

Redemption in The Novel *Veronika Decides To Die* By PAULO COELHO

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Abstract—Paulo Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947. He worked as a theatre director, actor, lyricist and a journalist. After travelling the world and finding out about secret societies and other religions, Coelho dedicated himself to his writing and published his first book in 1982. In 1987, *The Alchemist* was published to become an eventual international best-seller. Coelho has received many awards which are too numerous to list. Redemption means, in the context of life, returning to your natural Self, returning to deeper awareness and understand the real color and meaning of life. When one thinks about this, he can realize how absolutely essential it is to one's happiness, to his fulfillment and to the meaning and quality of life and everything one does here. This paper attempts to explore the redemption that generates in the mind of Veronika.

Paulo Coelho's '*Veronika Decides to Die*' is a book that teaches one to appreciate life and be grateful for being alive. The story unfolds to reveal Veronika's journey of self-discovery, in the intense week that follows. She is drawn to the patients and confinements of her new place, Villette, and realizes that each individual reflects the heart and glory of human life and experience. She redeems herself. It is during this time, that she feels the things she has never felt before: curiosity, fear, love, hatred, sexual awakening. She understands that each moment of her being is an option between life and death, and in the final stage of her time, she becomes more open to life and its ways, than she ever has been. Through *Veronika*, the writer helps to travel boundaries between happiness and despair, sanity and madness, life and death.

Keywords: Paulo Coelho, *Veronika Decides To Die*

1. INTRODUCTION

The author, Paulo Coelho, was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947. He worked as a theatre director, actor, lyricist, and a journalist. After traveling the world and finding out about secret societies and other religions, Coelho dedicated himself to his writing and published his first book in 1982. In 1987 *The Alchemist* was published to become an eventual international best-seller. Coelho has received many awards too numerous to list, among them are -The Crystal Award by the World Economic Forum and "Knight of Arts and Letters of France." His books are: *Brida*, *The Valkyries*, *By the river*

Piedra I sat Down and Wept, *Maktub*, *The Fifth Mountain*, *Manual of a Warrior of Light*, *Veronika Decides to Die*, *The Devil and Miss Prym*, *Eleven Minutes*, *The Zahir*.

Redemption means in the context of life, returning to natural self, returning to deeper awareness and understand the real colour and meaning of life. When one thinks about this, he can realize how absolutely essential it is to one's happiness, to his fulfillment and to the meaning and quality of life and everything one does here. This paper attempts to explore the

Redemption that generates in the *Veronika*. A significant device that stands apart from all others and becomes the core of Coelho's fiction is that of Choice. In philosophy, it is an outcome of proposal of free will, that is, the ability to decide voluntarily to perform one of possible acts or to avoid action entirely. Freedom of choice, according to existentialists, is humanity's primary distinction. It is central to human existence and entails commitment and responsibility. Paulo Coelho makes the most of his writer's freedom by choosing to embark upon self-exploration. He therefore, follows the pattern of quest with its cycle of departure, journey and return in all his novels. Central to human existence, freedom embodies all the characters of Coelho.

2. VERONIKA DECIDES TO DIE

Veronika is a beautiful young woman from Ljubljana, Slovenia who appears to have the perfect life, but nevertheless decides to die (commit suicide) by overdosing with sleeping pills.

While she waits to die, she cancels the suicide letter she starts to her parents while suddenly provoked by a magazine article. The magazine article wittily asks "Where is Slovenia?", so she writes a letter to the press justifying her suicide, the idea being to make the press believe that she has killed herself because people don't even know where Slovenia is. Her plan fails and she wakes up in Villette, a mental

hospital in Slovenia, where she is told she has only a few days to live due a heart condition caused by the overdose.

Her presence there affects all of the mental hospital's patients, especially Zedka, who has clinical depression; Mari, who suffers from panic attacks; and Eduard, who has schizophrenia, and with whom Veronika falls in love. During her internment in Villette she realizes that she has nothing to lose and can therefore do what she wants, say what she wants and be who she wants without having to worry about what others think of her; as a mental patient, she is unlikely to be criticized. Because of this new-found freedom Veronika experiences all the things she never allowed herself to experience, including hatred and love.

3. REDEMPTION IN VERONIKA DECIDES TO DIE

Existential Depression is a type of depression found in many gifted individuals who have been made to part with the pursuing of their talent. It may lead to isolation, alienation, meaninglessness and even death. Paulo Coelho's *Veronika Decides to Die* is a novel which portrays a young pianist Veronika who attempts suicide and is admitted in an asylum. In the asylum she finds Eduard, a schizophrenic, who encourages her talent. Eduard reveals a similar past to Veronika about his talent as a painter and how he was not allowed by his parents to develop his passion. He too suffers from the same depression and is admitted in the asylum. This paper attempts to trace the causes of Existential Depression of two characters, Veronika and Villette in the novel.

