

A Critical Study on Trauma Literature and the Concept of Soul Mate in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*

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Abstract:

The Brazilian author Paulo Coelho was born in 1947 in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Before dedicating his life completely to literature, he worked as theatre director and actor, lyricist, and journalist. His novel *Brida* is chosen for study. It illustrates the concept of Soul mate very strongly. Besides this novel is analysed in view of trauma literature. The field of trauma studies in literary criticism has gained significant attention in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. A theoretical trend was introduced by scholars like Caruth, who pioneered a psychoanalytic post structural approach that suggests trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language.

Paulo Coelho's third novel, *Brida*, tells the story of a young woman on a quest for knowledge and fulfillment. As the novel begins, Brida seeks out two teachers. The first is Magnus, who teaches her about the tradition of the sun, in addition to helping her conquer her fears. In *Brida*, the Magus sees his soul mate essentially the other half of his own soul. The second teacher is Wicca, who instructs Brida in the knowledge and rituals of the tradition of the moon. While practicing these rituals, studying tarot cards, and dancing to the sound of the world, Brida begins to understand that she is a witch. While the spiritual aspects of the novel are most profound, Paulo Coelho's protagonist also struggles with the more visceral challenges of the heart.

Keywords: Trauma, Soulmate, Witch, Rituals, Knowledge.

“A THEMATIC STUDY OF TRAUMA LITERATURE AND THE CONCEPT OF SOUL MATE IN PAULO COELHO'S *BRIDA*.”

Paulo Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1947. After deciding that law school was not for him, he travelled through much of South America, North Africa, Mexico, and Europe. Returning to Brazil after two years, he began a successful career as a popular songwriter. In 1974, he was imprisoned for a short time by the military dictatorship then ruling in Brazil. In 1988, Coelho published *The Alchemist*, which was sold more than 11 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 41

languages. He has written more than a dozen novels, including *The Pilgrimage* and *Veronika Decides to Die*, both of which are being adapted to film.

Paulo Coelho is an outspoken activist for peace and social justice. His third novel *Brida* is chosen for the thematic study of Trauma Literature and the concept of Soul mate.

Paulo Coelho illustrates themes like search for one's destiny, true love and a soul mate, finding a path to a higher and more joyous self, making choices in life, etc. The novel follows the journey of a 21-year old girl, Brida who was a "witch" or an enlightened woman in her past reincarnations and had forgotten the same through various births. However, the attraction to occult and magic lingered in her memory and made her seek teachers and knowledge that would guide her on this path. As she embarks on her journey, she rediscovers her gift through the teachings of a wise man and a tarot card reader who herself is a witch. This woman teaches her to dance to the hidden music of the world and connect with her soul through her own voyage of discovery.

Trauma, in my analysis, refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society. The term "trauma novel" refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world.

Trauma has been an inherent element of American literature since its beginnings, but not until the emergence of trauma studies in the 1990s. Trauma fiction became a focus of American letters. Trauma studies explores the ways in which psychological trauma is represented in language and analyses the ethical, cultural, and political implications of individual and collective traumas manifested in literary texts. Theoretical premises of trauma studies are indebted to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, and Theodor Adorno's metaphysics, while its roots are in the medical recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Trauma literature, on the other hand, is defined as texts that are influenced by trauma studies, and in which a traumatic experience is presented through a series of stylistic innovations such as disrupted causative and temporal narration, iteration, and characters' doubling. Trauma fiction and trauma studies are closely related, while trauma fiction authors explore a wide range of issues such as race, feminism, violence, and postcolonialism.

The field of trauma studies in literary criticism gained significant attention in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. A theoretical trend was introduced by scholars like Caruth, who pioneered a psychoanalytic post structural approach that suggests trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language. This Lacanian approach crafts a concept of trauma as a recurring sense of absence that sunders knowledge of the extreme experience, thus preventing linguistic value other than a referential expression.

