

FATHOMLESS OCEAN

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IDENTIFYING THE SELF IN PAULO COELHO'S *VERONICA DECIDES TO DIE AND THE ZAHIR*

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Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian lyricist and novelist is currently one of the most famous Latin American authors. He is the recipient of numerous international awards, including 'the Crystal Award' by the World Economic Forum. He is originally from Brazil and has been enchanting readers around the world with his charming fictional expertise for nearly three decades. His novel *The Alchemist* is regarded as his masterpiece. In this novel the writer portrays the shepherd as finding out the treasures for his life at same time helps the readers to discover the true meaning of life. Every book of Coelho looks like a journey or a search for a way of life that enriches the meaning of existence. It also brings a message of hope. A man's life is considered successful when he struggles and fights in life against his ego and his greatest achievement is in the wisdom acquired in this process. In *The Fifth Mountain* Elijah says: 'I have discovered that there resides in me a soul better than ever I thought.' (29). In *Veronica Decides to Die*, Paulo used Zedka as mouth piece to express his philosophy about madness. Coelho believes that life is an act of faith.

He illustrates his philosophy wonderfully in *Brida* when she happened to spend her night in the forest she learnt that the search of God is like a Dark Night. None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, and still we go forward. It's only because we trust and have faith. In *By the River I sat Down and Wept* Coelho has given voice of his philosophy: There are many ways to serve our Lord. Only a man who is happy can create happiness in others. Coelho writes that those who love conquer the world and have no fear of loss. One who takes the path of love always suffers but in every love there lies the seed of growth. Because when we love, we always strive to become better than we are.

In *The Witch of Portobello* Paulo reveals an idea that 'Love is Liberty'. Coelho's spirituality is a personal and individual approach. The Times rightly observes, 'His books have had a life-enhancing impact on

millions of people'. Paulo Coelho is a storyteller with the power to inspire nations and to change people's lives.

Veronika Decides To Die is a novel written by Coelho. This novel tells the story of a beautiful woman, Veronika 24 years old, woman who has managed to get the whole worldly pleasure of her dreams. However, deep in her heart, she is depressed with her life. She has failed to face her life, Veronika finally decides to end her life by consuming sleeping pills.

She lives in the beautiful capital city of Slovenia. She gets bored, because she has the same routine every day. The work she lives everyday leads her to the thought that everything in her life was the same and once her youth would be gone, it would be downhill all the way, with old age beginning to leave irreversible marks, the onset of illness, the departure of friends. She would gain nothing by continuing to live; indeed the likelihood of suffering only increased. She finds that being in an asylum has provided her the freedom she never had. She can do whatever she likes because she is branded an insane. She finds that she is not constrained by the value structure of the society. The belief that, her death is very near brings the true Veronika out. By the presumed final day of her life she falls in love with Eduard and they escape from the asylum. In the mental hospital she meets many unique patients. Zedka, has clinical depression, Mari a lawyer that gets panic attacks, and Eduard a student that has schizophrenia. Throughout the book Veronika learns their backgrounds and what brought them to Vilete. Through the novel, Veronika explores a relationship with the mental patients and in the end realizes freedom and the will to live.

Veronika also finds herself being drawn into the lives of other patients who lead constrained but oddly satisfying lives. Eduard, Zedka, and Mari have been sent to Vilete because there doesn't seem to be any other place for them. She begins to know the reason to live. Love has come to her senses when she begins to fall in love with Eduard. She also bonds with Eduard; her piano-playing skills give deeply feeling for the young schizophrenic. What suddenly stabs Veronika is the realization that she has fallen in love with Eduard: primarily because once she is gone, he would be one who would not miss her. Love, hate, curiosity, sexual

desires and the wish to live start clouding her. She finds her time at the Villette to be an emotionally enriching one.

"You're the only man on the face of the
earth with whom I could fall in love,
Eduard, for the simple reason that,
when I die, you will not miss me. I don't
know what schizophrenics feel, but
I'm sure they never miss anyone"(Coelho,131).

