

## **Analyzing Psychonarration in Paolo Coelho's *The Alchemist***

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### **Abstract**

This study examines how the technique of Psychonarration is used by Paolo Coelho in his novel "The Alchemist" to depict the thoughts of his characters. Psychonarration is but one way of characterization which is unique to fiction in which the narrator could have access to the minds of his characters and hence reveal his thoughts and feelings. With the different possibilities of thought presentation, writers of fiction are inviting the readers to share private information with the character whose mind is being depicted. This piece of information might not be exposed to other characters, especially if the character is sitting alone thinking loudly or being in a conflict with the other characters in the story. The study follows the model of Leech and Short (2007), and Black (2006) to analyze the mental representations of the characters.

Keywords: Psychonarration; Thought Presentation; NRTA; (F)IT; (F)DT

### **1. Introduction**

Readers are interested to know how the mind of the character is working, how he feels and thinks. For this to happen, there should at least be an omniscient or a limited omniscient narrator. The narrator, being inside or outside the fictional world, could penetrate the minds of his character(s) to depict feelings and thoughts. This process is called thought presentation and sometimes takes one of several forms. The thoughts are presented either directly or indirectly. The outside narrator, presumably the author, is the most reliable narrator among the other types of narrators. An inside narrator, a participating character, is not necessarily reliable because subjectivity may

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sweep into his personal judgments. As pointed out by Kate Hamburger (1973:161), the psychonarration is one of the three principal methods that is used in the representation of thoughts apart from interior monologue and narrated monologue or free indirect discourse. Under psychonarration, the character's consciousness is understood through the narrator, who takes it upon him/herself to inform the readers about the emotions and thoughts of the characters. The narrator holds a critical position in the structure of the story, occupying a place in the foreground; often incorporating *general observations* into the structure of the story about the characters. The characters' thoughts and emotions are never heard in a linear format but are always heard through the consciousness of the narrator. In this case, readers tend to be detached from the characters and create a connection with the narrator.

A writer has at his disposal various ways of characterization such as by speech, action, externals, etc. Characterization by revealing the character's thoughts is very popular and useful in fiction. This way which comes to be known as psychonarration is but one way of revealing characters. By psychonarration technique, the writer feels free to expose the mental dispositions of his characters. Psychonarration is firstly introduced by Cohn (1978) who defines it as the narratorial description of the character's mind. Through psychonarration, the character's inner thoughts and assertions are reflected through the narrator, through the narrator's language. By adopting psychonarration, the mental language of the character is absented from the text, and the narrator is recognized as the origin. Cohn (1978) in *Transparent Minds* points out that psychonarration is one of the means through which the External Narrator renders the consciousness transparent. The psychonarration is carried out with the aid of an external narrator, who is not a part of the story.

Psychonarration is an approach "for the investigation of mental processes and representations corresponding to the textual features and structures of narrative"

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(Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003:24). Olga (2009) suggests that psychonarration is simply the process of describing the thoughts of the character by the narrator. Though psychonarration represents the thoughts and emotions of the characters, Olga points out that it is not the mere representation of the emotions of the characters but it also effectively represents *what the character has not thought or felt*. In a manner, every work of literature is encompassed by some form of psychonarration. McHale (1981: 185) asserts that the technique of psychonarration reports the characters' thoughts and emotions through the narrator. The psyche of the characters is narrated, explained and exposed to the readers. The narrator is not the mere reflection of the outward emotions of the characters, but, undergoes a process where the narrator examines as well as analyses the character's mind content, encompassed of its subliminal and habitual elements. In psychoanalysis, the character's mind is in a way controlled by the narrator who has a hold on the characters' consciousness more than the character him/herself.