The event may include, for example, the intimately personal experience of female sexual violence, such as found in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, or the unexpected death of a loved one, as found in Edward Abbey's *Black Sun*. The popular trauma theory employed today depends upon the abrogative model of trauma, which is used to assert the position that traumatic experience produces a "temporal gap" and dissolution of the self. For example, in *Worlds of Hurt* Kali Tal writes: "Accurate representation of trauma can never

be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception" (15). This Freudian concept of trauma and memory emphasizes the necessity to recreate or abreact through narrative recall of the experience. Yet, at the same time, this model claims, as Tal makes clear, that the remembrance of trauma is always an approximate account of the past, since traumatic experience precludes knowledge, and, hence, representation.

The literary trauma theory articulated by Kali Tal, and critics such as Cathy Caruth, considers the responses to traumatic experience, including cognitive chaos and the possible division of consciousness, as an inherent characteristic of traumatic experience and memory.

Brida is found as a restless soul in the novel. Paulo Coelho's books allow the readers to find out answers the question what is my place in the World. *Brida* deals with the search for life and soul mate. It is the central theme of the whole story. The story revolves around the search of that one person who possesses the same soul as yours, yet in a different body. This is what is necessary to love, to live your life with the thought of being in love. The story tells us how it is not necessary for us to find our soul mate in a single person, and how it is not necessary for us to be with our soul mates forever, even when there is love. A single encounter with a soul mate has an everlasting impact in our lives.

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. The main character of this story *Brida* has been portrayed beautifully. Her internal conflicts, external temptations, fears, and joy are so beautifully penned that everyone can easily connect with the character.

In addition to *Brida's* journey of self-discovery, Paulo Coelho also includes religious themes in the novel. There are prevalent overtones of paganism mixed with Roman Catholicism. Paulo Coelho's novel depicts the path to God as based on an individual's actions. As *Brida* continually seeks to understand the path she has chosen, which will ultimately lead her to discover her destiny, Coelho also illustrates the need for modern pilgrims to continually search, not only for a deeper knowledge of themselves but also a more tangible understanding of the will and plan of God.

While the spiritual aspects of the novel are most profound, Coelho's protagonist also struggles with the more visceral challenges of the heart. This struggle is personified by the two people *Brida* considers her soul mates. The first is her teacher Magnus. The second is her lover, Lorens. This conflict within her represents the author's attempt to illustrate the subtle battle between the id (pleasure-seeking) and the superego (the quest for perfection) that exists within each human being. *Brida's* quest for perfection is straightforward. As she continually practices the skills of her trade, she becomes more proficient, therefore coming ever closer to achieving the goal of becoming a witch. Her quest for pleasure, however, is more ambiguous. Although *Brida* is inextricably linked to Lorens, she is uncertain if he is truly her soul mate. Her relationship with Magus lends itself to the same feelings. *Brida* must seek the counsel of Wicca to determine the truth about what a soul mate is. Ultimately, *Brida* discovers that love brings both pleasure and pain in equal measure. While her connection with Magnus is one she will never forget, she is bound to Lorens and therefore chooses him in the end.

Coelho's novel touches on many subjects relevant to the human condition. Among these topics are witchcraft, spirituality, magic, and the search for self. The most important theme prevalent throughout the novel is the idea of soul mates. The author emphasizes that it is possible to meet more than one soul mate in life, with each individual resonating with a different aspect of a person's soul. The novel *Brida* deals with the search for life and soulmate. It is the central theme of the whole story. The

story revolves around the search of that one person who possesses the same soul as yours, yet in a different body. This is what is necessary to love, to live your life with the thought of being in love. The novel tells us how it is not necessary for us to find our soulmate in a single person, and how it is not necessary for us to be with our soulmates forever, even when there is love. A single encounter with a soulmate has the power to last a lifetime.

This is what happens to the protagonist, Brida in the novel. She is torn between two people: her lover and her teacher, as she can find the 'light' in both their eyes. According to the witch in the novel, the 'light' is the signal that you have found your soulmate. Throughout the course of the novel, she is confused as to whom to choose, whether her boyfriend or her teacher who is twice as old as she is.