Veronika, a young girl of twenty-four, decides to commit suicide. She is not satisfied by the life she leads as a librarian and feels it is a deadening monotonous routine: "She wasn't killing herself because of a lack of love. It wasn't because she felt unloved by her family, or had money problems or an incurable disease" (VDD 9). Veronika experiences purposelessness in her life. So, she takes four packets of sleeping pills, experiences a kind of nausea and loses her consciousness. When she opens her eyes after many days she finds herself admitted in a lunatic asylum named 'Villette' in Slovenia.

It is a poignant novel of a beautiful girl by the same name. She is a woman in mid- twenties who in spite, of having almost everything in life such as a job and a good family finds life meaningless to live and surrenders to death by overdosing herself with sleeping pills. She does not die. She comes to consciousness in a mental asylum in Villette where Dr. Igor informs her that the poison will eventually lead her to her death in the course of five days.

The proximity of death slowly regenerates a new urge to see life again, may be, this time for a limited number of days as Coelho says: "In order to appreciate life, one must taste death..."

In the hospital she thinks about life, she questions about life to the people she meets like – Zedka who has clinical depression, Maria who suffers from panic attacks and Eduard who is schizophrenic. Veronika's five days stay in the hospital is her metamorphosis to the new life ahead. In the hospital she recollects the days of her first love, she again starts playing piano and finds her love and satisfaction in Eduard.

She takes interest in the problems of others only to find that she is not suffering from any illness. Though the book is woven around insanity but for the greater part it deals with the deliberate choice to live- a choice, we all have to make at some point of life.

Coelho, through the story tries to answer some of the questions that lie hidden in the deeper recesses of our mind, the answer to which a common man searches throughout one's life. At a point in the novels he reminds his readers "You are someone who is different, but one who wants to be same as everyone else. And that in my view is a serious illness. God chose you to be different. Why are you disappointing God with this kind of attitude?" Here he shows us how each of us is unique and how we tend to forget this when we try to equate ourselves with other fellows and open the doors to unforeseen miseries. The competitiveness within us makes us overlook our unique potentialities and at the end we try to make ourselves a replica of someone else which forms the root of all our problems.

It follows the story of a 24-year-old woman's attempted suicide and stay at a mental hospital. The novel takes place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, a few years after the break up of Yugoslavia. Veronika is a young librarian with a good life that she nonetheless finds unfulfilling. Though she has a job, friends and family, she feels nothing but apathy toward her life and feels no great draw toward the kind of life that is expected of her. She feels powerless to change her life and feels that things will only get worse as she ages, so makes a relatively passionless decision to end her life in order to find "freedom."

Her suicide attempt fails, however, and she awakens in an infamous mental institution called Villette Veronika's doctor, Igor, tells her that she has damaged her heart so much that she only has a few days to live, which she is expected to live out in the institution. Though initially disappointed by her unsuccessful suicide, as the days continue she finds herself experiencing life more fully than ever before, as she has nothing to do lose. Her actions are uninhibited by other's opinions and expectations. While at the institution she meets a number of patients with varied experiences with "madness." She questions the nature of insanity as she gets to know them.

Mari, a wife, mother, and successful lawyer, was treated for intense panic attacks. Though Dr. Igor told her that she could return home, Mari said she wanted to stay to give her husband time to recover for the months of stress prior to her institutionalization. As she, cured of her symptoms, gets ready to leave and resume her life, a colleague tells her that she was

being forced to resign. She begs him to let her return, stating that she has lived with two sorts of people: those who have no chance of ever going back into the society some are completely cured but who prefer to pretend to be mad rather than face up life's responsibilities. She needs to learn herself again, and convince myself that she is capable of taking her own decisions. He remains firm, and she loses her job. Mere days later, a lawyer visits her and informs her that her husband is seeking a divorce. Devastated, she lies and tells Dr. Igor that her symptoms have returned and asks to stay. Though he knows she is lying, he agrees, and Mari becomes exactly the type of reality-avoiding patient she begged her colleague to spare her from embodying.

Another patient, Eduard, is getting treated for schizophrenia. Born to a rich and powerful Yugoslavian ambassador, Eduard was raised to follow in his father's footsteps. However, after an accident and a stay in a hospital he developed an ambition to paint. His father strongly disapproved, and pushed him to continue his path toward becoming a diplomat. Afraid to further disappoint him, Eduard buried his dream of painting and followed his father's wishes. However, in the wake of this decision Eduard loses his grip on reality and becomes diagnosed with schizophrenia and ends up at Villetete.

The cause of Schizophrenia is due to a repression of life force and the repressed emotional complexes which is caused by maladjustment with the environment"(348). Eduard is caught between the love of his parents and the passion for his art. The tough situation gives him depression and made him a Schizophrenian. The cause of Schizophrenia is due to a repression of life force and the repressed emotional complexes which is caused by maladjustment with the environment"(348). Eduard is caught between the love of his parents and the passion for his art. The tough situation gives him depression and made him a Schizophrenian.

