

A Philosophical View on Love and the Concept of Soulmates in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*

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Abstract—Paulo Coelho's novel *Brida* (1990) takes readers on a transformative journey of self-discovery and spiritual exploration. This paper delves into the novel's profound themes of love, the protagonist's quest for personal authenticity, and the concept of soulmate. Brida, the young and curious protagonist, embarks on a voyage to uncover her true self and find her place in the realm of magic and spirituality. Throughout her journey, Brida is guided by wise mentors and enriched by spiritual experiences. This abstract examines how the concept of soulmate and love intertwines with Brida's self-discovery, allowing her to shed societal constraints and discover her authentic identity. This study examines the novel from a philosophical lens by integrating Jean-Paul Sartre's theories on love and existentialism. The study focuses on intricate narrative and poignant insights, and it sheds light on the transformative power of finding love for the being and the profound impact of self-discovery on one's journey toward personal authenticity.

Keywords—Brida, Jean-Paul Sartre, Literary analysis, Philosophy, Soul-mate.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study delivers an overview of constant research on the key traits of love and self-discovery. It is part of a developing field dedicated to the study of philosophical literary analysis of postmodern texts, encompassing research in literature, novel, and personality. The unique combination of these features sets this study apart from other synthetic approaches, offering an integrated approach to theoretical and practical research. *Brida* is a novel by Paulo Coelho first published in 1990. The novel is the story of Brida, a young Irish girl, and her continuous quest for knowledge. She has long been interested in various aspects of magic but is searching for something more. Her search leads her to people of great wisdom, who begin to teach Brida about the spiritual world. As Brida seeks her destiny, she struggles to find a balance between her relationships and her desire to become a witch. This captivating novel embodies themes of love, passion, mystery, and spirituality from the master storyteller Paulo Coelho. He is one of the most recognized Brazilian novelists. His writings are mostly known for their magical realism. It is commonly full of references to mystical creatures and happy endings: "He writes his novels with strong universal themes such as the importance of love, the need for adventure, the joy of fighting for one's dream, etc." (Geetha and Thambi, 2018, p. 94).

This study aims to conduct a qualitative analysis of self-discovery and the concept of soulmates in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*, concerning the role of one individual and her relationship with her spirituality to find her true self. Besides, the study seeks to explore and verify the themes of love, time, and the power of transformation in an individual to discover her true abilities. The study attempts to apply Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical theories in his book *Being and Nothingness* (1943) which describes the concept of love and soulmates. Sartre has a cynical view of love and uses the term "soulmate." Furthermore, he explains when people use these terms it puts pressure on the person to stay in that relationship by believing that they are meant to be together and it was all led by fate. Thus, the study attempts to integrate Sartre's theory into *Brida* and how she spends her life searching for her soulmate and how she believes it is her ultimate aim in life. The study also tries to explain the origin meaning of the term "soulmate" by Plato, and the theory of Greek mythology, he claims that we had three genders "male," "female," and "male-female" and they were strong which was regarded as a threat to the power of gods, especially Zeus himself, thus he separated them. It is said that since then, humans have been in search of their other halves "Soulmates." This study has significant implications for our understanding of the importance of the

concept of love and the ability to find oneself in literature. By examining the themes and literary techniques used in *Brida*, this study offers insights into the broader postmodern and its representation of soulmate and self-discovery. The findings of this research will be valuable for scholars, students, and enthusiasts of postmodernism. The researchers shed light on the harmonious relationship between time and self-authenticity in postmodern literature. It also applies existentialist theories of life and how humans deal with their existence in their lives, by questioning the basic concepts of being and living. Existentialism is a philosophical theory that deals with human existence. Existentialists explore questions related to the meaning, purpose, and value of being. Repeated concepts in existentialist philosophy include existential crisis, death, and crisis in the face of an absurd human life, and the quest for an individual's freedom and human free will. In addition to authenticity, courage, love, and virtue.

