



The Philosophy Of Becoming In Paulo Coelho's Fiction: Ethics, Choice, And Experiential Spirituality

Dr. Gorakh Popat Jondhale*

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Gokhale Education Society's HPT Arts and RYK Science College, Nashik- 422005,

Email: gorakhjondhale1986@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Despite Paulo Coelho's global popularity, his fiction is frequently dismissed within academic criticism as inspirational or philosophically simplistic. This article challenges such reductive assessments by offering a philosophical re-reading of Coelho's major novels through the concept of *becoming*. Drawing on philosophical-hermeneutic literary analysis and narrative ethics, the study argues that Coelho's fiction articulates a coherent ethical vision in which spirituality functions as experiential moral practice rather than belief-based transcendence.

Focusing on *The Alchemist*, *Brida*, *The Zahir*, and *The Pilgrimage*, the article examines how recurring narrative structures foreground ethical choice, responsibility, and moral labour as central to spiritual development. Across these texts, becoming is presented not as a state of enlightenment or personal fulfilment, but as an ongoing ethical process shaped by decision-making, discipline, love, and accountability. Characters are repeatedly confronted with the consequences of choice, suggesting that freedom in Coelho's fiction is inseparable from responsibility.

By repositioning Coelho as a philosophical novelist concerned with ethics rather than inspiration, this study contributes to broader debates in philosophy and literature, narrative ethics, and the critical evaluation of popular fiction. It demonstrates that Coelho's novels sustain a serious engagement with moral selfhood and experiential spirituality, warranting renewed scholarly attention beyond prevailing dismissive frameworks.

Keywords: Paulo Coelho; philosophy of becoming; narrative ethics; experiential spirituality; ethics and literature; moral responsibility; choice and freedom

Introduction:

Despite his global popularity, Paulo Coelho has rarely been taken seriously within academic literary criticism. His novels are frequently categorized as inspirational or self-help fiction, labels that often preclude sustained philosophical engagement. As a result, existing scholarship tends to focus on symbolism, accessibility, or popular reception, while largely overlooking the ethical and philosophical questions that structure his narratives.

This article argues that such dismissals are critically limiting. Across his fiction, Coelho repeatedly stages narratives in which characters are required to confront choice, responsibility, discipline, and moral consequence before any form of spiritual fulfilment becomes possible. Spirituality, in these texts, is not presented as belief, transcendence, or revelation, but as a lived process shaped through ethical action.

While studies of ethics and narrative have productively examined moral selfhood in canonical and modernist fiction, Coelho's work has remained marginal to these discussions. This article addresses that gap by offering a focused philosophical reading of selected novels, positioning Coelho as a writer whose fiction consistently explores becoming as an ethical process rather than a motivational ideal.

Research Aims and Objectives:

Aim:

The primary aim of this study is to reassess Paulo Coelho's fiction as a sustained philosophical engagement with ethics, choice, and experiential spirituality.

Objectives:

- To examine how ethical responsibility shapes the process of becoming in selected novels.
- To analyse recurring ethical concepts such as choice, freedom, discipline, love, and accountability.
- To apply narrative ethics and philosophical hermeneutics to Coelho's fiction.
- To reposition Coelho's work within academic debates on ethics and literature.

Research Design:

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in philosophical literary analysis. It is text-centred and theory-informed, treating fictional narratives as sites of ethical reflection rather than as psychological case studies or inspirational discourse.

Close reading is employed to analyse selected narrative moments where characters confront ethical decisions and moral consequences. Interpretation is guided by philosophical hermeneutics and narrative ethics, ensuring that meaning is derived from narrative structure, action, and consequence rather than authorial intention or reader response. Secondary theoretical sources are used to support interpretation and situate the analysis within established scholarly debates.

Text Selection and Corpus Construction:

The corpus is constructed through purposive selection, guided by the study's focus on ethics and becoming. Four novels are selected: *The Alchemist*, *Brida*, *The Zahir*, and *The Pilgrimage*. These texts are chosen because they most clearly foreground moral decision-making, responsibility, and ethical formation as central narrative concerns.

