

## Eleven Minutes and The Zahir: An Odyssey Towards Self Transcendence

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### Abstract

*Paulo Coelho's novels Eleven Minutes and The Zahir contain many factual issues related to the emotional feature. Self-transcendence is one of psychological characteristics that all human needs to experience. It is expressed as an identity state for going ahead of earlier boundary. It is the utmost individual realization since it is able to control psyche to attain happiness. The major characters of Eleven Minutes and The Zahir practice self transcendence. The writer carried out a study about human survival in Eleven Minutes novel which shows the resistance of Maria as the main character in enlightening her actual self through marginalized conditions. Maria has a journey from a marginalized person to the self-transcendence whereas in the Zahir the narrator, an author, realizing that his wife Esther has disappeared leaving no traces and no goodbye note either. What the author first perceives as betrayal gradually leads to accepting of her vanishing and then to the rediscovering of his love for her and he becomes self-transcendence.*

**Keywords:** Self-transcendence, Identity, Resistance, Journey

In Coelho's *Eleven Minutes*, the character of Maria is portrayed as a young girl who has dreams of recognition and wealth. She dreams for being wedded by a Prince Charming and living in a beautiful house blissfully ever after, like many young girls vision as well. For

accomplishing her dreams, she experiences many things preliminary from being in love with some boy in her tender age and got experience of heart break. In her odyssey to pursue the dreams, she went to Geneva and insisted to demolish her dreams. She became a prostitute for the short term and determined to stop it after her meeting with Ralf Hart. He was the one who admitted her inner-light. Then, she finally practiced an eleven minutes of sacred sex with him, and got multiple orgasms. We meet Maria when she is still a young girl living in Brazil's unsophisticated interior. Maria's girlhood experiments with romance convince her that love is a delusion, or at least it is not for her. Attaining her mainstream, she becomes a shop girl with limited prospects. But a trip to Rio takes her into contact with a Swiss traveller appearing to employ dancers for his club in Geneva. Maria goes to Geneva. Maria is portrayed as a girl who encounters many problems since she was in adolescent. She gets downs and being into difficult situations. She thinks:

The little experience of life I've had has taught me that no one owns anything, that everything is an illusion - and that applies to material as well as spiritual things. Anyone who has lost something they thought was theirs forever (as has happened often enough to me already) finally comes to realise that nothing really belongs to them. And if nothing belongs to me, then there's no point wasting my time looking after things that aren't mine; it's best to live as if today were the first (or last) day of my life. (Coelho, p. 27)

Maria chose the path herself nobody forced her to be indulged in prostitution yet after sometimes she realized it is not what she wanted. In this investigation, Maria is a subject matter of study who practised self-transcendence as a demolisher and a discoverer. Certainly, man can destroy life is just an unbelievable a deed as that he can generate it, for life is the phenomenon, the reasonable. In the act of devastation, man sets himself higher than life; he is driven to go beyond and transcend himself, to create or to destroy, to love or to disgust. Maria's transmission of demolisher is offered when she distrusts about love; during her sexual-experiences; and her choice to work in prostitution:

I don't care whether it was once sacred or not, I HATE WHAT I DO. It's destroying my soul, making me lose touch with myself, teaching me that pain is a reward, that money buys everything and justifies everything. No one around me is happy; the clients know they are paying for something that should be free, and that's depressing. The women know that they have to sell something which they would like to give out of pleasure and affection, and that is destructive. I've struggled long and hard before writing this, before accepting how unhappy and dissatisfied I am - I needed and I still need to hold out for a few more weeks. But I cannot simply do nothing, pretend that everything is normal, that it's just a stage, a phase of my life. I want to forget it, I need to love - that's all, I need to love. (Coelho, p. 222)