In the end, after a conversation with her mother, she understands that some people are not meant to be together with, although they are their soulmate. She understands that the budding romance between her teacher and her was meant to be short lived, for her own sake of happiness, and his, and hence, she spends however little time she has with her soulmate, telling him she would always remember him and shall wait for him. They might be together in some other life, and after they bid each other goodbye, she returns back to her first soulmate.

After experimenting all magical skills and abilities, Brida turns to her own world to strike a chord of power, lust and balance in her life and the people associated with her. The novel ends abruptly and it is all about fictionalizing a tale of a girl who was out for spirituality and in search of love or soul mate. In the end Brida realizes that it's not necessary to have just one soulmate. Our soul gets broken into a million shatters. And all those shatters are very much a part of the same soul; that's what makes them soulmates. It is just that not all soulmates can stay together. some are meant for a short span, some might last forever or some might not even meet in the lifetime.

Coelho is known for writings novels based on love, battle between good and evil, presence of supreme power, foreshadowing, self-discovery and magical realism. Spirituality and mystery are basic characteristics of his writings. In terms of developing plots and introducing his characters to reader he is remarkably excellent in it. He has an astounding capacity to express emotions so that reader can easily relate the major character to him or herself. Coelho reveals that he is fearless and experimental writer. His mindfulness regarding numerous regular human encounters, he composes his novels largely based on life experiences that are necessary to develop one's inner-self with maturity.

He has an extraordinary art of introducing his characters and making them representative of his readers in real life situations. Most of the novels written by Coelho are representative of his own personal life experiences. In each of his novel there is a connection between the story of the novel and his life. In novels written by Coelho there is not only the depiction of the society but there is also a glimpse of his personal life experiences. He himself admits that in his bestselling novel *The Alchemist* there is a clear picture of his personality in protagonist, he is even the main character in *Brida*. He reveals in one of his interview that all his books are the result of his life experiences, not of his imaginary thoughts (Mayer, 2019). He also said that every individual has unique life experiences and these experiences are meant to be shared. He emphasized that sharing of life experiences is one of the important task assigned to human beings. He is of the point of view that writer and artist has something to share, he has experienced. It does not matter that the experience is real or imaginary. He admits that sharing of past experiences free oneself from the past.

Through his open and vivid style of writing he creates a live experience for readers as he knows very well that what are the longings and yearnings of the soul which people do not talk about usually.

The moment reader picks up his novel, he/she gets glued with it. The simple yet full of wisdom writing style have inspired greatly his readers all over the world. He provides a big purpose to his readers out of all the mess in life.

Coelho actually wants to proclaim his readers about his novels that is why his writing style fits into the culture of the present scenario. This shows that he always holds a unique idea about life from his youth. Coelho trusts that every person is born and grows with his very own impulses, types of delight and want for experience. Every individual attempts to find answer to the inquiry why one should pursue a particular regular standard of conduct. He believes that each individual has to fight for his dreams and he has to break the chains of common thinking patterns.

Each novel of Paulo Coelho resembles a voyage or a quest for a lifestyle that improves the meaning of presence. It likewise brings a message of expectation. A man's life is viewed as effective, when he battles and battles in life against his self-image and his most prominent accomplishment are in the shrewdness procured in this procedure. In *The Fifth Mountain* Elijah says: 'I have found that there dwells in me a spirit in excess of anyone's imagination I thought' (P 36)([www.journalppw.com.article](http://www.journalppw.com/article)).

Life is a continuous journey including many magical and meaningful deeds, experiencing different occasions .It is a beautiful synthesis of joys and sorrows. It doesn't have some other reason or point aside from the procedure of this investment in every single such movement. Coelho additionally recommends that one should confront every one of these exercises as a round of amusement. In his novel, *The Alchemist* one of his outstanding characters. The Alchemist discloses to Santiago one significant thing that he should know: Before a dream is realized the soul of the World tests everything that was learnt along the way. It does this not because it is evil, but so that we can, in addition to realizing our dreams, master the lessons we've learned as we've moved towards that dream. That's the point at which most people give up. It's the point at which as we say in the language of the desert, one 'dies' of thirst just when the palm trees have appeared on the horizon (P 5) ([www.journalppw.com.article](http://www.journalppw.com/article)).

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