The selection avoids comprehensive coverage in favour of conceptual coherence. Each novel contributes a distinct ethical dimension: choice and risk (*The Alchemist*), responsibility of knowledge (*Brida*), ethical commitment in love (*The Zahir*), and discipline and correction (*The Pilgrimage*). Non-fictional works and biographical materials are excluded to maintain a strict focus on fiction as philosophical narrative.

Analytical Framework:

The study employs an analytical framework combining philosophical hermeneutics and narrative ethics. Philosophical hermeneutics, informed by Paul Ricoeur, understands identity as formed through narrative action and ethical interpretation over time. Narrative ethics, drawing on Martha Nussbaum and Wayne C. Booth, examines how moral values are conveyed through narrative consequence rather than explicit moral instruction.

Within this framework, ethical meaning is analysed through recurring concepts—choice, freedom, responsibility, discipline, and love—across the selected texts. The framework does not evaluate characters psychologically or symbolically; instead, it focuses on how narratives construct ethical selfhood through action, failure, and accountability. Spirituality is interpreted as inseparable from moral labour rather than transcendental belief.

Procedures for Textual Analysis:

The textual analysis in this study proceeds through systematic close reading of selected novels by Paulo Coelho, focusing exclusively on moments where ethical decision-making and moral consequence are narratively foregrounded. Rather than analysing entire plots, the procedure isolates key scenes involving choice, hesitation, commitment, discipline, and accountability. These moments are examined for how ethical meaning is generated through narrative progression, character action, and consequence.

Each text is read independently before being placed in comparative relation with the others. Analysis begins by identifying ethically charged narrative situations, followed by interpretive examination of how these situations reshape the character's moral orientation. Quotations are used selectively and contextually, not as thematic evidence but as entry points for interpretation. The emphasis remains on *how* ethical understanding emerges through narrative action rather than on symbolic or allegorical readings. Cross-textual synthesis is conducted only after individual analyses are complete, ensuring that interpretation arises from textual specificity rather than imposed generalization.

Use of Secondary Scholarship:

Secondary scholarship is used to frame, support, and refine interpretation, not to determine it. Philosophical and literary-theoretical works in narrative ethics, moral philosophy, and philosophy of literature provide the conceptual vocabulary through which the primary texts are analysed. Thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur, Martha Nussbaum, and Wayne C. Booth are engaged to clarify how narrative constructs moral selfhood and ethical responsibility.

Existing critical responses to Coelho's fiction are consulted primarily to identify prevailing assumptions—particularly the tendency to categorise his work as inspirational or philosophically simplistic. Rather than rehearsing these positions at length, the study engages them selectively to demonstrate how the present analysis diverges in method and focus. Secondary sources thus function as dialogic interlocutors, situating the study within scholarly debates while preserving interpretive autonomy.

Limitations:

This study is limited by its selective corpus and interpretive scope. It does not attempt a comprehensive survey of Paulo Coelho's entire body of work, nor does it engage with his non-fiction, biographical writings, or reader reception. The focus on four novels necessarily excludes other texts that may offer alternative perspectives on spirituality or ethics.

Methodologically, the study prioritizes philosophical and ethical interpretation over psychological, sociological, or theological analysis. As a result, it does not address empirical reader response, cultural reception, or doctrinal religious frameworks. While this limitation restricts the breadth of analysis, it allows for greater conceptual clarity and depth. The findings, therefore, are not presented as exhaustive claims about Coelho's oeuvre, but as a focused philosophical reading grounded in selected narratives.

Ethical Choice, Moral Risk, and Experiential Becoming in *The Alchemist*

In *The Alchemist*, Paulo Coelho structures the narrative as a philosophical inquiry into how ethical choice precedes spiritual fulfilment. While the novel follows the outward plot of Santiago's journey from Andalusia to the Egyptian desert, its deeper concern lies in how becoming occurs through repeated decisions made under conditions of uncertainty, fear, and loss. The plot is therefore not merely a quest narrative but a sequence of ethical tests that demand responsibility before reward.