According to Lanser (2018:924), the narrative voice is a critical element that contributes towards shaping the reader's attitude pertaining to any story. The unique style adopted by the narrator, called the narrative voice engulfs and enthrals the readers, through which they are introduced to the structure and plot of the story as well as the characters. By understanding the narrative voice adopted by the narrator within a text, the vantage point of the narrator is assessed. Tannen, Hamilton and Schiffirin (2015) point out that, the usage of pronouns such as *I, my, me* is used where the story is narrated by a character within the story. The usage of *he, she, his, hers* points out that the narration is carried out by a narrator outside the events and plot of the story. The first person narrative holds the ability to create a closer connection between the readers and the characters, whereas the third person narrative has been assessed to create a distance between the readers and the plot and structure of the story. Cortazzi (1993:36) asserts that the narrator's voice is one of the most critical

elements in a text. Marshall explores the various aspects of a narrative text, examining the different types of narrative voices. The author describes first-person narrative voice as the voice of the character and not the author, which is layered by the history of the character. It even denotes the social class that the character is belonging to. Cortazzi's study (1993:37) points out that the third person narrative has the ability to explore the character voices, surpassing the limitations that pertained in the first-person narrative voice. Gary Smailes (2018) suggests that a novel consists of two different types of voice, the characters' voice as well as the narrator's. Often, the narrator's voice and the author's voice within a text is confused to be the same, but Smailes (2018) points out that, it is never the same. The narrator is somebody within the contexts of the story whereas the author is the developer or the constructor of the story. That is, in the words of Smailes, '*The narrator is a character whom the author controls. The narrator often says things that an author believes to be untrue; that's why it is called fiction*' (pg. 05, *The Writing Manual*, 2018). As per the findings of Smailes, the two types of narration encompassed in books of fiction are first person and third person.

As asserted by Raven, Graham and Elahi (2015: 55), the narrative voices are of three types, the omniscient third-person narrator, the limited third person narrator and first-person narrator. The researchers point out that the narrative voice adopted in a novel determines the impact it will have on the readers. The omniscient third-person narrative voice describes the story of the characters from a distance, where the readers are not given the chance of experiencing it. It does not dwell on any form of emotional ties usually created between the readers and the characters. Under this approach of narrative voices, the emotional depth within the plot is absent due to the broad perspective approach. The omniscient third-person narrative consists of slightly predominant jumps in the elements of space and time. The limited third person

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narrator technique is not restricted to a single character, but changes from one character to the other and indifference to the omniscient third-person narrator, limited third-person narrator adopts the approach where the readers hold the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with the characters. The first person narrator is limited to the single perspective, and it is through the single perspective that the readers view the novel. The narrator under this technique is the character that the readers chose to connect with. According to Foucault, different discourses are a separate set of phenomena or method that is encompassed by its own set of strategies and rules. The different discourses have a *disjunctive or discontinuous* relation pertaining to each other.

## 2. The Means of Thought Presentation

### 2.1. Narrator's Comment, Description, and Observation

The narrator's comment is most popular in narrative fiction to reveal the mental representation of the character. The narrator penetrates the mind of the character to analyze its mental temperament. Here, much of the character's behavior is shown through the narrator's description of the character's attitudes and opinions (Black, 2006:138).

### 2.2. Narrator's Report of Thought Acts (NRTA)

Black (2006:139-41) pinpoints the various uses of the narrator's report of thought acts (NRTA). Here, the narrator can give judgement about the thoughts of the character he is reporting. NRTA can co-occur with other forms of thought presentation. This device is very helpful in granting writers the ability to depict the thoughts of some human and even nonhuman characters which are not usually accessible. Moreover, the flexibility of NRTA allows the writer to blend the thoughts

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of the characters with narratorial comment since it is characterized by the co-presence of the narrator's consciousness and the character's consciousness.

### 2.3. Indirect Thought (IT)

According to Leech and Short (2007:276), the norm for the thought presentation is the indirect thought (IT) where the narrator presents the other character's words while reserving the general idea of the utterance without copying the exact words uttered. The reason indirect thought is considered as the baseline for the presentation of thought is that people's thoughts are not accessible to direct presentation and that "thoughts, in general, are not verbally formulated, and so cannot be reported verbatim."

