

## **BINARY OPPOSITION AND INTERTEXTUALITY OF CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS "ALEPH" AND "ALCHEMIST" BY PAULO COELHO**

**Dilnoza Ramatjanovna RUZMATOVA**

Doctor of Philosophy in Philological Sciences (PhD), Docent  
Associate Professor  
Department of Linguistics and English Literature  
Uzbekistan State World Languages University  
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

**Nargiza Uraz qizi BEBUTOVA**

Master student  
Uzbekistan State World Languages University  
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

## **PAULO KOELONING "ALIF" VA "ALKIMYOGAR" ROMANLARIDAGI QAHRAMONLARNING BINAR QIYOSI VA INTERTEKSTUALLIGI**

**Dilnoza Ramatjanovna RUZMATOVA**

Filologiya fanlari bo'yicha falsafa doktori (PhD), dotsent  
Lingvistika va ingliz adabiyoti kafedrası  
O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti  
Toshkent, O'zbekiston

**Nargiza O'raz qizi BEBUTOVA**

Magistrant  
O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti  
Toshkent, O'zbekiston

## **БИНАРНОЕ ПРОТИВОРЕЧИЕ И ИНТЕРТЕКСТУАЛЬНОСТЬ ПЕРСОНАЖЕЙ В РОМАНАХ «АЛХИМИК» И «АЛЕФ» ПАУЛО КОЭЛЬО**

**Дилноза Раматжановна РУЗМАТОВА**

Доктор философии (PhD) по филологическим наукам, доцент  
Кафедра лингвистики и английской литературы  
Узбекский государственный университет мировых языков  
Ташкент, Узбекистан [dishemu2017@gmail.com](mailto:dishemu2017@gmail.com) ORCID: 0000-0001-5235-380X

**Наргиза Ураз кизи БЕБУТОВА**

Магистрант  
Узбекский государственный университет мировых языков  
Ташкент, Узбекистан [bebutovanargiza9@gmail.com](mailto:bebutovanargiza9@gmail.com) ORCID: 0009-0000-9749-9685

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**Abstract.** This paper presents a comparative analysis of the characters in Paulo Coelho's novels Aleph and The Alchemist, focusing on the binary opposition and intertextuality between them. Both works reflect Coelho's spiritual philosophy and explore personal growth through mystical journeys. The protagonists, Paulo and Santiago, are guided by their desire to fulfill their Personal

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Legends, facing internal conflicts, moral dilemmas, and transformative encounters. The study highlights how each character's development reflects themes of redemption, faith, and self-realization. The author draws parallels between Coelho's life and his fictional heroes, underlining autobiographical elements in both novels. Through binary opposition—past vs. present, innocence vs. experience, tradition vs. transformation—the analysis unveils the complexity of human growth and destiny. The concept of intertextuality is applied to examine similarities among major and minor characters, including symbolic figures like Hilal and Fatima, and spiritual guides like J. and Melchizedek. Ultimately, the paper argues that both novels emphasize the value of introspection and perseverance in overcoming life's trials, as well as the profound impact of love and belief. Coelho's philosophical message encourages readers to embrace their journey, interpret signs from the universe, and remain faithful to their dreams despite hardships.

**Keywords:** journey; dream; “Personal Legend”; redemption; “Spiritual Growth”; intertextuality; characters.

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqola Paulo Koeloning “Alif” va “Alkimyogar” romanlaridagi qahramonlarni qiyosiy tahlil qilishda ularning o‘zaro qarama-qarshiliklari va intertekstual aloqalariga e’tibor qaratadi. Har ikki asar Koeloning ruhiy falsafasini aks ettiradi va shaxsiy o‘shini mistik sayohatlar orqali yoritadi. Asosiy qahramonlari — Paulo va Santiago — o‘zlarining “shaxsiy afsonasini” amalga oshirish istagi bilan yo‘lga chiqib, ichki ziddiyatlar, axloqiy tanlovlar va hayotni o‘zgartiruvchi uchrashuvlarga duch kelishadi. Tadqiqot har bir qahramonning rivojlanishi orqali poklanish, e’tiqod va o‘zini anglash mavzularini yoritadi. Muallif Koeloning hayoti bilan uning badiiy obrazlari o‘rtasidagi o‘xshashliklarga e’tibor qaratadi va har ikki romandagi avtobiografik jihatlarni ko‘rsatadi. Qarama-qarshiliklar — o‘tmish va hozirgi zamon, beg‘uborlik va tajriba, an‘ana va o‘zgarish — orqali inson o‘shishi va taqdirining murakkabligi ochib beriladi. Intertekstual yondashuv orqali Hilal va Fatima kabi ramziy obrazlar hamda J. va Melchizedek ruhiy yo‘l ko‘rsatuvchi qahramonlar o‘rtasidagi o‘xshashliklar tahlil qilinadi. Har ikkala asar yakuni hayotdagi sinovlarni yengib o‘tishda tafakkur va matonat muhimligini, shuningdek, sevgi va e’tiqodning chuqur ta’sirini ta’kidlaydi. Koeloning falsafiy xabari — har bir inson o‘z yo‘lini topib, koinot yuborayotgan ishoralarni tushunib, orzulariga sodiq qolishi kerakligini targ‘ib qiladi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** safar; orzu; “shaxsiy afsona”; poklanish; “ruhiy o‘shish”; intertekstuallik; qahramonlar.