The novel opens with Santiago's dissatisfaction with a settled life as a shepherd, a restlessness triggered by a recurring dream of treasure near the pyramids. His decision to pursue this dream marks the first ethical rupture in the narrative. Importantly, the dream itself carries no moral value until Santiago acts upon it. When Melchizedek advises him to follow his "Personal Legend," the guidance is framed not as destiny guaranteed by fate but as a call to commitment. The king's statement that "when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (Coelho 22) is often read as unqualified optimism. Within the plot, however, this assurance is immediately destabilized by loss. Santiago is robbed in Tangier, stripped of his money, language, and certainty. The narrative thus clarifies that the universe does not protect the seeker from suffering; rather, it exposes him to ethical vulnerability.

Santiago's time with the crystal merchant deepens this ethical tension. The merchant confesses his lifelong fear of fulfilling his dream of pilgrimage to Mecca, admitting, "I'm afraid that if my dream is realized, I'll have no reason to go on living" (Coelho 56). This moment functions as a counter-example within the plot. The merchant's refusal to act is not portrayed as tragic fate but as ethical avoidance. By contrast, Santiago chooses movement over security, reinforcing the novel's argument that becoming requires risk rather than comfort.

As the journey progresses, Santiago learns that fear itself is the primary obstacle to ethical action. His realization that "the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself" (Coelho 131) emerges during moments of genuine danger in the desert. This insight is not presented as abstract wisdom but as a product of lived experience. Plot events repeatedly confirm that moral clarity arises only after Santiago accepts the possibility of loss, including the loss of life. In this sense, the desert functions as an ethical landscape where indecision carries consequences.

The love story with Fatima further complicates the philosophy of becoming. Rather than presenting love as a reason to abandon the quest, the narrative insists that true love does not negate ethical responsibility. Fatima's assertion that "love never keeps a man from pursuing his destiny" (Coelho 152) reframes attachment as compatible with moral commitment. Love, here, is ethical precisely because it does not demand possession or sacrifice of purpose.

By the novel's conclusion, when Santiago discovers that the treasure lies where his journey began, the plot completes its ethical arc. The circular structure emphasizes that the value of the journey lies not in material reward but in the transformation achieved through ethical perseverance. Santiago becomes capable of understanding the "Language of the World" only after he has assumed responsibility for his choices, endured loss, and acted despite fear. *The Alchemist* thus presents spirituality not as revelation bestowed upon the passive subject, but as insight earned through moral labour.

Through its plot progression, *The Alchemist* articulates a philosophy of becoming in which ethical choice is the primary mechanism of transformation. Destiny, far from being predetermined, emerges as a horizon shaped by responsibility. Coelho's novel ultimately suggests that one becomes fully human not by avoiding suffering, but by choosing action when fear offers compelling reasons to remain still.

Ethical Initiation and the Burden of Knowledge in *Brida*

In *Brida*, Paulo Coelho shifts the focus of becoming from outward quest to ethical initiation, where spiritual knowledge is inseparable from responsibility. The plot follows Brida, a young Irish woman drawn to magic and wisdom traditions, yet the narrative consistently resists presenting initiation as mystical elevation. Instead,

becoming unfolds as a demanding ethical process in which knowledge obliges choice, restraint, and accountability.

Early in the novel, Brida's desire for spiritual mastery is met with caution rather than encouragement. Her teacher Magus insists that learning is never neutral, warning that "knowledge is a responsibility, not a privilege" (Coelho, 92). This moment establishes the ethical premise of the novel: initiation does not liberate the self from consequence; it binds the self more deeply to it. Plot-wise, Brida's progress is repeatedly slowed by hesitation and fear, underscoring that access to wisdom requires ethical readiness rather than enthusiasm alone.