Moreover, this study contributes to the ongoing argument about the representation of identity transformation in literature and provides a framework for future research on the portrayal of self-discovery in other works of postmodern literature. Ultimately, this research adds an insight to our appreciation of Paulo Coelho's *Brida* and its enduring relevance to the study of literature and philosophy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brida is a magical-realism novel, and the plot follows its title character going on a journey of seeking knowledge through learning magic. Brida's journey through self-realization takes the reader through a philosophical and existentialist road questioning love, soulmates, the meaning of life, and religion. Magical realism is a movement that started in the 1960s in Latin America mostly in narration. This movement is the reason that Latin American literature received recognition worldwide. This type of literature combines reality with fiction, history, and mythology figures. It tries to achieve the effect of conveying a political message (Gale, 2009, p. 448). The genre of magical realism transfers the everyday normal objects and takes the reader into a fantasy world. Magical-realism in this novel is utilized to show Brida's journey into finding her identity and purpose in life.

Corera (2019) in his study titled *Commingle of the Magical and the Real: A Postmodern Reading of Paulo Coelho's Brida* explains magical realism in the novel. It declares that *Brida* breaks the stereotypes of portraying witches as evil women who play with spirits. Furthermore, the paper explains that the witch character named Wicca is a God-loving Christian who helps the main character to study magic and we as the reader can see supernatural elements in the novel. Magical realism is apparent in the novel when Wicca helps Brida travel back to her past life to find what type of life she has had, as well as to help her find a purpose in her life (p. 72).

Nijanthan and Bosco (2021) in their paper *Magical Realism in Paulo Coelho's Brida* share similar views; they

discuss the protagonist's journey which leads her to explore the traditions of the moon and the sun. Learning from wise individuals who impart valuable teachings about the spiritual realm. Brida faces challenges in seeking her identity while aspiring to become a witch. Throughout her adventures, she discovers the significance of overcoming fears and trusting in the goodness of the world.

Naseem et al. (2022) titled *The Experience of spiritual Intelligence (SI) in Brida by Paulo Coelho* explores the concept of SI in contrast to emotional intelligence and intellectual intelligence. It discusses the protagonist who undergoes a transformation process fueled by SI. The qualitative study utilizes textual analysis to identify instances of SI in the character's actions and events. The findings reveal that the protagonist effectively uses SI to address life problems, leading to improved self-identity and a deeper sense of purpose and innovation. Additionally, SI plays a significant role in fostering compassion, reason, and essential skills in individuals, contributing to better decision-making and wise actions in challenging situations and interactions with others.

Tamang (2021) titled *Assertion of Female Self in Paulo Coelho's Brida* declares that the reason why Brida is eager to find her purpose in life is because she has lived in a patriarchal society that tells women how to behave. Thus, she turns it into a challenge to define her own identity and feel empowered.

Mostly scholars in Paulo Coelho's novels have focused on the writer's personal feelings and biography. The other mentioned studies have focused on magical realism, SI, and the feminine roles in the narration. However, this study disregards biographical interpretations by analyzing the language of the text and exploring the identity of the protagonist. It differs from the previous studies by focusing on the idea of self-discovery and the concept of "soulmate." In the following section, the researchers try to analyze the novel based on a philosophical point of view and the existential ideas of Sartre.

III. ANALYSIS

The original meaning of "Soul-mate" or "the other half" comes from Plato's book *The Symposium* which consists of dialogs between Plato, Socrates, and other Greek dramatists. Aristophanes who is an ancient Greek Comic playwright becomes the speaker, he explains that before humans became two sexes, they were three sexes: Men, women, and the merging of both. Furthermore, Aristophanes declares that "they were made round having four hands, four feet, two faces on a round neck, and the rest to correspond." (Plato, n.d, p. 56). They had profound strength and they were planning to become violent to the gods. Eventually Zeus the god decided to cut them in half, moreover, he altered them into two sexes which made it possible for them to have marital relations. The two sexes searched desperately for their "other half," thus, they become a "whole" again. When humans long and chase for their "half" to become

“whole” Aristophanes names this occurrence: Love. Hence, Plato’s mythology might explain the reason why humans feel the need to be loved and the desperation to find their “soul mates.” Similarly, to Plato’s myth in Brida’s case, she learns that there is a special way to find her soul mate, which is by seeing a light on their shoulder, she thinks to herself that: “Finding your Soul Mate is something that only happens in fairy tales,” (Coelho, 1990, p. 32). This quotation explains Brida’s thoughts on soulmates which she finds impossible or ridiculous. Despite her continuous search for self-discovery, she believes that what she is doing is in vain and that she cannot find what she is searching for. Therefore, we come to the idea that some of our beliefs are constructed by societal norms, and the concept of love is one of them. Furthermore, Brida at the beginning of her journey does not have the understanding that soulmates could be one of the aims of self-discovery. She is seeking knowledge through magic. According to Plato, love has power and we can see it in all nature and beings, nonetheless, Brida is skeptical about this matter. Brida’s ignorance about the nature of soulmates can be intertwined with Socrates’ idea about knowledge in *Symposium*, in which he explains that it is a continuous journey. A person must dedicate their lives to finding the unknown (Plato, 2001, p.56).