### 2.4. Free Indirect Thought (FIT)

Free indirect thought (FIT) has an advantage over the other kinds of thought presentation by bringing the reader closely to the characters in the fictional world. It posits the reader directly in the consciousness of the character. This kind is widely used by many novelists and short story writers to manipulate the reader's empathy towards the events and the characters (Leech and Short, 2007: 271). Among the other methods of thought presentation, free indirect thought is the most interesting and challenging. Since it is characterized by the presence of two voices, the character's voice which is embedded in the narrative, and the narrator's voice which encodes a different perspective, the reader's task is complicated as whose perspective is being reflected. Nevertheless, free indirect thought uses normal past tense narratives which makes the task rather easy to identify (Black: 2006: 142).

### 2.5. Direct Thought (DT) and Free Direct Thought (FDT)

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Direct thought (**DT**) is characterized by the presence of quotation marks or introductory reporting clause and the absence of which constitutes a free direct thought (**FDT**). Many novelists use free direct thought to suggest speed of thought and intimacy. However, in many instances of FDT, quotation marks are removed while reporting verbs are reserved (Black, 2006:143).

### 3. The Alchemist, Paolo Coelho (born 1947- )

Paolo Coelho (born 1947) is a Brazilian lyricist and novelist. His acclaimed novel "The Alchemist" was published in 1988. The novel becomes a widely translated international bestseller and considered one of the most important literary phenomena of the 20th century. It is considered a unique illustration of magical realism. It can be regarded as a literature genre, which tends to weave fantastical factors into realist stories. The novel gains much popularity worldwide and events in the book turn out to be miraculous, which grasp the attention of the readers.

The narration is considered one of the most critical elements of a novel. It helps in determining how a character has been portrayed. This paper focuses on discussing the analysis of psychonarration in the novel. Further, it aims to explore the consciousness of the character, as depicted by the narrator.

The novel by Paulo Coelho is limited to one single protagonist, whose name is Santiago. He belongs to a small town. Considering the narrator's description and comments, it is observed that Santiago is a curious and strong boy, who tends to have

a deep interest in learning unique things. The quote "*I'm an adventurer, looking for treasure*" (Coelho, 1998), clearly depicts that the boy has the enthusiasm to go to adventures and find the desired treasure. The novel highlights that Santiago's parents want him to become a priest; however, his interest is to catch his big dreams and become a successful person. From the quote, "*But ever since he had been a child, he had wanted to know the world, and this was much more important to him than knowing God and learning about man's sins*", it is evident that since childhood, Santiago has always wanted to explore the mysteries of the world (Coelho, 1998). The boy dreamt about exploring a particular treasure in Egypt. He is revealed to be quite intuitive and insightful.

The novel tells the story of a young Andalusian shepherd named Santiago who is haunted by a recurring dream as he sleeps under a sycamore tree that grows out of the ruins of an abandoned church. The dream is about a treasure buried so deep beneath the Pyramids in Egypt. Against his father's wishes, and following the advice of an old man who claims to be Melchizedek, King of Salem, Santiago sells his flock and sets his journey afar towards Africa. When the boy arrives to Tangier, he is robbed by a thief and left without money. Nevertheless, this does not dissuade Santiago to continue his journey.<sup>1</sup>

On his way to the Pyramids, Santiago meets an Englishman who wants to learn the secret of alchemy from a famous alchemist who lives in Al-Fayoum oasis. Upon reaching the oasis, Santiago meets an Arab girl named Fatima and falls in love with her instantly. There, Santiago receives an omen of an imminent attack. After Santiago defends the oasis, the alchemist agrees to take him to the treasure. When Santiago reaches the Pyramids, he begins digging for the treasure at the foot of the Pyramids