A central tension in the narrative emerges around error and freedom. Brida acknowledges that "everything tells me that I am about to make a wrong decision, but making mistakes is just part of life" (Coelho, 76). While this line might appear to excuse error, the plot immediately reframes it. Mistakes are not celebrated; they are endured and corrected. Each misstep carries emotional and moral cost, reinforcing the idea that becoming is shaped through accountability rather than innocence. The narrative thus treats error as an ethical condition of learning, not a romanticized spiritual detour.

The novel further complicates becoming through Brida's relationships, particularly her struggle between love and spiritual calling. Unlike narratives that frame love as an obstacle to enlightenment, *Brida* presents relational commitment as an ethical test. Brida's realization that "love is not about possession, it's about participation" (Coelho, 183) situates intimacy within moral responsibility. Love demands presence and honesty, not transcendence. The plot repeatedly shows that evading relational responsibility in the name of spiritual pursuit leads to fragmentation rather than growth.

Initiation rituals in the novel are also stripped of spectacle. Brida learns that rituals have meaning only when grounded in ethical discipline. Her teacher emphasizes that wisdom cannot be rushed, asserting that the gift of knowledge comes only after patience has proven itself. Plot progression confirms this claim: moments of impatience result in confusion and fear, while restraint leads to clarity. Becoming, therefore, is portrayed as temporal and ethical, unfolding through sustained commitment rather than revelation.

By the novel's conclusion, Brida's transformation is marked not by mastery of magical knowledge but by ethical orientation. She learns to accept responsibility for what she knows, whom she loves, and how she chooses. *Brida* thus advances Coelho's philosophy of becoming by demonstrating that spiritual knowledge deepens moral obligation. To know more is to be responsible for more.

Through its narrative structure, *Brida* reframes initiation as ethical burden rather than mystical reward. The novel insists that becoming occurs when the self consents to responsibility, toward knowledge, relationships, and choice, rather than when it seeks escape through spirituality. In this sense, *Brida* complements *The Alchemist* by extending Coelho's ethical vision inward, showing that becoming is sustained not only by courageous action, but by disciplined moral awareness.

Ethical Accountability, Obsession, and Responsible Freedom in *The Zahir*

In *The Zahir*, Paulo Coelho turns decisively from the ethics of quest and initiation to the ethics of relationship, examining how becoming is tested when love hardens into obsession. The novel's plot, structured around the unexplained disappearance of the narrator's wife, Esther, functions less as a mystery than as an ethical audit. The central question is not where Esther has gone, but what the narrator has failed to assume responsibility for in the name of freedom.

At the outset, the narrator prides himself on autonomy and success, treating freedom as the absence of constraint. This self-understanding collapses as Esther's absence exposes the moral emptiness beneath his self-image. His confession that "freedom is not the absence of commitments, but the ability to choose—and commit myself to—what is best for me" (Coelho, 89) marks a crucial ethical reorientation. The statement arises after repeated failures to control others and circumstances, revealing that freedom without accountability devolves into domination and neglect. Within the plot, becoming begins precisely when control proves impossible.

Obsession, what the novel names the *zahir*, serves as the ethical counterforce to responsibility. The narrator's fixation on Esther masquerades as devotion but functions as possession. He admits that obsession "destroys everything around it" (Coelho, 117), a realization prompted by the recognition that his love demanded recognition rather than reciprocity. The plot repeatedly demonstrates that obsession isolates the self, narrowing moral vision and reducing others to objects of need. In this sense, obsession is not excessive love but ethical failure, a refusal to recognize the other as autonomous.

The journey across Central Asia intensifies this ethical reckoning. Travel in *The Zahir* does not offer escape or revelation; instead, it strips away the narrator's illusions of innocence. When he reflects that "we are responsible for everything that happens to us" (Coelho, 165), the line resists fatalism. Responsibility here does not mean blame for external events, but ownership of one's ethical posture toward them. The plot insists that suffering becomes meaningful only when the subject accepts responsibility for how desire has been exercised. Esther's eventual voice in the narrative further destabilizes romantic idealism. Her refusal to remain within a love that erases her autonomy reframes separation as an ethical necessity. Love, the novel suggests, must allow freedom without abandonment and commitment without possession. This ethical balance becomes the condition for becoming, replacing earlier fantasies of control with mutual accountability.