Eduard is admitted in the asylum as a schizophrenic, but now he reveals a past similar to Veronika, a true artist who had undergone Existential depression and thus became a mentally insane person. Eduard has a fascination for painting, but his father and mother want him to finish his degree in the American college and wish him to get a job. But Eduard is not able to accept his parents' wishes and continued his passion on painting. As a result, he does not concentrate on his studies and was expelled from the college for questioning the teachers. His parents show so much love and concern but they also demand that he follow their status in high society. His father threaten him with his love saying:

"If you really love us, do as I ask. If you don't love us, then carry on as you are now"

(Veronika Decides to Die: p-173).

As Veronika interacts with these patients, she discovers versions of herself that she didn't know existed which provides her the plat form to redeem her. she finds much more

compelling and satisfying than her old self. She finds herself playing the piano again, a former passion that she had abandoned, and her sonata attracts Eduard, with whom she falls in love as she never has before.

Zedka, getting treatment for depression, outright states upon meeting Veronika those masterminds such as Einstein and Columbus were thought to be crazy, though they merely "lived in their own worlds." She is being treated for an obsession over a former lover. Though married with children, she becomes fixated on tracking him down. She is convinced that he was seeking her as well. She directly expresses the novel's doubts about the nature of madness, stating that insanity is the inability to communicate ones ideas. It's as if one were in a foreign country, able to see and understand everything that's going on around the world. But, sometimes people become incapable of explaining what you need to know or of being helped.

Because people don't understand the language they speak there. All folks of the society feel that , the individuals in one way or another, are insane.

As Veronika approaches her final 24 hours, she finds herself reinvigorated by life and tells Dr. Igor she desires to leave the institution in her final hours to see Ljubljana castle and "...give [herself] to one man, to the city, to life and, finally, to death. However, it is revealed that Veronika was not in fact dying, but that Dr. Igor merely tells her that she wants to leave in order to attempt to shock her into the appreciating her life. It is at this point of life she redeems herself in the mental institution called Villetete. The novel concludes with Veronika and Eduard celebrating their life and future together.

This is what the true colour and meaning of life that everyone should appreciate. Most of us are in such an obvious condition taking up life, each day, every moment that we are kind of fed up with the 'same old life'. We are somewhat obsessed with our idea, our self-conceived expression of 'life's monotony'. And by the time we realize what life is, chances are that it would have already been late. And it has been put , Our life shouldn't be long, it should be large instead. And with these emotions we come to the end of the days of Veronika. And with these emotions we come to the end of the days of Veronika. The moral is there but the reader is immensely saddened by the 'about to' death of Veronika ...but hold on this is where Paulo plays the chemistry. He tells us that the psychiatrist operating on Veronika faked upon her the news of her near death i.e. when he told him that she was about to die in a week. He has been using some drug called Fenotal, with which he manages to stimulate the effects of heart attacks and impress upon Veronika, the diminishing days of her remaining life. There had been absolutely no damage to her heart and no problem with her health, but the psychiatrist stages this story lest Veronika realizes the meaning and lost importance of her life. By convincing that her death is eminent, he has managed to shock Veronika making her want to live, respect it and most importantly enjoy it, something

which life is meant for. He considers telling this truth to Veronika in the end but ultimately discards his idea arguing to himself, that unknown of the fact that Veronika has her life at her expense, she would consider each day a miracle when we consider the number of unexpected things that can happen in each second of our fragile existences.

When Veronika and Eduard find someone to share their passions with, they slowly recover from their hatred of life. They redeem each other. As a result they start accepting life and enjoying the pleasures of life side by side. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is used for suicide prevention and treatment in individuals. The chief process of this therapy is allowing the patients to freely express themselves. This is also called 'talking therapy'. Veronika is able to express herself to Eduard with whom she finds herself comfortable. Here is a person who truly understands and praises for her artistic qualities. She feels the need for living. In spite of being weak, she plays the piano tirelessly throughout the night for Eduard. Thus, Veronika is able to break away from her past towards a new life of redemption. This redemption is provided by Eduard.

On the other hand, Eduard is also able to recover from Schizophrenia through his love for Veronika. It is the love for each other makes them to redeem themselves. Eduard now has a chance to indulge in and express his talent through his love for Veronika. Veronika motivates him and Eduard too gets a true admirer of his talent. His passion of becoming a painter is finally achieved through his love for Veronika.

Eduard and Veronika, the true Artists recognizes their potentials in Villette, and decide to lead a life of passion. They finally escape from Villette to pursue their dreams with each

other's support. They are not bothered about the society. For the world, they are still mad people, but for themselves they are pursuing their vision. Thus, the Existential Depression in Eduard and Veronika slowly vanishes from them through the power of love, which gives them fruitfulness in living: "Love is above wisdom, just as the Virgin is above the snake" Veronika Decides to Die: p-184).

4. CONCLUSION

Veronika has everything she could wish for – young and pretty, with plenty of attractive boyfriends, a steady job, and a loving family. Yet she is not happy and on one winter's morning she takes an overdose of sleeping pills, only to wake up some time later in the local hospital. There she is told that although she is alive, her heart is now irreparably damaged and she has only few days to live. The longing to achieve her dream makes her life empty. She has no interest herself from the outside world and locks herself in the convent room after her work is over.

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