She thus leads to devastate herself. She destructed her dreams, her believing, and many others. But, in her spirit of hopefulness she stands to become developer. Her directions of creator can be revealed when she experienced to fall in love; view her spirit of cheerfulness; and her practice of sacred-sex, a sex in the quest of love. Maria starts on the road to enlightenment by reading a truly incredible book by an un-named Brazilian sage - something to do with an Andalusian shepherd boy's treasure hunt. This learning takes a concern consistent with the personality of Maria. She experiences self transcendence as a demolisher and a discoverer. She experiences it to attain happiness. Maria's self-transcendence is not only shown as a demolisher. She also becomes a creator because she wants to attain comfort. Maria's transmission of turning as creator is shown when she is fallen in love with many boys. Although her adolescent development is subjugated with suffering in love, she is always optimist. She experiences many things in her way to pursue her dreams. Regardless of uncertainties, she constantly has courage of hopefulness to survive. She comes to know that the real pleasure is in giving:

'Does a soldier go to war in order to kill the enemy? No, he goes in order to die for his country. Does a wife want to show her husband how happy she is? No, she wants him to see how devoted she is, how she suffers in order to make him happy. Does the husband go to work thinking he will find personal fulfilment there? No, he is giving his sweat and tears for the good of the family. And so it goes on: sons give up their dreams to please

their parents, parents give up their lives in order to please their children; pain and suffering are used to justify the one thing that should bring only love.'(Coelho, p. 217)

Maria is explained as a girl who destructs her life in the beginning. She thinks "I've realised that sometimes you get no second chance and that it's best to accept the gifts the world offers you" (Coelho, p. 26) and she is indulged in an unexpected journey:

Although she believed that love is the only true experience of freedom, and that no one can possess anyone else, she still harboured a secret desire for revenge, and this formed part of her triumphal return to Brazil. (Coelho, p. 99)

Then she ultimately creates a better life. To recover her happiness, she is influenced by some relational factors. Based on the investigation, it can be theorised into two conclusions; the first conclusion is that Maria's self-transcendence is shown through her direction of turning to be killer and discoverer. The track of destroyer is revealed in the course of her doubt toward love, as she was in school. Then, another track of destroyer is revealed when Maria investigated sexual practices through several men. She is concerned to discover new innovation regarding sex. She is all the time probing how contentment can be attained to have sex with partners which is why she experiences several sexual trials. The final direction of destroyer is uncovered when she deliberately chooses to happen to a prostitute. In her odyssey to chase her dreams, she is sent to Geneva, Swiss. She is alone there. She needs more money to survive that is why she decides to join prostitution. Because it guarantees her life for a couple months later:

If I were to tell someone about my life today, I could do it in a way that would make them think me a brave, happy, independent woman. Rubbish: I am not even allowed to mention the only word that is more important than the eleven minutes - love. All my life, I thought of love as some kind of voluntary enslavement. Well, that's a lie: freedom only exists when love is present. The person, who gives him or herself wholly, the person who feels freest, is the person who loves most wholeheartedly. And the person who loves wholeheartedly feels free. That is why, regardless of what I might experience, do or learn,

nothing makes sense. I hope this time passes quickly, so that I can resume my search for myself - in the form of a man who understands me and does not make me suffer. (Coelho, p. 96)

In addition being a part of destroyer, Maria also creates her life improved. To consider Maria's self-transcendence, there are some mutual reasons that may persuade her to practice self-transcendence to attain happiness. First of all, the social aspect which is transmitted between her and family—especially for her mom; friends; and romance—especially for Ralf Hart. Secondly, the psychological aspect which unites her with her individual self or intellect. She is accustomed to note down her record in a diary concerning her life. Her practice of writing diary is able to persuade her to attain accomplishment. Finally, there is a metaphysical factor which is connected between her and something more powerful or greater than her, which is God. This spiritual association permits men to apply their worldly perception to give power to themselves:

Every human being experiences his or her own desire; it is part of our personal treasure and, although, as an emotion, it can drive people away, generally speaking, it brings those who are important to us closer. It is an emotion chosen by my soul, and it is so intense that it can infect everything and everyone around me. Each day I choose the truth by which I try to live. I try to be practical, efficient, professional. But I would like to be able always to choose desire as my companion. Not out of obligation, not to lessen my loneliness, but because it is good. (Coelho, p. 178)