By the conclusion, the narrator's transformation is marked not by reunion alone but by ethical clarity. He understands that love demands responsibility for the other's freedom as much as for one's own. *The Zahir* thus completes Coelho's philosophy of becoming by demonstrating that spirituality is hollow without ethical

accountability in relationships. Freedom, stripped of commitment, becomes obsession; commitment, without respect, becomes domination. Becoming, therefore, requires the courage to love responsibly.

Ethical Discipline and Moral Correction in *The Pilgrimage*

In *The Pilgrimage*, Paulo Coelho offers an early but decisive articulation of the ethical foundations that later novels continue to develop. Unlike the outwardly dramatic quests of *The Alchemist* or the relational crisis of *The Zahir*, *The Pilgrimage* foregrounds discipline, failure, and correction as the basic conditions of becoming. The plot follows Paulo's journey along the Camino de Santiago, yet the narrative consistently resists portraying pilgrimage as spiritual reward. Instead, it presents the journey as ethical apprenticeship shaped by obedience and repeated self-correction.

Central to the novel is the insistence that progress depends not on purity or success, but on the willingness to confront failure. Paulo's admission that "there is no sin in falling, only in remaining where one has fallen" (Coelho 98) functions as the ethical core of the text. The line emerges in moments of fatigue and doubt, reinforcing the idea that moral growth is sustained through correction rather than perfection. Failure, within this framework, is not a deviation from the path but an integral part of ethical formation.

The repeated emphasis on obedience further clarifies Coelho's ethical vision. Paulo is required to follow instructions whose value is not immediately apparent, learning that discipline precedes understanding. The narrative suggests that ethical clarity cannot be achieved through desire or insight alone; it must be earned through sustained practice. Correction, rather than revelation, becomes the primary mechanism of becoming. Though brief in its narrative arc, *The Pilgrimage* anchors Coelho's philosophy by establishing a moral grammar that underlies his later fiction. Discipline tempers desire, failure exposes ethical weakness, and correction enables renewal. In this sense, the novel functions as a foundational text, affirming that spirituality, for Coelho, begins not with transcendence but with responsibility enacted through disciplined action.

Comparative Ethical Framework in Paulo Coelho's Selected Novels:

Novel	Central Narrative Movement	Core Ethical Problem	Mode of Becoming	Key Ethical Insight	Representative Quotation
<i>The Alchemist</i>	Physical journey from Andalusia to the desert	Fear vs ethical choice	Becoming through risk and action	Destiny is not guaranteed; it is shaped through responsible choice under uncertainty	"The fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself" (Coelho <i>The Alchemist</i>)
<i>Brida</i>	Inner journey toward spiritual initiation	Knowledge vs responsibility	Becoming through ethical burden of knowing	Spiritual knowledge deepens moral obligation rather than offering escape	"Making mistakes is just part of life" (Coelho <i>Brida</i>)
<i>The Zahir</i>	Relational journey across cultures	Obsession vs responsible love	Becoming through accountability in relationships	Freedom requires commitment; love is an ethical practice	"Freedom is not the absence of commitments..." (Coelho <i>The Zahir</i>)
<i>The Pilgrimage</i>	Spiritual apprenticeship along the Camino	Failure vs discipline	Becoming through correction and obedience	Moral growth depends on correction, not perfection	"There is no sin in falling..." (Coelho <i>The Pilgrimage</i>)

Cross-Novel Synthesis: Core Philosophical Patterns

Ethical Dimension	<i>The Alchemist</i>	<i>Brida</i>	<i>The Zahir</i>	<i>The Pilgrimage</i>
Nature of Journey	External quest	Internal initiation	Relational crisis	Ethical training
Role of Fear	Obstacle to ethical action	Hesitation before responsibility	Fear of losing control	Fear corrected through discipline