The twist in the tale comes when Veronika escapes from the asylum with Eduard, without her knowing that she is healthy and has long to live. Dr Igor finds out about her escape on the very morning when he plans to notify her about her health; yet he relishes the fact that Veronika unaware that she is fine again, would live each day as a miracle. Deep down, a fire is sparked inside of Veronika, giving her back her life, when death is only moments away. Veronika decides to take what life she has left into her hands and she once more begins to live. Veronika and Eduard decides to escape from the asylum so that she can live the remaining days of her life to the fullest. Coelho through his life experiences had internally come to terms with the fact that everyone must live out his or her madness. A little bit of madness is quite healthful. In one of his interviews with Marika Schaerti he says:"If madness means being other than "normal" that is fine with me. If it is threatening for oneself and society, there is a problem. My motto is: A little bit of madness is quite healthful."

Veronika believes by following her heart to live outside with Eduard could make her life more meaningful in the very last days. She starts realizing that it is nobody's fault that she has not found meaning in life. In fact, she starts discovering quite a few things about herself, which are safely locked and buried deep inside. The turn of events in Veronika's life proved not just a valuable lesson to her, but to many people in the asylum, lost in their own worlds.

Coelho's spirituality is a personal and individual approach. The Times rightly observes, 'His books have had a life-enhancing impact on millions of people'. Paulo Coelho is a storyteller with the power to inspire nations and to change people's lives. The spiritual search, he believes, is the search for total consciousness of oneself. Making this an epitome of his literary truth, he evolves as an author in search of himself. Through his novel *The Zahir*. Identifying oneself is a very powerful element such an experience 'ill penetrate into heart and soul which inculcate behavioral changes. But people's approach is very different to this attitude. For this there is no exception for Coelho and he too was searching for himself who he is? When he missed his beloved wife Esther. On her absence he was living with a celebrity Marie who is an actress though he couldn't find any satisfactory. His longing for his wife's presence shows how she played an important role in his life. Though he is living with Marie, he feels very guilty for that and wishes to talk about his missing wife to her,

"But I couldn't talk about tell her everything, unless.... unless I could find an indirect way of saying what I was feeling (Coelho,178)".

"I'm saying that, during the time I spent in hospital, I came to realize that I was always looking for myself in the women I loved. I looked at their lovely, clean faces and saw myself reflected in them. They, on the other hand, looked at me and saw the dirt on my face and, however intelligent or self-confident they were they ended up seeing themselves reflected in me and thinking that they were worse than they were. Please, don't let that happen to you."(Coelho,179)

The power of his wife's silence and her distance made him to realize who she is? And whenever the author says 'No' she made him to say 'Yes' on his career and encouraged her husband to go to Santiago and write and discover the literary genius within him but which was once opposed by his parents when he was a young man. And this made the narrator to find himself at first who he is than search for his wife. For an entire year, she becomes the narrator's blinding obsession, the *Zahir*.

"If I was to see her again, my face needed to be as clean as hers. Before I could find her, I must first find myself (Coelho,179)".

He finds her in the steppes of Kazakhstan making carpets and pregnant. Towards the end of the novel, he is successful in finding Esther and himself. Much of the novel is based on the author's own experiences in mental institutions. As a young man, Coelho was himself institutionalized by his parents three times by age sixteen due to their inability to control him and to attempt to dissuade him from becoming a writer. A character-driven analysis on the nature of sanity and the society's pressures to conform, *Veronika Decides to Die* showcases one woman's journey towards carving out a meaningful life away from ingrained societal expectations. The moral lesson is the awareness of the finite nature of life that inspires Veronika to follow her dreams, shows who she truly is and then finds happiness. Love is what that smokes her live again. In her saying she speaks as if she is going to die one day; it may not be tomorrow, in a week, or in 50 years, but it will happen, and that awareness should motivate her to live exactly the way she wants. Each day is a gift, and she knows it. And through the novels *Veronika Decides to Die* and *The Zahir* Coelho celebrates the women and portrays their courage and strength.

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