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-chemist-coelho/study-guide/summary>



but he finds nothing. Once again, Santiago is attacked by two robbers who take his money. As they asked him what he is doing here, he tells them about his dream and the treasure. Just to illustrate the worthlessness of dreams, one of the robbers tells Santiago that he has a dream of a treasure buried in an abandoned church in Spain where a sycamore tree grows. Santiago realizes the treasure has been buried there all along. Shortly after, Santiago heads home to find the treasure buried in the church where he used to sleep with his flock.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Examining Thought Presentation in the Novel

##### 4.1. Narrator's Description, Comments and Observation in *The Alchemist*

Black (2006) indicates that the narrator's comments are of utmost significance. At some points, the narrator may evaluate the character's mental disposition. In some parts of the novel, it can be found how superbly the narrator explains the description of the characters. "*The girl was typical of the region of Andalusia, with flowing black hair, and eyes that vaguely recalled the Moorish conquerors*" clearly indicates how well the narrator provides a description of the character. The narrator's comments also give an indication to the readers regarding the story about Santiago's consciousness. In the extract "*He had the same dream that night as a week ago, and once again he had awakened before it ended*", the narrator attempts to provide insight about the relation of the dream and the whole story (Coelho, 1998). This aspect further explains

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.enotes.com/topics/alchemist-paulo-coelho>

that in his consciousness, Santiago possesses restlessness and he aims at catching his dreams.

In one of the instances, the narrator states, “*He had no idea how he was going to transform himself into the wind. He wasn’t an alchemist!*” This aspect highlights the comments of the narrator about the consciousness of the boy in a critical situation. The quote “*When he reached the top of the dune, his heart leapt. There, illuminated by the light of the moon and the brightness of the desert, stood the solemn and majestic Pyramids of Egypt*” (Coelho, 1998) clearly represents what may happen to a person if he/she experiences a natural and beautiful sight that it seems to be religious or spiritual. This tool also explains the consciousness of the character, as his heart starts beating abruptly after seeing the sight. At once, he could not believe that he is actually witnessing the Pyramids of Egypt.

#### 4.2. Direct Thought (DT) and Free Direct Thought (FDT) in *The Alchemist*

DT possesses certain characteristics as quite distinct from the speech aspect. It is critical to consider that free direct thought and direct thought have a distinct value from other categories of speech presentation (Black, 2006). In one of the events, the boy thought, “*the world speaks many languages, the boy thought*”. This clearly indicates the free direct thought. In the DT, the words of the character are directly written without indicating the narrator’s thought. The quote can help to evaluate that the boy in the novel is enthusiastic to travel the world and explore the secrets. The boy seems to be fascinated by several mysteries hidden in the world. The element of mystery further excites the boy to explore countries and achieve his desired aim. Another instance is when the boy states “*When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around*

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*us becomes better too*". This is another example of DT used for conveying the thoughts to the readers.

While reading the book, one of the catchy sentences observed is "*So, I love you because the entire universe conspired to help me find you*" (Coelho, 1998). Here, Santiago strives to provide a reason to Fatima (a major character) regarding love. Paulo Coelho excellently formulates the sentences, as the narrator explains that when a person desires something with pure intention, then the whole universe strives to help him/her achieve the desired thing. The consciousness of Santiago is depicted in a way that he is courageous and does not hesitate to find the answers to various questions of the world. The boy is intelligent and adventurous, who dares to explore the treasure. Another example of DT is "*They wanted me to be a priest, but I decided to become a shepherd*". In his mind, the boy has his own goals and despite resistance from his father, he chooses to become a shepherd. His consciousness is explained in a way that he is determined to choose whatever he wishes and wants to pursue his dreams. The quote "*I learned the alchemist's secrets in my travels. I have inside me the winds, the deserts, the oceans, the stars, and everything created in the universe*" allows the readers to explore what the protagonist feels after meeting the alchemist. Through DT, the narrator sharply explains the power of an individual. Through the quote, Coelho actually tries to explain that dreams can be turned into reality through dedication and motivation.

