



USE OF SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS TO EXPRESS THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE IN PAULO COELHO'S THE ARCHER

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of symbols and motifs used by Paulo Coelho in his latest novel 'The Archer' to describe the real meaning and purpose of life. The philosophy of life has been described with the help of a very simple story by the writer in this novel. The Archer is the latest novel by the famous Brazilian author Paulo Coelho, best known for his novel The Alchemist. This novel is smaller in size but deeper in meaning. Writer has put his whole experiences to express the real meaning and purpose of life. "The Archer aims to motivate readers to take risks, embrace the unexpected targets."

Key Words – Philosophy of life, The Archer, Bow and Arrow, Meaning and purpose of life, Aphorism, Parable, Paulo Coelho

"What is a master? I would say that he is not someone who teaches something, but someone who inspires the student to do his best to discover a knowledge he already has in his soul."

-Paulo Coelho

Paulo Coelho returns with the motivational story of a master archer who dispenses philosophical advice. Using a fable like framework, Coelho spools out short chapters that are interspersed with simple but evocative artwork. The story begins as a young boy leads a stranger to the local carpenter, Tetsuya, whom the stranger claims, is a master archer in hiding. The stranger requests a competition to prove he is more skilled than Tetsuya, but when Tetsuya takes his turn, he aims for his target while balancing on a rickety bridge. Tetsuya's lesson is that the stranger cannot compete, because - though he performs well in ideal, controlled situations - he cannot be a master until he can also perform well under difficult, trying situations. After the stranger leaves, Tetsuya and the boy return to the carpentry shop, and Tetsuya holds forth with meditative gems meant to teach the boy the skill of archery as he himself had been taught, such as "Never hold back from firing the arrow if all that paralyzes you is fear of making a mistake, and once the arrow has been shot, there is nothing more the archer can do, except follow its path to the target." The narrative is simple, and the act of holding a bow and shooting an arrow is a fairly obvious metaphor for doing one's best and striving for excellence.

Paulo Coelho is the master story-teller, who casts spells through his words. He is celebrated across the globe because of his philosophical and mystical writing style. His writing style captures a broad audience and holds their attention, book after book and leaves the readers spellbound and asking for more. The themes in most of his novels are universal - such as Meaning and purpose of life, personal legend, tales of forgiveness and love, battle between good and evil, presence of supreme power, magic realism, and spirituality. And readers around the world find refuge and peace in his books. There are a number of writers out there who entertain us, but it is only Paulo Coelho who inspires us to follow our dreams, nudges us to become a better human being and guides us to live our lives with purpose and passion through his amazing stories. From the master story-teller comes, *The Archer*, an inspiring story about a young man who is seeking wisdom from an elder, and the practical lessons imparted along the way.

Paulo Coelho needs no introduction to the literature lovers. His beautifully written books can be found everywhere, from airports to libraries. In 'The Archer', Paulo Coelho provides the framework for a rewarding life: hard work, passion, purpose, mindfulness, the willingness to take risks in life, honing your craft, following your dreams, and the urge to make a difference - all of these can be takeaways from this elegantly written story.

‘The Archer’ written by Paulo Coelho is about a master archer, Tetsuya, who teaches life lessons through archery to a young boy. Tetsuya, was a man once famous for his remarkable gifts in using bow and arrow. Now, he has retired from the public life as an archer and is leading a simple life as a carpenter in a remote village. The Archer is a series of life lessons that are told through the voice of a master archer giving instructions to a young boy on the steps to mastering archery. You can apply the words on these pages to almost any skill that you wish to master. He compares the principles of archery to situations in everyday living and imparts life lessons that can be learnt through archery. Tetsuya starts teaching to the young boy about the way of the bow that can be applied to any skill in life, as the way of the bow is the way of life.

“Teaching it isn’t hard. I could do that in less than an hour, while we’re walking back to the village. the difficult thing is to practice it everyday until you achieve the necessary precision.”

Tetsuya goes on to explain about each of the tools and their importance such as: The Allies; In his quest to become a better archer, the young boy needs to surround himself with good allies, who take pleasure in life, do their work with enthusiasm and have joy in their eyes. As the best allies are the ones who are risk takers, get hurt, and then take more risks. These are the kind of people who are flexible and have qualities of water.

The Bow: The bow is life and source of all energy. And it requires periods of inaction. So one needs to allow it to rest, to recover its firmness. Paulo subtly compares the bow to creativity and how one needs to have periods of rest in between, so new ideas can be generated and we can work with more enthusiasm.

The Arrow: The arrow is compared to the intention. So, before releasing the arrow, the archer must have clear intention and goal. And also urges us to take time before releasing the arrow. And admonishes us to never hold back from taking risks in life.