In contradiction to Plato, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre portrays a more pessimistic view on love. Sartre’s theories on love do not portray the fairy tale happy ending picture that people imagine in their lives. Consequently, it shows a bleak image of how the need for love is people want to control the identity of the other, which Sartre names “being-for-others” (Wyatt, 2006, p. 6). To put it in other words, for Sartre in romantic relationships, one is either the subject or the object. Hence, the relationship is bound to fail. We can see this when Brida takes the journey to learn magic, she appears frustrated when her boyfriend Lorens does not understand her new world: “Who was this man lying on the sofa, staring at her, incapable of saying anything of interest? It was quite absurd. She didn’t need him. She didn’t need anyone.” (Coelho, 1990, p. 71). When Brida learns magic, she realizes that a soulmate must have similar characteristics. However, since they are different, she appears she does not need him in her life if she cannot control him.

The narrator’s use of the word “absurd” might be connected to the fact that Brida finds it meaningless to be with Lorens when she knows that they are different people and not each other’s soulmates. She and Lorens relationship seems to be normal for the most part until she starts to learn that having a soulmate is the most significant part of the “tradition of the moon” because she may believe they have different interests and beliefs. Brida dreams about one of her past lives named Loni who lived in the South of France in the 12th century, while she is on the verge of death, it describes the surrender of Montségur. After she wakes up Wicca explains the history behind Brida’s vision and the fight between The Cathars and The Catholics. Throughout her dream, she learns that Loni’s husband is her soulmate while she dies in his arms. After waking up Brida wants to experience this type of love:

You continue your studies with me. During the day, I teach you the wisdom of the Cosmos, and at night, he teaches you the wisdom of Love But there comes a moment when those two things can no longer coexist, and you have to choose (Coelho, 1990, p.7).

Wicca tries to give Brida chances to make her choices freely and to reach the point of self-authenticity. She attempts to instill a strong sense of self in her students. Moreover, Brida’s belief that she and Lorens are not meant to be soulmates appears to be stronger after her vision which can be integrated with Sartre’s theory on initiating authority over one’s beloved. Brida fails to understand that Lorens might not be her soulmate and attempts to change his mind concerning magic. Sartre asserts that in our relationships we try to seek the identity and the qualities that we as a human do not possess and gain from others. However, we must realize the conception of the other is theirs not our own “Thus my project of recovering myself is fundamentally a project of absorbing the other” (Sartre, 1993, p. 296).

Brida’s conflicting feelings for Lorens’ love might be related to her connection with her teacher, The Magus. The moment they meet he thinks to himself that she is his soulmate “I must be twice her age,” he thought. And despite this, he knew that he had met his Soul Mate.” (Coelho, 1990, p. 3). The Magus knows she is his soulmate, nonetheless, his internal monologues tell the reader that they will not end up together. After she learns magic, she starts to see the point of light on The Magus’ shoulders, she tells him that she is ready to be loved. And yet, at the end of the novel, they do not end up together. Brida appears devastated by The Magus’ decision; he explains that although he knew they were soulmates, he always knew they would not be united. Furthermore, he explains that she is a witch now she does not need him. Similar to nature’s beautiful flowers, we see around it can be admired from afar but we can never possess it: “We are not the masters of the sun or of the afternoon or of the waves or even of the vision of God, because we cannot possess ourselves.” (Coelho, 1990, p. 209). This quotation by The Magus intertwines with Sartre’s theory on our relations with others, specifically that if we try to control or attempt to possess the other it results in the relationship’s frustration and consequences. Moreover, Sartre illustrates that relationships fail because we want to be loved freely but we try to take control of the other’s freedom, which dooms the relationship. Another important point that Sartre makes is that people attempt to justify their love using these terminologies: “It was meant to be,” “we were meant to be together,” or “soul-mate” this perspective puts people in an existential loop. As a result, it makes the beloved mourn because the aforementioned expressions “refers to an original choice.” Furthermore, he demonstrates that: “This choice can be God’s since he is the being who is absolute choice, but God here represents only the farthest possible limit of the demand for an absolute” (Sartre, 1993, p. 300). Thus, from this quotation, we can understand that Sartre believes that the beloved wants to feel they are the absolute choice that they were chosen freely and willingly not because they “were meant to be together.” From this point of view, it