Another Maria's transmission which directs her to turn out to be a maker, while she understands eleven minutes of sacred-sex in the viewpoint of love with Ralf Hart. Ralf Hart is an artist who thought that Maria has an unusual inner-light. It was a representation of sexual odyssey of prostitute Maria's transmission to become a discoverer. She begins her true love with a man who dealt her in a different way "She felt had discovered herself through independence, despair, love, pain, and back again to love and she would like things to end there" (Coelho, p. 234-235). Maria realized self-transcendence in order to improve her happiness. To improve it, she is influenced by some relational factors. This study reveals that

Maria was not tormented as the women are “tortured, tormented and exploited in various ways” (Bijalwan, p. 189). She does not suffer because of others but it was her decision to go beyond the boundaries. She has passed through boundaries in her life to be an authentic individual. She flies to Geneva inexperienced, decides to become a prostitute, and gets addicted to pain as source of pleasure and struggle to conquer her own self of love. Even though she has to maintain pain, suffering, guilt, and struggling, she has succeeded to find her authentic self through “pain, suffering, and a great deal of pleasure”(Coelho, p. 189). Maria has her own freedom and decision toward things in her life. She takes the consequences and in the other side, she is aware that there is another more powerful being which is beyond her grasp. It is the transcendence.

Amid all his works, which are obviously inclined in the direction of spirituality, his novel, *Eleven Minutes* has the most arguable prominence due to its plot. It lucidly, with most surprising approach of writing revolves around Maria with a beginning point where she decides that this could be an exciting and adventurous job. Yet, what starts off as interest and apprehension towards sexual encounters, particularly after her adolescent annoyance towards love, ultimately brings her unto realising her love for a painter. On the other hand, throughout her odyssey as a sex employee, she discovers the ultimate truth about herself. A spiritual realisation, ironically, in the case of this novel, emerges through the "eleven minutes" of sacred sex and therefore “She looked at her own past and, for the first time, she forgave herself” (Coelho, p. 120). Consequently, we can observe the approach in which Coelho had described the sexual odyssey of a prostitute as a spiritual one. Maria is an inexperienced young woman from Brazil who becomes a high-class prostitute in Switzerland. And while Coelho comes down steadily in the conclusion for the reality of a holy mundane, the path she takes to that pronouncement accepts entirely the trap and labyrinth in anticipation of any explorer of the fusion of body and soul. This early obligation is bizarre yet the rest of the tale develops itself steadily in Maria's insights and understanding, her feelings, thoughts and resistance to realize life. In the closing stages of the story she entirely possesses her tale. She is elevated from the status of mere representative and character to that of exceptionally self transcendence subsistence power.

In *The Zahir* the narrator is hero, a renowned writer concerning spirituality, who lives in Paris. The narrator maintains that 'the visible world always manifests itself in the invisible world', but it's actually the visible world which gets short-changed here. In this novel the narrator is in search for his wife whom he is married for ten years. This search also leads the narrator to a realization of God, or of the transcendence of the need for God into an appropriated experience of the divine presence just like Maria of *Eleven Minutes*. In this journey the narrator who is "the bestselling novelist must re-examine his life and face his shortcomings as a husband as he searches for her; this leads him to an acute assessment of his life" (Figueredo, p.928). At the commencement of the book, the narrator's wife, Esther is a war correspondent who has disappeared along with a friend, Mikhail consequently; the narrator should review his life and look his weaknesses as a spouse as he investigates for her; this guides him to a sensitive evaluation of his existence In the final chapter of *The Zahir*, we read the following words of this first-person narrator:

Although I know that I may have lost forever the woman I love, I must try to enjoy the graces that God has given me today. Grace cannot be hoarded. There are no banks where it may be deposited to be used when I feel more at peace with myself. If I do not make full use of these blessings, I will lose them forever. (p. 292)

Coelho gives his narrator a war-correspondent wife, Esther, who disappears. Gradually he realises that her disappearance is a kind of point, a confront to him to rethink his feelings and create them valuable of hers. She turns out to be the 'Zahir' of the title, a blinding obsession. In Arabic, *Zahir* means visible, present, and incapable of going unnoticed. In this novel Coelho through the spirit of narrator illustrates the odyssey on the way to enlightenment and self discovery:

Where was I going? I hadn't the slightest idea and I didn't care. The woman I was looking for was somewhere in that infinite space. I could touch her soul, hear the song she was singing as she wove her carpets. Now I understood why she had chosen this place: there was nothing, absolutely nothing to distract her attention; it was the emptiness she had so

yearned for. The wind would gradually blow her pain away. Could she ever have imagined that one day I would be here, on horseback, riding to meet her? (Coelho, p. 174)

Their marriage has stroke a dry stain and she is impatient, desires to travel in search of her individual pleasure. As soon as Esther disappears, he is anguished and distressed by the secrecy of what has occurred to her. The narrator's resistance is that of a man as arduous to come to conditions with something he cannot recognize or manage: the secrecy of Esther's nonexistence. It is very difficult for him to release his sentiments that she is the single one who fills his existence with sense. The inside journey he takes releases him up to innovative prospective.

The desertion of Esther and her motive for separation from him happen to the pivot of his survival. He can't stop thinking about why she left, for whom she leaved, where she was, what she was doing, how she arrived at the decision and more. He can't understand why a war correspondent wife of his would wish for such secrecy? He then starts to remember how she used to inform him regarding sentiment alive merely on the battle field. His wife's loss happen to be his motive of life and he goes away in search of Esther, the significance of love and contentment, and crucially, in search for himself. On his journey to discover response to his queries, the writer finds himself in a connection once more this time with an actress. He meets his wife's companion Mikhail who knows her location. The writer believes that Esther left him for Mikhail because his reconsideration of the history brings to light how his wife had started spending a lot of time with this man from the East. He hates Mikhail in the beginning but started liking him at the end:

"I want to tell you something, Mikhail. I too have travelled back and forth between many contradictions since I first met you. I began by hating you, then I accepted you, and as I've followed in your footsteps, that acceptance has become respect. You're still young, and the powerlessness you feel is perfectly normal. I don't know how many people your work has touched so far, but I can tell you one thing: you changed my life." (Coelho, p. 181)

Then Mikhail, the last person Esther was seen with, contacts the narrator and promises to take him to her. Mikhail, a young man who works with unhappily married couples, has his own



spiritual perspective on love. This reason makes the writer to move towards Mikhail more personally. The quest to find his wife brings a transformation in himself. He wakes up to the lives they were leading; those of occasional dialogues and in quest of company in other men and women. He embarks on a journey of re-discovering the past and simultaneously liberating himself of his history.

The author goes to places where his wife had employment, meets the people she met and finds out that she was accustomed to hand out parts of blood-stained cloth from a soldier's uniform only to certain people. He meets Mikhail regularly. Mikhail conveys the author to a meeting where guests tell narratives about the dearth of love in their lives. He takes him to meet beggars who describe why they go ahead lives that they do and the author sees how all the beggars knew his wife. Ultimately the author travels to Kazakhstan with Mikhail on his final journey to meet Esther. He feels his journey is completed when he reaches to the place where her wife lives now:

A sense of paradise descends from the skies. And I am aware that I am living through an unforgettable moment in my life; it is the kind of awareness we often have precisely when the magic moment has passed. I am entirely here, without past, without future, entirely focused on the morning, on the music of the horses' hooves, on the gentleness of the wind caressing my body, on the unexpected grace of contemplating sky, earth, men. I feel a sense of adoration and ecstasy. I am thankful for being alive. I pray quietly, listening to the voice of nature, and understanding that the invisible world always manifests itself in the visible world. (Coelho, p. 174)

He comes to know about the real meaning of love at last. He thinks that she never left him "As if she had never left. As if only a day had passed, not two years, nine months, eleven days, and eleven hours (Coelho, p. 185). At last he understand "While I was following in her footsteps, I had gotten to know the woman I had married and had rediscovered, too, the meaning of my own life, which had been through so many changes and was now about to change again (Coelho, p. 185). He comes to know at last that regardless of being married to Esther for ten years he never knew what she wanted. But now at last he knows the real meaning of love:

Despite being married all those years, I had never really known my wife. I had created a love story like the ones I'd seen in the movies, read about in books and magazines, watched on TV. In my story, love was something that grew until it reached a certain size and, from then on, it was just a matter of keeping it alive, like a plant, watering it now and again and removing any dead leaves. Love was also a synonym for tenderness, security, prestige, comfort, success. (Coelho, p. 185)

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