Ethical Dimension	<i>The Alchemist</i>	<i>Brida</i>	<i>The Zahir</i>	<i>The Pilgrimage</i>
View of Spirituality	Ethical risk-taking	Moral burden of knowledge	Responsible love	Disciplined practice
Concept of Freedom	Choosing despite uncertainty	Freedom tied to accountability	Freedom through commitment	Freedom through obedience
Mechanism of Becoming	Action under risk	Ethical learning through error	Accountability in love	Correction after failure

The comparative reading of *The Alchemist*, *Brida*, *The Zahir*, and *The Pilgrimage* reveals that Paulo Coelho develops a coherent and cumulative philosophy of becoming rather than a series of loosely connected spiritual narratives. Although each novel adopts a different narrative situation, a quest, an initiation, a relational crisis, and a pilgrimage, they are unified by a shared ethical logic: becoming is achieved through responsibility, not revelation. The comparison shows that Coelho consistently rejects spirituality as escape or consolation and instead frames it as a morally demanding process grounded in choice, discipline, accountability, and correction. Across the novels, becoming unfolds through progressively complex ethical challenges. *The Alchemist* establishes the foundational principle that ethical courage precedes fulfilment; Santiago's journey demonstrates that fear and loss are not obstacles to spirituality but necessary conditions for moral agency. *Brida* deepens this ethical vision by shifting from action to knowledge, insisting that learning intensifies responsibility rather than offering liberation. Knowledge, once acquired, binds the self more firmly to ethical consequence. *The Zahir* extends this framework into the sphere of relationships, where love is stripped of romantic idealism and redefined as ethical accountability to the freedom of the other. Here, becoming is tested not by isolation or pursuit, but by the capacity to relinquish control and accept responsibility within intimacy. *The Pilgrimage* anchors all these developments by emphasizing discipline and correction, asserting that failure is ethically productive only when followed by self-correction and perseverance.

Taken together, the comparative analysis demonstrates that Coelho's fiction advances a consistent philosophical position: spirituality has no meaning apart from ethical labour. Whether through risk, knowledge, love, or discipline, the self becomes only by assuming responsibility for action and consequence. This integrative interpretation leads directly to the article's conclusion that Coelho should be read not as an inspirational writer but as a philosophical novelist whose work systematically explores becoming as an ethical process. The comparison thus substantiates the study's central claim and provides a unified conceptual foundation for the concluding argument.

An Ethical Matrix of Becoming in Paulo Coelho's Fiction

The philosophy of becoming articulated in the selected novels of Paulo Coelho can be understood as an ethical matrix, where becoming unfolds through interconnected ethical demands rather than a single linear progression. Each novel foregrounds a distinct ethical pressure, yet together they form a coherent structure in which spirituality emerges through moral labour.

Ethical Dimension	Narrative Focus	Dominant Ethical Demand	Philosophical Function	Representative Novel
Choice	Decision under uncertainty	Courage to act despite fear	Initiates becoming	<i>The Alchemist</i>
Responsibility	Consequences of knowledge	Accountability for knowing	Deepens becoming	<i>Brida</i>
Discipline	Failure and correction	Perseverance over perfection	Stabilizes becoming	<i>The Pilgrimage</i>
Relational Accountability	Love and freedom	Commitment without possession	Completes becoming	<i>The Zahir</i>
Ethical Selfhood	Integrated moral identity	Responsibility as way of life	Outcome of becoming	Across the corpus

Interpretive Explanation of the Model

This matrix demonstrates that becoming in Coelho's fiction is distributed across ethical domains, not confined to a single transformative moment. Ethical choice initiates movement, but without responsibility it remains shallow. Responsibility, in turn, requires discipline to endure failure and correction. As ethical maturity develops, it extends outward into relationships, where freedom must be balanced with accountability to others. Only when these dimensions coexist does ethical selfhood emerge.

Unlike linear spiritual models that culminate in enlightenment or transcendence, this framework emphasizes ethical integration. Each dimension remains active even as others emerge; choice does not disappear once

discipline is learned, nor does responsibility end with love. The model therefore captures becoming as an ongoing ethical condition rather than a final state.