**Аннотация.** В статье представлен сравнительный анализ персонажей романов Пауло Коэльо «Алеф» и «Алхимик» с акцентом на бинарные оппозиции и интертекстуальные связи между ними. Оба произведения отражают духовную философию Коэльо и исследуют личностный рост через мистические путешествия. Главные герои — Пауло и Сантьяго — движимы стремлением исполнить свою Личную Легенду, сталкиваясь с внутренними конфликтами, моральными дилеммами и трансформирующими событиями. В исследовании подчеркивается, как развитие каждого персонажа отражает темы искупления, веры и самопознания. Авторы проводят параллели между жизнью Коэльо и его художественными героями, указывая на автобиографические черты в обоих романах. Через бинарные противопоставления — прошлое и настоящее, наивность и опыт, традицию и

трансформацию — анализ раскрывает сложность человеческого развития и судьбы. Концепция интертекстуальности применяется для анализа сходства между основными и второстепенными персонажами, включая символические фигуры, такие как Хилал и Фатима, и духовных наставников, как Дж. и Мелхиседек. В конечном итоге работа доказывает, что оба романа подчеркивают важность самоанализа и настойчивости в преодолении жизненных испытаний, а также глубокое влияние любви и веры. Философское послание Коэльо побуждает читателей принять свое жизненное путешествие, уметь читать знаки Вселенной и оставаться верными своим мечтам несмотря ни на что.

**Ключевые слова:** путешествие; мечта; «Личная Легенда»; искупление; «Духовный Рост»; интертекстуальность; персонажи.

## Introduction

Paulo Coelho is one of the most influential writers of all time, especially his novels "Aleph" and "The Alchemist" are those that book lovers can not ignore. Both novels are highly philosophical, demanding from the reader spiritual ideologies. These novels are also appreciated as a doorway out of difficulties and strong motivation to follow dreams, whatever obstacle is ahead, by most people who have endured through their lives. The heroes of these novels are real and sincere, finding their way to the readers' souls, as they are not unreal or unimaginable, but real ones. Below, in this essay, the main themes and heroes' characteristics of these novels are explored. Both Santiago in Alchemist and Paulo in Aleph follow their purpose to achieve their Personal Legend. Their way to the realization of their target is full of obstacles, helping them grow; close people who were always ready to support and stand aside; enemies letting them down; and magical aspects playing a crucial role in their life path. In order to clearly explain the core meaning of the novels, differentiative and similar traits of character are analysed. Moreover, the link between these novels and author's life is also established so that readers better understand the initial stimuli to the creation of these masterpieces.

## Theoretical part/ Literature review

Both novels, "Aleph" and "Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, include important heroes, and below in the literary review, characters are to be analysed deeply with the help of binary opposition and intertextuality. As both novels are philosophical, inanimate features are also taken as a character part of the novels.

### *PAST AND PRESENT LIFE OF COELHO (ALEPH)*

The novel "Aleph" is centered on finding redemption from the mistakes of past lives [Geetha Thambi 2018: 101] because it has an impact on Paulo's present. Paulo, during his life despite gaining enough experience, finally did not feel satisfaction; on the contrary, he lost the meaning of his present life. Thus, his quest for self-discovery through the

long train journey across the Siberian territory can be considered an ultimate success in Paulo's life [Abdulatif 2018: 77]. This journey helped him to meet Hilal, be in Aleph. After that experience, he was constant reminded of an image of the past in which he was not able to follow his heart while obeying his authorities [Cherian 2018: 376]. That mistake done in the past constantly followed Paulo persuading him feel guilty in his present life. That action in his past made him make crucial decisions in his present life: his sudden agreement to travel around the world despite the expected huge pressure. Eventually, his being forgiven by Hilal and finding the strength to forgive himself for his past, gifted him peace and full spiritual growth in his present. Overall, Paulo's past being full of experience, fear, and sin paved the way for his present with peace, satisfaction, and inner growth.

