only best known as "an old, superstitious Arab" (88). Like his Arab ancestors, he is deliberately and ideologically framed and captured with magic and conjuration; Coelho cannot see him as more than an Arab or better than superstitious, asserting the traditional bias towards Muslims and Arabs.

Santiago

Though the reader expects that the alchemist is the hero since it is the title of the novel, Santiago is the name given to the major character and meant to be Coelho's voice throughout the novel. First comes first, so Coelho initiates his novel with what he wants his readers to mainly focus on: "The boy's name was Santiago" (1). Neither time, nor place or the theme of the novel are of any importance compared with Coelho's Christian protagonist who takes the role of the commander and instructor of the Eastern society, starting with the crystal merchant and ending with Fatima.

Hence, the priority is given to the answer of who Santiago is and why Santiago in particular. First, Santiago is named after Santiago Matamoras, the Moor-Slayer, who has been the inspirational figure in all Christian blood spilling battles. His ferocious image of killing the Moors while riding his white horse inspires all Christian armies and urges them to furiously kill their enemies, the Muslims. The Moors are the Muslim people of Morocco and Algeria who conquered Andalusia in 710, the first setting of the novel. Later, they fell down in 1492 when King Romero-I fought them in decisive battles. Thus, Saint Santiago is celebrated as the Moor-Slayer who was accredited with the honor of fighting beside King Romero-I and killing more than 5,000 of the Moors.

Readers must understand the ideological role of the novel's Santiago, which circulates around the same role of the historical Saint Santiago. Coelho's Santiago evokes the image of Saint Santiago in two positions. First, Santiago remembers Saint Santiago with a sense of pride and relief when he sees the religious practices of Muslims in Tangier while kneeling in their prayers. Neither as a disciple of Jesus, nor as a pacific Apostle or non-violent proselytizer does Santiago recall Saint Santiago's image. Instead, he recalls his memory as the Moor-Slayer. "As a child in church, he had always looked at the image of Saint Santiago Matamoras on his white horse, his sword unsheathed, and figures such as these kneeling at his feet" (19). Here, Santiago explicitly compares Muslims' kneeling down in religious devotion to their fear-struck ancestors who once stooped down before the Moor Slayer, Saint Santiago Matamoras. Such a comparison reflects Coelho's hidden biased dangerous ideologies which consider all Muslims as invaders and their religious prayers as "a practice of infidels" (19).

Later, the same image is drawn in Santiago's mind while talking to the alchemist for the first time. Trembling out of fear of the alchemist's shadow, Santiago tries to seek tranquility by recalling the same image of Saint Santiago on his white

horse killing the Muslim Moors. The mere memory gives him the courage to face the alchemist and freely talks to him without any fear of being attacked or killed.

The alchemist “looked exactly the same [as Saint Santiago], except that now the roles were reversed” (60-61). In the past, all Muslim Moors were killed by Saint Santiago. Meanwhile, Santiago faces the fear of death as being threatened by the alchemist's sword. However, he is helpless and he cannot do anything since he is standing in the Moors' place and the alchemist is now Saint Santiago. In spite of Santiago's prejudice of considering the alchemist's actions like those of the Saint and his words like Melchizedek's, the alchemist peacefully welcomes him and offers his hospitality. The alchemist proves that the roles cannot be reversed, whatever happens, since they both cannot be similar in any way, Saint Santiago is a Christian Moor-slayer and the alchemist is an Islamic knowledge seeker.

Fatima

Concerning the origin of the name 'Santiago' and the role he plays in the novel; Coelho chooses the well-known Islamic name 'Fatima' to be the waiting beloved for his Christian protagonist. Amongst all the Arabic names, none seems to attract Coelho's ideologically-motivated literary imagination but the name of the prophet Mohammed's daughter who had a remarkable role in Islam, Fatimah. Any Eastern or Western reader would expect her to play a major role and take a noticeable space in the narration of the novel. However, Coelho antagonistically presents her as an 'enemy' since her name has been outrageously carried by the Moorish invaders rather than firmly propagated by the Islamic virtue.

Instead of seeing the precious civilization and invaluable culture of Islam and Arabs in Fatima's eyes, Coelho makes her only desert woman who fears none but losing a Christian boy whom she happily becomes part of. She, blissfully, forgets her Islamic traditions and cultural customs for the sake of a Western boy. Coelho makes her part of Santiago. "I have become a part of you" says Fatima to him and adds, "And I am part of your dream, a part of your destiny, as you call it" (53). The holder of this holy name cannot see anything worthy in her culture to hang on. Her name stands only for the violent invaders of Spain not for the religion of peace, Islam, which Coelho publicly claims being attracted to and interested in whenever he talks about it in his real interviews.