This presentation reinforces the article's central argument: spirituality in Coelho's fiction is not a destination but a sustained ethical practice shaped through action, correction, and responsibility. By conceptualizing becoming as a matrix rather than a pathway, the model highlights the philosophical coherence of Coelho's work while allowing flexibility for comparative and interdisciplinary application.

Conclusions:

This study set out to reassess the fiction of Paulo Coelho by examining whether his novels sustain a serious philosophical engagement with ethics, choice, and experiential spirituality. Through a focused analysis of *The Alchemist*, *Brida*, *The Zahir*, and *The Pilgrimage*, the study has demonstrated that Coelho's work consistently articulates a philosophy of becoming grounded in moral responsibility rather than inspirational idealism. The findings confirm the central aim of the research: Coelho's fiction does not promote passive belief or escapist spirituality but advances an ethically demanding vision of selfhood shaped through lived experience.

Across the selected novels, becoming emerges as a cumulative ethical process. *The Alchemist* establishes choice under risk as the foundation of transformation, showing that destiny acquires meaning only when fear is confronted and responsibility is assumed. *Brida* deepens this framework by revealing that knowledge intensifies moral obligation rather than offering liberation, thereby reframing initiation as ethical burden. *The Zahir* extends becoming into the relational domain, demonstrating that love and freedom require accountability and respect for the autonomy of the other. *The Pilgrimage*, finally, anchors this philosophy by foregrounding discipline, failure, and correction as the conditions through which ethical growth is sustained. Together, these narratives confirm that Coelho's concept of spirituality is inseparable from moral labour.

The comparative analysis directly fulfils the study's objectives by identifying recurring ethical concepts—choice, freedom, responsibility, discipline, and love—and tracing their development across different narrative contexts. Rather than repeating a single message, Coelho's novels progressively complicate the ethical demands placed upon the self. Becoming is not achieved through revelation or transcendence, but through action, restraint, correction, and accountability. This coherence across texts supports the article's title by demonstrating that ethics, choice, and experiential spirituality form the structural core of Coelho's literary philosophy.

In concluding, this study contributes to ethics-and-literature scholarship by challenging the critical marginalization of Coelho's work and repositioning him as a philosophical novelist engaged with fundamental questions of moral selfhood. By reading his fiction through the lens of becoming, the article shows how popular narratives can function as serious sites of ethical reflection. Coelho's novels ultimately suggest that becoming human is not a matter of believing differently, but of choosing responsibly, living ethically, and accepting the moral consequences of one's actions.

Scholarly Contribution and Implications

This study contributes to literary scholarship by repositioning Paulo Coelho as a writer whose fiction sustains a coherent philosophy of becoming grounded in ethics, choice, and experiential responsibility. Moving beyond dominant readings that frame his work as inspirational or spiritually simplistic, the article demonstrates that Coelho's novels consistently portray becoming as a morally demanding process shaped by accountability, discipline, and lived consequence. In doing so, the study offers a corrective to critical approaches that have underestimated the philosophical seriousness of his fiction.

Methodologically, the article advances work in narrative ethics by showing how ethical meaning in popular fiction emerges through narrative consequence rather than explicit moral instruction. The analyses of *The Alchemist*, *Brida*, *The Zahir*, and *The Pilgrimage* reveal that Coelho's narratives operate as ethical sites in which characters confront fear, responsibility, relational obligation, and failure. This approach illustrates how philosophical hermeneutics can be applied productively to contemporary popular fiction without reducing interpretation to allegory or symbolism.

The study also has broader implications for the academic evaluation of popular literature. By establishing ethical coherence across diverse narrative forms, quest, initiation, relational crisis, and pilgrimage, it challenges the assumption that popularity precludes philosophical depth. Finally, the concept of becoming articulated here provides a useful framework for future interdisciplinary research on ethics, spirituality, and narrative in global fiction, encouraging further critical engagement with accessible yet ethically serious literary texts.

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