can be clear why The Magus and Brida's relationship was ruined even before it started because it put pressure and stress on Brida that she must be with The Magus. From the beginning, he knew they would never be together, but he still hoped that God would be good to him and make his dream become reality. He even tells her: "But you don't love me," interpreting this novel with Sartre's theories explains why Brida and The Magus do not have a happy fairy tale love story at the end of the novel (Coelho, 1990, p. 208).

Brida's internal struggle, obsession with magic, and quest for a soulmate take her on an existential road. She believes she is useless every time she attempts a new task she surrenders. She doubts herself and her abilities, similarly, she hesitates to find love, and she does not believe that her boyfriend is her soulmate. Existentialist concerns often revolve around questions of meaning, freedom, and personal responsibility. Brida grapples with the purpose of her existence, the inherent isolation of being, and the challenge of creating meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. It's a philosophical exploration of her experience and her search for significance in the face of life's uncertainties. Brida's state could be a representation of a post-modern world in which people go through their externalist path.

"I'm always starting things and then giving up," she thought rather sourly. Perhaps life would soon realize this and stop presenting her with the same opportunities over and over. Or perhaps, by always giving up when she had only just started, she had exhausted all possible paths without even taking a single step (Coelho, 1990, p. 37).

A question here is presented: Why is Brida always chasing various opportunities and never following one path? She has a job, she goes to school, her father sends her money, and she has a loving boyfriend, what makes her feel that she is a failure with no purpose? Brida's road to self-discovery can be linked to Jean-Paul Sartre's theory in *Existentialism is A Humanism*, in it he explains that: "existence precedes essence" meaning that humans live their lives only afterward they define themselves (2007, p. 22). Humans are born with nothing, they have no essence, and they have the freedom and will to choose whatever they want to do. Brida fearlessly searches for her true identity. The narrator intends to show the connections between the struggles Brida faces and her intention of finding the way out of her chosen identity: "When you find your path, you must not be afraid. You need to have sufficient courage to make mistakes. Disappointment, defeat, and despair are the tools God uses to show us the way." (Coelho, 1990, p.11). Thus, when Brida starts to believe in reincarnation, she believes that her purpose has been created for her and she must follow it. Meaning, she has no control or freedom to pick her identity. Even after learning about magic, she is still confused that it will not make her achieve the goals she wants in life. Perhaps Brida's confusion and existential crisis come from her having no freedom regarding her life: "That was the lesson it took me so many years to learn. That is the lesson that sent me into exile and now sets me free again" (Coelho,

1990, p. 210). Even when it comes to her love life, it appears she cannot choose freely because The Magus was her soulmate in her previous lives. Eventually, Brida learns who she is and becomes stronger and empowered in the process. Perhaps by not being with her supposed soulmate, she realizes she has the freedom.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper was an intention to find one individual's quest to discover her true identity; the paper has concluded Brida's experience in magic practice and her journey to becoming a magician. It further discussed the existential theory and ideas of Sartre. The paper reached the point that love is within one individual and can be a source to find one's true identity. In conclusion, the protagonist's exploration of her true identity through magic practice highlights the transformative power of self-discovery. The integration of Sartre's existential theories underscores the individual's responsibility in shaping their own identity. The protagonist's journey to self-fulfillment is interconnected with Sartre's concepts of love and existentialism - in a way that she is always looking to achieve the next aim in her life. She does not seem to be content about her choices unless she has achieved all the requirements to become a magician. At the end, she does not find herself she will not have a relationship with The Magus even though he is supposed to be her soulmate.

The focal point of the research on love and the concept of a soulmate emphasizes that these connections are not external entities but internal aspects within an individual. Brida's journey suggests that the search for a soulmate is, in essence, a quest for self-completeness. Love, as depicted in the paper, becomes a conduit for self-realization, prompting a deeper understanding of one's true identity. Thus, the intertwining of love, the quest for a soulmate, and the pursuit of self-discovery collectively form a profound narrative that echoes the idea that true fulfillment lies within oneself.

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