

# A Critique of *the Valkyries* as an Exploration into the Unknown

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It is believed that union with or absorption into the Deity or the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender. This is, in other words, termed as Mysticism. *The Alchemist* famed Paulo Coelho, having went on a pilgrimage to Saint James of Compostella, has documented his experience of his encounter with darkness, his search for the light, and the seeking of his personal angel in his novel *The Valkyries*. This book is journey of faith, of trust, of forgiveness, of love, of self-discovery, and of battling the darkness within ourselves and wanting to change. This paper attempts to show how the author has depicted the protagonist's inner transformation led him to comprehend his unknown angel.

"And an angel descended where they were and the glory of the lord shone all about them" (*Luke 2:9*). Thus begins the novel *The Valkyries* which not only gives a clue but also a mystical insight into the novel. In this age of angel sightings, angel occurrences are happening with intense frequency. This is *The Alchemist* famed Paulo Coelho's astonishing true story of his encounter with darkness, his search for the light and the seeking of his personal angel (*Scribbles of Soul*). It is as if God is sending his messengers with a message and that message is love. The novel *The Valkyries* is autobiographical but narrated from the third person point of view.

This book is a modern day magical adventure which deals with exorcism of personal demons and discovering one's strength. It also deals with relationships between people, in this case, Paulo Coelho and his wife. The plot chronicles Coelho's journey from Brazil to the Mojave desert to meet the Valkyries, a group of warrior women who travel the desert on motorcycles.

The Valkyries are rumoured to be able to speak and to see  
their angels. Having fought a battle with darkness, Coelho  
has redeemed his life and is a seeker of the light. (*Scribbles of Soul*)

At the beginning of the story, J, Coelho's master in RAM, shows him a copy of the poem by Wilde that says "We destroy what we love" (*Paulo Coelho's Collection 7 books*). This theme is central to the story. *The Alchemist* of Coelho is a quest for treasure in the deserts where the protagonist acquires various experiences of life whereas *The Valkyries* is a quest through desert to encounter the angels- a mythical creature often talked about but never seen.

The quest begins from the Mojave desert and gets over at the top of Glorieta Canyon. It is a compelling account of his journey, as Coelho, the protagonist and his wife embark on a forty day quest into the searing heat of the Mojave desert, where they encounter the Valkyries. It is highly autobiographical for the author has narrated his own experience in detail.

The enchanting, true story of *The Valkyries* begins in Rio de Janeiro when author Paulo Coelho gives his mysterious master J., the only manuscript for his book *The Alchemist*. Haunted by a devastating curse, Coelho confesses to J., “I’ve seen my dreams fall apart just when I seemed about to achieve them (*The Valkyries* 10)”. In response, J. gives Coelho a daunting task: He must find and speak with his guardian angel. “The curse can be broken”, he replies, “if you complete the task” (*The Valkyries* 10). The curse that makes us kill the best thing God offers us, which makes us turn our faces away from the things we love the most. J also mentions that Chris, wife of Coelho, would be accompanying Coelho in his quest. Accordingly, Coelho, a wealthy businessman, at the bidding of his Master, leaves with his wife without knowing where exactly they are going. All he knows is that he has to find a person named Gene in USA somewhere in the Californian desert.

Chris accompanies her husband without the slightest interest in angels, yet enduring Coelho’s unpredictable moods she prays that he meets his angel.

Coelho has used his own wife Chris as a cynic, who initially  
refuses to accept even the possibility of an angel, but soon  
becomes a medium herself to gain better access to mind’s  
hidden recesses. (*Scribbles of Soul*)

They travel nearly for six hours with confidence and at times Chris ruminates about her life with Coelho who has once been termed as a sorcerer by her friends. Coelho has learned magic for seven years and has had a vision of J who reforms him. They arrive at Mojave desert. He shares his mystical experience with Chris. There are certain moments when he feels as if he is being keenly observed by someone whom he comprehends to be his angel.