Coelho intends to give this name, known as the role model of all women in the Islamic world, to his major female character in order to be a representation of the ideal Islamic woman in the eyes of his readers. Just like other Muslim women, she is “a dessert girl and she is not aware of any direction a woman's mind can progress

other than is meted out to her by the society” (Ray 60). Coelho’s fabricated Fatima is seen as supportive, selfless, complacent and desperate for any male attention.

The moment Santiago professes his love to her and tells her that he wants to marry her, she directly tells him that she is one of the women of the desert who "are proud of their tribesmen" though those tribesmen leave them behind in search of treasure (Coelho, *The Alchemist* 53). Consequently, she encourages her Western boy, Santiago, to fulfill his quest and reach his personal legend without any regard of her own. Indeed, "Fatima is a woman of the desert . . . She knows that men have to go away in order to return, and she already has her treasure" (66). Fatima has no higher treasure than her Christian lover. Coelho’s readers are drawn to consider her as a symbol of all Arab women believing that finding a man and having a husband are all that the perfect Muslim woman should think of and crave for. In fact, Coelho projects Fatima as a mere blind Muslim female rather than an individual or at least a human.

It is an indisputable fact that Muslim women have been always projected in “mainstream media as troubled by their patriarchal and misogynist societies backed by the Islamic religion, hence, necessitating their freedom from such oppressive clusters as women in the West have done decades of years ago” (Isa et al. 234). The negative representation of Fatima is not only an allegory of the desired dominance of the Western masculinity over the Muslim femininity. More importantly, it reflects the Western superiority over the Muslim community in general. Her character is used to echo the passive role of Muslims in their society since she spends her life doing nothing but waiting for others, Westerners, in order to help them achieve their personal legends. Maybe, those Westerners would hopefully come back one day to educate those Muslims and enhance their life and circumstances.

Fatima is doing nothing remarkable above filling water and waiting for a strange lover. She is the omen Santiago “had sought to find with his sheep” which in turn do nothing but wait for food and drink (Coelho, *The Alchemist* 51). Coelho covertly draws a horrible comparison between her as a submissive lover and the sheep as a despicable animal. To emphasize her role of passivity, she is presented as a form of distraction for Santiago. Indeed, she is the girl who almost distracts Santiago from his dream of reaching the pyramids and his treasure. She is so pretty, and he is so in love with her, that he almost decides to just stay at the oasis and take her instead of the treasure.

Furthermore, the previous romantic stereotypes of the Islamic image as being full of superstitions and magic reappear with Coelho's construction of Fatima's character. The alchemist, whom Santiago and the Englishman may consider as an

alchemy scientist and spiritual person, Fatima sees him only as a powerful magician who knows all the secrets of the world and “communicates with the genies of the desert” (Coelho, *The Alchemist* 52). In fact, she does not only distract Santiago, however, she is the unreliable source from which Santiago gets his needed information.

As the Western man, in general, is glorified being the only Savior of the Eastern community, Santiago is honored being the Arabs’ in the novel. Fatima's reaction towards his love and marriage proposal is surprising, she “dropped the container, and the water spilled” (52). This affirms the biased Western ideological notion that Arabs are eager to attract the Europeans and that Muslims are thirsty for anything coming from Christianity. Coelho draws his readers' attention to the idea that Muslims and Arabs do believe, and should forever do, that any Western person must be highly welcomed in the Eastern land and be the only instructor, commander and enlightener of their weak and blocked minds. Having no opinion, Fatima blindly accepts Santiago's love affair and easily starts dating him forgetting her religious traditions and tribal customs. She is turned to a typical Western lady when she falls in love with the Christian Santiago. Henceforth, Santiago feels a "touch of a kiss—a kiss that came from far away, slowly, slowly, until it rested on his lips” (94). Later, they embrace each other, and though “the boy knew that it was a violation of the [Islamic] Tradition, but [it] didn't matter to him now,” so then “the two walked out among the palms” (68).

Fatima is willing to go to any extreme because she fears losing God's blessing of sending a Western Christian hero to elevate her Arab fragile spirit and uncivilized Muslim society. She explicitly tells him that he is the sacred present that is highly far away from being compared with anything in her past or future, which asserts the superiority of the Christian West. “I have forgotten about my past, about my traditions . . . I have dreamed that the desert would bring me a wonderful present. Now, my present has arrived, and it is you,” Fatima says (53). Neither does the glory of the Eastern Islamic history still attract her nor does the pride of the Moorish conquerors take part of her memory since they are now completely wiped out by her new glowing present. Santiago is now the wonderful vivid present that can attractively shape her future away from her dead past, the palm trees and the sunny desert of the oasis where she has always lived. Coelho makes her humiliate herself at all levels admit that she has no personal legend as she is only “a woman of the desert” and Santiago is the only treasure she has been and will be waiting forever (55).