“Even if the arrow fails to hit the target,
you will learn how to improve your aim next time,
If you never take a risk, you will never know
what changes you need to make”

The Target: The target is the end result or any goal one sets out to achieve In this lifetime. And Paulo subtly mentions how it is our goals in life that give meaning to our existence and thereby making us become a better version of ourselves when we achieve our goals.

“Always regard your target with respect and dignity:
you need to know what it means and how much effort,
training, and intuition were required on your part.”

And he further goes on to explain about key points about archery like the importance of right posture, the right way to hold the arrow. Use the story of Tetsuya as a metaphor for your life. Use the way of the bow as a method to finding inner peace. Take the lessons you like from the book and shun those you don't find helpful, it's that simple to enjoy a book like this.

The Archer can be interpreted in different ways. I guess it really depends on the understanding of the readers and the journey they are in life. I don't know a thing about archery but Coelho is clearly a master to it. The beauty of this book is you can read it from time to time and you'll still come away with pearls of wisdom. This is kind of book that need to be savoured slowly and take in the meaningful lessons within. I also loved how at the end, after prompting that strength is found within, the author humbles the reader by reminding them of a higher power. Ultimately, everything that we've achieved and overcome is not through our efforts but from the will of God, and for that, we should live in a constant state of gratitude.

“Visualise the perfect master always by your side, and do
everything to revere him and to honour his teachings.

This master, whom many people call God,
Although some call him ‘the thing’ and others
‘talent,’ is always watching us.
He deserves the best.”

‘The Archer’ is a fast read. It amounts to 160 pages including illustrations. The book comes with illustrations by Christoph Niemann, has been translated from Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa. The language used in the novel is lucid and easy to understand. The quotes are very deep and life changing. This is a slim volume. It has a Zen-like quality to it. Reading this book actually calms you. I wondered about

the genre in which the book should fall, and eventually settled on Philosophical Fiction/Self-help like most of Paulo Coelho books.

"Illustrating literature is difficult, especially since Coelho's words do not need embellishment. My idea was to create a visual layer in a parallel sphere, which would help enjoy the book even more," said Niemann on the book. Adding to Coelho's lyricism, the streamlined paintings by award-winning illustrator Christoph Niemann set a tone of symbolic elegance, making the book ideal in print rather than e-book. Like each gesture the archer makes, Niemann's illustrations embody the book's theme in graceful symbols. Coelho's keen understanding of humanity's yearning for enlightenment emerges again and again in his work. "Enlightenment" does not conform to the Western notion of happiness in the sense of "fun" or even "love" but is a quieter experience related to discovering one's soul.

In Alan Riding's *New York Times* article from August 2005, "Paulo Coelho: Writing in a Global Language," the prolific author says, "What surprises me is when I'm called a spiritual writer. For me, the pursuit of happiness is a lie, as if there were a point when everything changes, when you become wise. I believe enlightenment or revelation comes in daily life. I look for joy, the peace of action." This relationship between the self and physical activity is quintessential to Coelho's ethos and writing. Such simplicity in storytelling disguises a more complex message than how best to pull back a bowstring; it fosters an understanding of the higher self and a reverence for life's many stages. Like the tenets of Taoism, the story demonstrates the fulfillment that comes from relentless practice and mindful intention. The narrator likewise emphasizes the wisdom the student may gain from all experiences, even so-called failures. Awareness of negative feelings can lead to a student's growth instead of thwart it. The author's closing acknowledgements refer to spirituality and Japanese Zen interpretations of archery underlying the book's many messages. Coelho goes so far as to redefine terms such as "master" or "target," explaining that one cannot exist without the other. "Just as the arrow seeks the target, so the target also seeks the arrow, because it is the arrow that gives meaning to its existence."

"The target exists only if the archer exists." In a nutshell, *The Archer* is full of inspiring words to achieve the goals of life. And yes, these lessons are given through a beautiful story of an archer and a young boy. The important thing is that one must follow one's passion, just like Tetsuya follows his passion-carpentry. It was metaphorical in every passage and the author brilliantly uses archery as a tool to showcase wisdom and life lessons that one can get from it. Paulo Coelho also draws some wonderful analogies between life and archery. By giving meaningful explanations, not only to the boy but also the readers on how a meaningful life needs to be lead by taking risks, building courage and by embracing the unexpected situations that life has to offer!

“The simple things are also the most extraordinary things, and only the wise can see them.”

Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist

In fact, life is simple. We complicate a lot. And a fable or allegory talks to the hidden parts of ourselves. You learn the essence of life by paying attention to the simple things that surround you. Every person has few goals in his life. How to achieve those goals? This is the major question. If you have these questions too then Paulo Coelho has the answers. In this novel The Archer writer explains who one can achieve his goals with the help of symbols and metaphors. This short book is full of learning and teachings which writer has earned throughout his life. After many years like The Alchemist, writer came with this wonderful book full of motivation and guidance.

“Target is the choice of Archer. The beauty lies in the way of the bow. You can never blame your conditions or opponents because it was your choice and responsibility.”

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