Chris’ spiritual journey starts soon after her meeting with Gene who is just in his twenties. She is astounded at the knowledge and experience of Gene on the mystical plane. As instructed by his angel, Gene teaches Coelho through Chris. There with Gene she learns how to master her second mind which is something beyond our control. It could be some melody which keeps flowing while one is thinking of something important. Coelho takes Chris for a stroll in a salt lake in the desert. The lake which appeared to be near at first seems to keep moving farther as

they walk towards it. So having felt frustrated they decide to return. While doing so, their exhaustion drives them to the extent of ripping their clothes as the temperature intensifies. They become fatigued; they lie down to rest a while not bothering about the passersby. When their endurance crosses the limit, fortunately a man in a truck, finds them in the desert. All the while, despite the scorching sun, Chris enjoys a feeling of euphoria. She is of the opinion that only in such a serene atmosphere angels appear. She feels as if her soul has grown. The author's journey towards introspection transforms him as well as his wife at the same time. He, not realizing that the man is actually one of the messengers of God being sent at an exact time to rescue them, hopes to meet his angel soon. To their surprise, they find themselves in the old trailer accompanied by Gene.

Once again they are taken to the top of the cliff where Gene first met his angel. He brings their mind back to concentration and explains every one's contact with four different entities in the invisible world: the elementals, the disembodied spirit, the saints and the angels. Since Coelho is a Magus, it is implied that Gene's talk on the elementals, the disembodied spirits is directed towards Chris, the amateur. Coelho understands that Gene uses Chris as an instrument through which he himself can progress. The first lesson of Gene to Chris is to invoke the saints who would appear after the disembodied spirits. When they are near, undoubtedly the angels would appear. Gene, then advises Coelho to seek out the Valkyries and adds that his meeting with them would fruitfully help him to get at his angel. And so they set out in search of the Valkyries. Here the valkyries are used as a perfect foil to overlook appearances, overcome one's irrational fears and apprehensions and believe in the truthfulness of our dreams. "Coelho writes every sentence with the sole motive of inspiring fellow humans to have faith in their beliefs and traditions, even in the wake of toughest cynicism or resistance (*Paulo Coelho's Collection 7Books*)".

In the meantime, Coelho teaches Chris the channelling, the fourth process to converse with her angel. Channelling is nothing but paying attention to the thoughts that emerge freely from the bottom of one's mind. In the course of channelling, , She makes strange noises, utters something ridiculous and says a prayer of Ojibway Shamans. Chris comes in contact with her angel sooner than they had expected. Due to this, their marital life seems to reach its sour ends. Suddenly, they hear a roaring sound of a truck and the Valkyries enter the diner where Coelho,,with his wife Chris is refreshing. They are women in black leather raiment with gloves and colourful bandannas, riding their powerful motorcycles. They are all ordinary human beings possessing profound mystical powers who symbolize both inebriation of courage and rest for the

warrior, the adventure of love in battle. They are eight in number and the oldest of them is named Valhalla who recognizes Coelho as a Magus. Having got a glimpse of Coelho's ring, she speaks in their code language after which Coelho makes his appeal. To meet one's angel, three things are necessary- break a pact, accept forgiveness and make a bet. After all, the most important aspect is a woman's courage rather than a man's. Valhalla consents to help him. At noon they meet Valhalla where Chris' courage is being tested before she pursues her spiritual path. Then they enter the strange door in the mountain preceded by Valhalla. Initially, Coelho is asked to break the pact. He breaks his pact that has been made fourteen years ago. Insolence is the price paid by Coelho for his salvation from evil.

"Angels are visible to those who accept the light and break the pact made with darkness" (*The Valkyries* 150). His intense prayer brushes aside the presence of evil eventually. As days pass by, Coelho's life becomes smooth and so he begins to fancy his dream thereby breaking his pact. "Coelho says, 'God is love, generosity and forgiveness; if we believe this, we will never allow our weakness to paralyse us (*Paulo Coelho's The Valkyries – A Meeting with Angels and the Self*)'". Valhalla instructs him to swear on the Archangel Michael that never again in his life he would betray his own self.