No longer does Fatima wait for the pilgrims who come back from Mecca, the most sacred place of Muslims. For her, “the oasis would never again have the same meaning it had had only yesterday. It would no longer be a place with fifty thousand palm trees and three hundred wells, where the pilgrims arrived, relieved at the end of their long journeys” (68). She has changed the kind and direction of her hopes and dreams to a much higher hope and much more invaluable practice, waiting for her Western Christian champion riding his white horse with his dark ideas and golden Spanish treasure. Until Santiago comes back, her environment is meaningless, ugly and dead. For her, the oasis without Santiago is “an empty place” (68).

Shadi Hamid (2006) determines that “it did not really matter whether they [Muslim women] were active or passive, sexed-up or sexless - Muslim women were always othered, invariably defined as the opposite of their Western counterparts” (80). Since early Orientalism, orientalists look at the Muslim woman in a very humiliating way. Though being a twenty-first century writer, Coelho keeps this projection of Muslim women in his neo-orientalist novel. “Someday you will learn that our countryside is the best, and our women [are] the most beautiful,” Santiago's father has said before (Coelho, *The Alchemist* 5). Through him, Coelho wants to rationally convince his readers that the West is the superior power over the savage and irrational East, since not only their women and land are the best, but also their tolerant culture, secular religion and civilized nation as well. At the end of the novel, all readers find that Santiago's tour has not been for the sake of finding the treasure, it is rather a journey to prove that his father's words have been truly said. It is indeed a journey of understanding and appreciating the history and culture of Spain at the expense of degrading the Muslim mind.

Sheep

Generally speaking, a sheep is an animal related to the goat and raised for wool, meat or skin. In literature, it connotes a symbol of humility, simplicity and self-actualization. Coelho's sheep is clearly used as a symbol of ignorance, humiliation, fake relationships and racism. His literary creative rhetoric is reflected in the way he overtly uses sheep to symbolize his dark suspicious intentions and deep biased interests. Throughout the novel, he mentions the word sheep for about ninety-seven times and relates it to any person Santiago meets and any lesson he learns. Food and water are everything sheep need, they are all what things in the novel go around and which people live for and surrounded by. Concerning these food images, they are often used to characterize the different individuals and their various levels of social status. In fact, Coelho often “makes eating and drinking as an important and

significant activity, something that is not only used to achieve realism, but also to emphasize the action of the story” (Suganya & Geetha 338).

Coelho is a wolf in sheep's clothing. His use of sheep is a means to an end. Explicitly, sheep seem to be the guard, teacher and source of inspiration for Santiago. However, the Western Santiago only remembers, calls and employs them whenever he wants to humiliate and underestimate the Islamic East either in the form of a person, nation, notion or language. In spite of the various people he meets and the lessons he learns, Santiago always prefers staying and talking to his sheep. He says, “sometimes it is better to be with the sheep, who [*sic*] do not say anything,” because he can “understand sheep; they're no longer a problem” (Coelho, *The Alchemist* 10,35). In spite of the presence of many characters such as the merchant's daughter, the crystal merchant, Fatima and the alchemist, only sheep “can be good friends” with Santiago (35).

Being an Arab means having no way of communication with Santiago. Neither the merchant's daughter, the crystal merchant, nor the alchemist can understand Santiago's feelings or needs. Nevertheless, the sheep can find many means to talk, understand and even teach him many universal lessons, which he needs while dealing with Arabs and Muslims later. Therefore, he is used to “calling [his sheep] each by name” (2). According to Coelho, names are prejudiced since they are only given to those who can understand his Christian character, Santiago, and estimate his Western beliefs and religion. Arabs, including the crystal merchant and the alchemist, do not deserve to have names or identities because of their failure in understanding Santiago. Unlike the alchemist who “has never been in love” before and does not understand Santiago's love for Fatima, sheep passionately understand Santiago's feelings towards the merchant's daughter (69). In addition, the crystal merchant does not understand the universal language and omens which Santiago's sheep deeply know and professionally teach him.

Some critics praise Coelho's gift in writing his masterpiece *The Alchemist*. They look at the character of the alchemist as the master, guide and instructor of Santiago during his journey. Coelho himself, on the other hand, contradicts this fact. Santiago once thinks that “his sheep could teach him everything he needed to know about the world” (31). Regardless of everything he now knows about how to deal with them, sheep also teach him to know if “there was water in the area” or not (20). Racially speaking, those sheep teach him the language he would later need to communicate with those Arabs in Tangier. Having failed to understand those Arabs, he thinks that “There must be a language that doesn't depend on words . . . I have already had that experience with my sheep, and now it is happening with people” (24). The infidel

people living in Tangier have a language only sheep know, understand and speak. They even refuse to teach it to the human Santiago. He says that, “there are probably other things in the world that the sheep can't teach me” (31).