Another example of DT is "*Why do we have to listen to our hearts?*" the boy asked (Coelho, 1998), where the boy's thought is revealed, that one always needs to listen to the heart. Here, Coelho tries to explain the curious nature of the protagonist. The quote above helps the reader dive into the consciousness of the boy. One can clearly understand that Santiago has the enthusiasm to reach the treasure and follow his dreams. The extract "*And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in*

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*helping you to achieve it*” clearly indicates the observation skills of Paulo Coelho (Coelho, 1998). This quote can be considered the most powerful. The narrator intelligently explains the motivation of the protagonist to catch the dreams.

The analysis reveals that the most utilized tool in the novel is Direct Thought (DT). It enables the reader to gain deep insight into the characters’ minds and consciousness. There are several instances, where DT has been used by Paulo Coelho to give his readers the chance to deeply observe the major characters.

As far as the Free Direct Thought is concerned, the extract *“I can always go back to being a shepherd, the boy thought”* reveals that the boy understands that he can become a good shepherd again (Coelho, 1998). However, he does not want to lose the chance to reach the Pyramids in Egypt. This enthusiasm and passion of the boy eventually lead him to the desired treasure. Santiago is also aware that even if he fails, he can again start with the life of being a shepherd. This aspect indicates the optimistic personality of the protagonist. Another example of FDT is *“If I became a monster today, and decided to kill them, one by one, they would become aware only after most of the flock had been slaughtered, thought the boy. They trust me, and they've forgotten how to rely on their own instincts, because I lead them to nourishment”* (Coelho, 1998). This extract implies reference to the absence of free will that humans have and animals lack. The boy leads his flock to the places of water and food and they give him their wool and even meat in exchange.

#### **4.3. Indirect Thought (IT) in *The Alchemist***

Indirect Thought (IT) focuses on locating the reader in the character’s consciousness directly (Black, 2006). Paulo Coelho, in his novel, successfully exploits it in order to manipulate the sympathy of the reader towards the characters and story world.

Santiago has a strong and healthy relationship with his sheep. In the novel, the narrator states, “*He had always believed that the sheep were able to understand what he said*” (Coelho, 1998). He wakes up at the same time when the sheep wake up. He shares his feeling with them and always makes sure that they are receiving care well. The narrator attempts to explain that Santiago has a pure and innocent heart. He cares for the sheep and thinks that they will also understand him “*...the boy thought. Sometimes it's better to be with the sheep, who don't say anything. And better still to be alone with one's books*” (Coelho, 1998). Thus, one can analyze that Santiago is caring and friendly. He does not make relationship for own-benefit; rather he attempts to provide benefit to those around him. An example that illustrates one of the major themes in the novel, free will, which concerns why the boy decides to become a shepherd is “*...the boy thought. But he decided to take a chance. A shepherd always takes his chances with wolves and with drought, and that's what makes a shepherd's life exciting*” (Coelho, 1998).

The quote “*The boy was surprised at his thoughts. Maybe the church, with the sycamore growing from within, had been haunted*” (Coelho, 1998) is another example of indirect thoughts, which indicates the thoughts of Santiago about the church. This aspect allows the reader to get an insight into how the boy has been evaluating his own thoughts. Santiago keeps dreaming and there are indications in his dreams. He tends to become confused at some point that whether the dream can come true or not.

#### 4.4. Free Indirect Thought (FIT) in *The Alchemist*

The Free Indirect Thought (FIT) helps the reader to directly locate the character's consciousness. In the narrative stories, FIT tends to be used widely (Black, 2006). “*The sun thought for a minute. The wind was listening closely and wanted to tell every corner of the world that the sun's wisdom had its limitations. That it was unable to deal with this boy who spoke the Language of the World*” (Coelho, 1998)

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represents an indirect thought by the narrator that the wisdom of sun has its own limitations. This incident involves the boy asking the sun turning him into the wind. This indirect thought helps to understand that it is not an easy task to turn someone into something else. One of the quotes, “*But when the boy wanted to learn how to achieve the Master Work, he became completely lost. There were just drawings, coded instructions, and obscure texts*” (Coelho, 1998) can be considered a unique example of FIT. The narrator attempts to explain that the boy was unable to learn the Master Work. This represents the thoughts of the narrator about the fact that mastery is not easy to be achieved. The boy, at first, is worried that not everything can be attained. However, with sheer dedication and courage, the boy, at last, becomes successful in attaining what he desires.