Then Valhalla takes Coelho to the Death Valley to enable him perform the forgiveness ritual. This ritual is otherwise known as the ritual that demolishes rituals which stir hatred between Coelho, a warrior and Rotha, the prisoner. Coelho attacks Rotha vehemently with the belt to extract the secret of seeing his angel. When she refuses, Coelho's hatred is stirred and it permeates through the warrior's heart.

No, I won't tell you about the angels - says Rotha, the warrior's eyes changed and she was delighted. He would show no mercy. The only thing that frightened her was that the warrior might be governed by the rule of morality [...]. (*The Valkyries* 174)

Coelho becomes furious at the same time awaits Rotha to beg for his forgiveness. In an unexpected moment, Chris who has been observing the rituals is transformed into a stronger woman like Valhalla while Valhalla takes up Chris' position. They both fight for Coelho now. The last ritual is making a bet which has been left at the efforts of Coelho himself. He feels forsaken by his angel. With only six days left behind, his conscience pricks him if he is growing greedy for the earth that produces enough to satisfy one's needs. During the sunset, they begin their channelling activity named "contemplation of the angel". Before the activity, Chris fires a volley of questions at him to know the reason for his craze to meet his angel. Coelho answers her

questions comparing J, Chris and himself to a farmer, a hunter and vice versa. Chris feels that the hunt that she has learnt has made her soul grow as well as speak with her angel. During their channelling, she obeys the second mind thereby agreeing to abandon her husband. Soon she realizes the presence of her angel.

The next day, he sets out in the early hours to meet his angel in Glorieta Canyon. “The world was in the hands of those who had courage to dream and to realize their dreams”(201). The dawn for him appears to be the face of his guardian angel who has been in his proximity. While he is obsessed with the thoughts of the desert, a blue butterfly flutters around him symbolizing his angel. The moment he opens his eyes, a streak of light appears on the horizon with the arrival of the sun. He hears a voice whispering.

Look around, this is my face. I’m the place where you are. My  
mantle will cover you with the rays of the Sun in daytime and with  
the glow of the star at night. (227)

On a sudden impulse, he writes a few verses dictated by the voice. Coelho’s attempt in *The Valkyries* is merely to confront his guardian angel. Throughout the journey, Coelho fights his inner demons and works towards spiritual enlightenment and self-development having three concepts as his prime factors, such as, break a pact, accept forgiveness and make a bet. This, in short, is a journey of faith, of trust, of forgiveness, of love, of self- discovery, and of battling the darkness within ourselves, and wanting to change. The fact that faith is a different conquest and it requires daily combat in order to be maintained is perceptibly revealed by Coelho in this novel.

Coelho’s basic message is that Paradise is open and angels are present if only we break the pact of our self-betrayal and learn to conquer fear and the distractions of our second mind. Unfortunately, he fails to go anywhere with this potentially exciting but hardly original vision. “What he offers is a kind of doctrinal salad in which belief in angels, channeling, and casual sex are mixed with references to magic rites, catholic worship, and reincarnation” (*A Review of the Valkyries by Paulo Coelho*). Coelho uses his characters to emphasize the dubious position that spiritual knowledge can be gained without any connection to how one lives. At times his wisdom turns out to be the familiar exhortation to follow our dreams, and he asserts, without clarification, that we are all manifestations of the Absolute.

Beneath the garb of a magical fiction, *The Valkyries* exhibits the best way to live, by having confidence in one’s own abilities and thoughts. And, here Coelho leads by not only indulging unabashedly in traditional rituals, without fearing any criticism, but also by exposing

the darkest years of his life, his innermost feelings and troubled intimacy with his wife, with a boldness, a few of the men could ever dare to (*Scribbles of Soul*).

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