#### *DREAM AND SANTIAGO'S REAL LIFE (ALCHEMIST)*

Santiago's dream in the novel represents his connection to the future and the past. Likewise, Coelho's "Aleph" does not merely tend to depict the perpetual coexistence of the past and the present, but the possibility of a journey through time [Safaei 2018: 119]. Both novels connect past and present, the only difference is that in "Aleph" time is limitless, and the concern is mostly on the past; conversely, in "Alchemist" the focus is mostly on the present. Moreover, during his dream, Santiago found the treasure; conversely, he was a simple shepherd in his real life. Therefore, at the beginning it seemed impossible for him to take risk to start his journey. All he needed in his real life were a thick book (cushion), his warm jacket, a flock of sheep, travelling around different valleys, while in his dream he is expected to find treasure in Egypt about which he had never heard of and imagined to get.

#### *FATIMA AND MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER (Alchemist)*

##### *HILAL AND CATHERINE (Aleph)*

In "Alchemist," Santiago's first love was a merchant's daughter. At first, he felt thrilled retelling different stories from his life and was really into the way the girl listened to him with high interest and impression. However, his steps to accomplish his Personal Legend create the chance to meet his life for a life, Fatima. Thus, the "Alchemist" also as "Aleph" is one of the most personal accounts of Coelho's magical thinking, regarding what can happen with one's relationship, life and development when one is prepared to go the extra mile [Mayer, Maree 2018: 8]. In "Aleph," Coelho could not have achieved life with full internal peace if he had not left Catherine and gone the extra mile to meet Hilal and be forgiven. Both women play a crucial role for Coelho in the novel: Catherine is Paulo's home where he can come back and find warmth; Hilal is his turbulent past from which he got spiritual growth and healing.

#### *CHARACTERS FROM "ALEPH" AND "ALCHEMIST" WHO HAVE PATTERNS OF ALIKE ATTITUDE*

##### *ALCHEMIST J. (ALEPH) VS MELCHIZEDEK (ALCHEMIST)*

Both of these characters in the novels have the mentoring and guiding feature: J. inspiring Coelho that there is a possibility of healing

wound left from past mistake, likewise, Melchizedek directing Santiago to make his dream come true, even offering him to buy his flock of sheep to provide finance for upcoming long journey. J. also mentioned Coelho the importance of presence: "It's what you do in the present that will redeem the past, and thereby change the future." Melchizedek too during his conversation with Santiago put stress on the value of present.

#### *YAO (ALEPH) VS SANTIAGO'S FATHER (ALCHEMIST)*

These minor character's main similarity is their conservative attitude in dramatic contrast to main heroes. Yao had trauma after his wife's death and despite Coelho's consoling him that our close people who passed away are always in the same train with us, just the platform is different, Yao firmly kept his opinion that his wife was dead and he could not imagine her existence in any way. Regarding Santiago's father, he also was conservative. He didn't prefer moving from his town as his son decided, but would rather live with his wife in one place. These both characters show the reader that it is we who decide what destiny we can have.

#### *FATIMA (ALCHEMIST) VS CATHERINE (ALEPH)*

Both women are symbol of strong dedication, love and bravery. They both trusted their life partners so that they would accomplish their Personal Legend. Fatima didn't even hesitate to let Santiago continue his journey to find treasure although she knew that it was a risk. Fatima trusted Santiago and waited him patiently. Likewise, Catherine inspired Paulo go on further to travel without her. She just wanted her husband be spiritually free and grown. Both Fatima and Catherine represent that real lovers are always ready even to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their parents.

Thus, "Aleph" and "Alchemist" have many common characteristics, focus of which is mostly on Alchemy. That is also a hint to Paulo Coelho's mission in the world to dedicate his life and work to those who are sorely misunderstood ("Aleph"). In the past representatives of Alchemy were mostly not accepted, and even buried, or called "witch" and "demon". However, thanks to characters in the novels, like "Aleph" and "Alchemist", world's pessimistic perception towards magic, spiritual growth, alchemy has totally transformed to optimistic one. So it can, undoubtedly, be considered that Paulo Coelho also, like his heroes in his novels accomplished his Personal Legend.