Santiago proudly says that “I learn more from my sheep than from books,” (2). No matter how useful the book is, he still learns more from his sheep and acquires better lifelong experience. This experience helps him while being “in that strange land [Tangier], he was applying the same lessons he had learned with his sheep” (25). Moreover, it inspires him when dealing with things and people in the crystal shop. Sheep grant him the language he uses every day to accomplish the merchant's postponed work and impossible dreams. Talking about Santiago, Coelho says:

But the sheep had taught him something even more important: that there was a language in the world that everyone understood, a language the boy had used throughout the time that he was trying to improve things at the shop. It was the language of enthusiasm, of things accomplished with love and purpose, and as part of a search for something believed in and desired. (33)

Recalling beautiful memories is generally associated with beautiful things. Being completely attached to his sheep, however, Santiago looks at the whole world, reality or memories and good or bad, from his sheep's eyes. As a flashback, he recalls the memory of the Moorish wars in Andalusia at the beginning of the novel. Coelho begins with the sheep which are wandering in the ruined church and fearing the furious wolves, which takes the readers back to the Christian fights with the Moorish Muslims. Later, thinking and searching only for food and water, Arabs always remind Santiago of the sheep since they are the only characters mentioned in a solid comparison to them.

Deliberately, Coelho compares sheep to anything related to Arabs. For example, sheep make Santiago's way to the merchant's daughter's heart much easier. He meets her while shearing his sheep and telling her his astonishing stories which make “her bright Moorish eyes [go] wide with fear and surprise” (3). In addition, talking to her “was a pleasant change from talking to his sheep” though “he was sure the girl would never understand” (2,3). Her love, like his books, is only meant to be shared only with sheep. This love is, therefore, weak and fragile as she would forget him for the sake of any “other shepherd, with a larger flock of sheep” (5). Muslim women strikingly have no higher ambitions since all those around them are mere shepherds. In Coelho's sick biased mind, only shepherds, who are experts in dealing with animals, can deal with Muslim women. A person who can guide and control a sheep is indeed able to do the same with a Muslim woman.

Arabs, for Coelho, are like sheep because they know nothing other than searching for food and water. However, Santiago grants them the honor and lets them guide him through his journey and take a part of his destiny. Coelho himself admits that “the sheep, the merchant's daughter, and the fields of Andalusia were only steps along the way to his [Santiago's] destiny” (16). In a very humiliating way, Santiago makes a strong comparison between his sheep and his inspirer, the alchemist. He allows the alchemist to guide and guard him while he, the Christian boy, is spiritually meditating the vast nature in the desert. Similarly, “the world was huge and inexhaustible; [so] he had only to allow his sheep to set the route for a while, and he would discover other interesting things” (5). As a matter of fact, there is no difference between them since they are both sent by God to serve and secure his Christian hero, Santiago.

Besides reality and memories, Coelho does not forget talking about dreams in a very humiliating biased way. No matter Eastern or Western you are, all people have dreams which they should struggle hard to reach. Though Santiago's leading dream is to find his treasure in the pyramids, this majestic dream is directly shifted into having few sheep whenever he meets an Arab. First, he wishes to have more sheep and know better about them in order to attract the merchant's daughter. Likewise, Fatima's love and smile only inspire him to buy more sheep and be a wealthy sheep merchant. Later, the crystal merchant helps Santiago to achieve his dream and buy double the sheep he has once had.

Bizarrely, the crystal merchant forgets his holy dream of fulfilling his religious obligation of going to Mecca for the pilgrimage though he finally collects all the money needed. Coelho, using his attractive and manipulative literary rhetoric, wants his readers to learn from both experiences, the Eastern and Western, and, of course, blindly follow Santiago's Western experience. Arabic Muslims do not struggle to reach their dreams even the religious ones while Christians do the impossible and face the savage to achieve their material dreams, even if it is in the shape of a sheep.

Conclusion:

Drawing the major differences among the various forms of neo\Orientalism is not a difficult task since they all inherit the same traditional features of the early one. No matter what are their temporal settings or critical aims, all forms construct the same imperial agendas and ideological interests over the Orient, bias and hatred. This paper shows how Coelho employs his literary talent to prove all the ancient false representations and fabrications about the Islamic East true and reasonable. For him, not only are Muslims and Arabs barbaric and irrational but they are also thieves and criminals since their eyes only speak of death and their words and deeds are symbols of violence, ignorance, pessimism and hostility. Having looked at all the detailed explanations and elaborations of how he applies the language to serve his destructive imperial interests, readers can now understand how his novel covertly defames the Islamic East through his imperial suspicious intention to overtly define the greatness of the West as a nation, culture and religion.

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