In one of the instances, the narrator explains “*The boy was tempted to be rude, and move to another bench, but his father had taught him to be respectful to the elderly*” (Coelho, 1998). This aspect clearly highlights that Santiago’s father teaches him how to behave with people. He learns various things from his father, which he applies during the travels. It also uncovers the mind of the protagonist, by highlighting that the boy has a soft heart and he does not want to harm someone for own benefit. The events tempt him to become rude, but he does not forget that the elderly must be respected. Paulo Coelho has attempted to describe that calmness that exists in the boy’s nature and his care for others. The extract “*The boy was beginning to understand that intuition is really a sudden immersion of the soul into the universal current of life*” describes the narrator’s thoughts about the boy (Coelho, 1998). Santiago starts understanding the element of intuition and he is able to predict things based on intuition. This clearly highlights that the boy possesses the ability to learn new things and implement them in practical life.

#### 4.5. Narrator’s Report of Thought Acts (NRTA) in *The Alchemist*

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NRTA is another means of narration that helps in determining the consciousness of the character. In one of the instances, “*He recognized that he was feeling something he had never experienced before: the desire to live in one place forever*” (Coelho, 1998), the narrator's description of Santiago’s desire to live in one place is notable. The quote “*Fatima shows her understanding of the boy and of the world by encouraging him to pursue his dream rather than stay with her waiting for the war to end*” shows the narrator’s opinion about the character (Coelho, 1998). This aspect helps to understand the psyche of one of the key characters in the novel. Fatima motivates Santiago to pursue his dreams, as she herself knows that the boy possesses the capability to achieve what he wants. This aspect further indicates that Fatima is sensible and mature enough to understand what is right and what is wrong. The element of NRTA is quite beneficial to understand consciousness. Paulo Coelho perfectly represents the thoughts of Santiago, explaining that everyone should have sufficient power and courage to pursue the dreams. At a particular point in the novel, the narrator reports “*So the boy was disappointed; he decided that he would never again believe in dreams*” (Coelho, 1998). This indicates the thought of Santiago, when he is asked to leave.

The narrator beautifully explains that Santiago always had been in search of the treasure. Through the extract “*From then on, he would make his own decisions*” (Coelho, 1998), the reader can get an idea that after a particular incident, Santiago decides to take decisions on his own. This NRTA approach further helps to understand the consciousness of the protagonist. This aspect indicates that the boy decides to take big decisions in life, as he becomes confident that he is able to face dangers and achieve the desired goals.

## 5. Conclusion

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This study, focusing on analyzing the psychonarration in Paulo Coelho's 'The Alchemist', has arrived at some concrete conclusions. Having carried out the analysis, the researcher has found that Coelho skillfully uses different means of depicting the characters' consciousness.

With the focus being made on the story of a young boy named Santiago, who seeks to turn his dream into reality, it has also been concluded that the most used tool for the depiction of the character's mind is the Direct Thought (DT). In the (DT), the words of the character are directly written without indicating the narrator's thought. Coelho insightfully makes use of different linguistic techniques to convey his message to the readers.

The analysis further reveals that the Free Direct Thought (FDT) enabled the readers of the novel to have direct contact with the character. Coelho uses this technique to explain the concept of dreams and motivation. Using Free Indirect Thought (FIT), the narrator attempts to explain that not everything in the world can be achieved. It requires certain efforts and dedication. This means of depiction helps the readers to locate directly the consciousness of the character.