### **Methodology**

During the analysis of "Aleph" and "Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, binary opposition and intertextuality methods are actively used. Focus has mostly been given on comparative, contrastive features of characteristics. At the end of the literary analysis similar aspects of novels are also explored. In literature review part, several research articles are actively utilized and analysed. Analysis is not limited to character comparison of the novels, but also includes the link between plot and author's life. The use of binary opposition has contributed to the detailed understanding of

heroes' presence, likewise, intertextuality sheds a light on even minor heroes of the novels.

### Research results/ Analysis of the text

Novels by Paulo Coelho like "Aleph" and "Alchemist" have a powerful impact on readers' worldview. They are both motivational and real-life, making readers ponder upon their life. Personally, I have read "Alchemist" more than three times, whenever I have difficulty or failure. Thus, below in the analysis, similar ideologies in both novels are to be explored.

First Extract is vivid reminder to the novel "Alchemist". In "Aleph" this ideology meaning that each person has their mission to compete in this life is mentioned only once, while it is central, inseparable part in "Alchemist", being repeated more than four times. Signs in Aleph are to the past experience, conversely, in Alchemist it is to Nature (everything happening around people); stones Urim and Thumim. There are special signs, conditions for Paulo needed to be in Aleph, likewise, Santiago focused his attention on surrounding environment: wind, birds, daily life situation, even conversations. From this point, it is clear that the term "signs" is more multi-sided in "Alchemist". After reading "Aleph", I contend that "Alchemist" also includes partly autobiographical features, as main ideas in both novels are the same. It is noteworthy to mention that Coelho himself after leading abnormal lifestyle, was first inspired to go to Santiago to find his path, that is giving a hint to the name "Santiago" chosen for main hero in Alchemist. Moreover, in "Aleph", Coelho trusted his internal feeling of guilt, followed signs, and made himself adjust to long travel, even if it was full of psychological and physical difficulties. In "Alchemist", Santiago trusted his dream and went to long journey to complete his mission in life. Both Paulo and Santiago face harsh realities of life during their journey, the only difference is former hero's experience of obstacles is short-term, while latter's one is long-term, making him stronger, more observant and experienced. Overall, this extract is short, but hints to root insight of the novels.

Second Extract is crucial: if bamboo tree is mentioned by Paulo to explain his condition, sycamore tree is for Santiago's life journey. Bamboo tree's root is giving a hint to Paulo's earning a great deal of experience, and it's growth is to his finally finding resolution to avoid the feeling of guilt and sense of as if his life always lacks something due to which he is not being able to find himself. As for sycamore tree's importance in Santiago's life, it turns out to be tree under which he finally found the treasure he has been looking for during several years. In my perspective, next comparison I concluded from this extract is that "Bamboo tree" is Santiago and "5 years for it to grow up to 25 meters high" is Santiago's one year of working in crystal shop to earn money to go to Egypt. After a year of valuable experience, Santiago finally had the chance to realize his dream. For Paulo in Aleph, the same happens thanks to his long train journey with Hilal across Russia. His many years of root (life experience) finally helps him release himself thanks to Hilal.



From Third Extract, it is clear that in "Aleph" if Paulo can not understand his past (world)- what happened many years ago, he won't be able to realize what is making him feel dissatisfied from life internally. In the novel, until he didn't find out how guilty he was in front of Hilal, what connected them spiritually, he even did not acknowledge the fact that he needed Hilal. Regarding "Alchemist", Santiago at the beginning of the journey, did not have ability to notice signs that world always give to direct him to the successful achievement of his mission. He also even made a decision to ignore his dream, thinking it as just nothing unusual, as if it happens with everyone. His finally acknowledging that observing world is crucial, gradually opens his path to his internal realisation of feelings and Personal Legend.

Fourth Extract is to Hilal being supporter for Paulo in "Aleph"; Melchizedek always with Santiago in "Alchemist". With the emotional help of Hilal, Paulo managed to finish his journey successfully. In the novel, whenever he needed to be in the past to find out the root of their connection, Hilal was with him. Only with her, he could use the ring-of-light exercise. Most important is his forgiving himself for the betrayal he did to Hilal hundreds of years ago. Without Hilal lighting the fire of friendship for him, Paulo would not be able to free himself at the end. As for the novel "Alchemist", it was Melchizedek from the very beginning of the book inspiring Santiago not to lose hope and take risk to achieve his Personal Legend. Melchizedek was always with him, directing him towards his goal. That was Melchizedek who gave Santiago Urim and Thumim so that he could easily made a choice in difficult situations. Likewise, Paulo's wife Christine and Santiago's friend crystal merchant fully resemble this extract. It was Christine who were brave enough to let her husband continue his journey alone and ask him to rely on totally stranger girl after seeing a dream. That part impresses the reader most as Christine's caring attitude and full trust towards her husband is for the sake of saving him from the cold wind blowing in his life. Likewise, in "Alchemist", crystal merchant's final decision to inspire Santiago continue his journey to Egypt symbolises for me the true sign of friendship.

Fifth Extract has deep meaning in the novel "Aleph" and fully coincides with "Alchemist". Coelho had to face past straight despite how painful it was for him. He had to rely on the stranger girl and risk to go to long journey, not knowing what was expecting him ahead. So if he likes to be free (rainbow), he had to get on with obstacles (rain) in front of him. As for Santiago, rain turns out to be a bit harsher. First of all, in order to get close to his treasure, he left his flock of sheep although they meant everything for him. Likewise, he had to deal with the strong sense of missing Fatima, as he left her to continue his journey. He even beat the failure of being robbed in Tangier. Taking this extract as an evidence for both novels, it is clear that there is a close bond between Paulo Coelho and his hero Santiago. Both sacrificed something valuable in their lives, got on with obstacles they faced in every step and the catch is that both accepted those difficulties as a valuable experience. They didn't consider the "rain" as their enemy but learnt to like it now that both wanted to see the "rainbow". Overall, this extract is a piece of valuable lesson from

Paulo Coelho to his readers, also his professionally resembling the hero Santiago in "The Alchemist".

Sixth extract fully shows the motto of Paulo Coelho and Santiago in the novels "Aleph" and "The Alchemist". Paulo didn't sit just pondering the meaning of life, but chose to explore the unknown places to find himself, shocking his assistant, as the number of journey Paulo agreed to have was unbelievably of high amount. He travelled to Santiago, Tbilisi and Moscow to observe life and people there. His longest and most crucial journey was on The Trans-Siberian Railway. During each of the travelling, Paulo faced his past, found strength to realise his present, which stimulated his significant spiritual growth. In "The Alchemist", Santiago's first journey started in Andalusia, where he saw the dream about treasure in Egypt more than once. Most important part of his journey, which taught him to be tolerant and psychologically strong was in Tangier, where he was robbed and found friendship with crystal merchant. In fact, there he first realized his mission to continue journey and not to give up. The peak period of his travelling, which was marked with full spiritual growth and meeting with the Alchemist, finding the love of his life (Fatima), was in the Sahara Desert.

During this journey, Santiago showed signs of becoming an Alchemist as he could predict by observing birds in the sky that the enemy is close. The most impressive and incredible of his experiences there was his transformation into the wind, marking his eventual finding of the Soul of the World. His trip to the Egyptian pyramids was a complete revelation for him. Overall, this extract clearly shows that both Paulo and Santiago lived to experience things, depriving themselves of just sitting and pondering about life's insight.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of characters in Paulo Coelho's "Aleph" and "The Alchemist" paves the way for us to figure out binary oppositions and similarities that enhance our understanding of their magical journeys. Santiago, the simple shepherd, is representative of the dreamer who follows his Personal Legend with firm faith and he is the one who symbolises the sweet fruit of following one's heart despite external challenges. In contrast, Coelho's portrayal of himself in "Aleph" reveals a more complex and philosophical character, complexed with the challenges of past experiences and life dilemmas. This comparison stresses the pressure between innocence and experience, illustrating how personal and spiritual growth often require being against of one's own limitations and fears. Furthermore, the novels explore the division between destiny and free will; while Santiago learns to trust in the universe's guidance, the author in "Aleph" must actively confront his choices to achieve enlightenment. As a result, these contrasting character features enrich the narratives and serve as a philosophical insight on the versatile nature of life's journey. Through this exploration, Coelho invites readers to stay for the moment of reflection on their paths, stimulating a deeper understanding of the connection between dreams, spirituality, and the human experience.



### Extracts from the book

1. We simply have to trust and follow the signs and live our Personal Legend.
2. "Do you think anything about Chinese bamboo? It apparently spends five years as a little shoot, using that time to develop its root system. And then, from one moment to the next, it puts on a spurt and grows up to twenty-five meters high.
3. If I can trust what's going on in the world, I can understand what's going on inside myself.
4. Promise that if ever a cold wind blows through my life, you'll light the fire of friendship for me.
5. If you want to see a rainbow, you have to learn to like the rain.
6. To live is to experience things, not sit around pondering the meaning of life.

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