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## EXISTENTIAL HUMAN NEEDS IN PAULO COELHO'S ELEVEN MINUTES

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### ABSTRACT

This study deals with the existential human needs in Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes*. The novel is seen as a representation of people who agree that love, money and sex are among the existential human needs. This is a library research and applies the mimetic theory proposed by M. H. Abrams that states literature as an imitation of the real life. The analysis focuses on how characters trying to look for love, money, and sex which is shown through the character Maria. She tries to pursue those three needs. At first, she tried to find love although it ended in failure and resulted in her not believing in love. At first Maria tried to earn money for her family, but she's starting to earn it for herself and starting to save up for her dream to travel to Geneva, Switzerland. In Switzerland, she works as a salsa dancer where unfortunately things don't work out for her and she needs to obtain a lot of money in order to return to her home country. After a series of events, Maria decided to sell her body as an escort since she finds that it is easier to obtain money that way. She later meets with Ralf and fall in love with him however she later finds out that Ralf is involved in the escort business. This young and handsome painter, Ralf, taught her many things in life and also one of the main reasons that made her wanting to become a better person. In her experiences, Maria was able to fulfil those three needs: love, money and sex. In conclusion, Paulo Coelho's, in his novel, describes the existential human needs which are: love, money, and sex to continue life.

**Keywords:** *existential needs, human needs, love, money, sex*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Paulo Coelho was born on August 24, 1947, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to a middle-class family in an urban environment. His father, Pedro is an architect, and his mother Lygia is an everyday housewife. He was a rebellious teenager and his parents sent him to an asylum three times. Brazilian novelists are known for employing rich symbolism in his depictions of the often spiritually motivated journeys taken by his characters and Coelho is no different. When Coelho was growing up in Rio de Janeiro, he rebelled against the conventions of his Roman Catholic upbringing and, as a result, was temporarily committed to a psychiatric hospital by his parents in which he escaped three times. He then released fully at the age of 20. Coelho later remarked that, it wasn't that they wanted to hurt me, but they

didn't know what to do. They did not do that to destroy me, they did that to save me. At his parents wishes, Coelho enrolled in law school and abandoned his dream of becoming a writer. One year later, he dropped out and lived his life as a hippie, traveling through South America, North Africa, Mexico, and Europe and started using drugs in the 1960s (Richard Pallardy 86).

Coelho married the artist Christina Oiticica in 1980. Together they had previously spent half a year in Rio de Janeiro and the other half in a country house in the Pyrenees Mountains of France, but now the couple reside permanently in Geneva, Switzerland. These days he and his wife Christina Oiticica mostly stays in either Rio de Janeiro or Europe. He founded the Paulo Coelho Institute in 1996 which provides aid to impoverished children and



elderly people. He also serves as the UNESCO special counselor for Intercultural Dialogues and Spiritual Convergences ([paulocoelhoblog.com](http://paulocoelhoblog.com)).

Coelho is a person who has written various books and all of his writings are full of optimistic views. He thinks that happiness can not be bought or asked, it have to be pursued. His characters face various problems in their lives but they never give up and never lose hope. The problems he wants to raise are: the lives of people struggling in poverty, oppression of the weak, and gender oppression. All of his characters of his books succeeded at the end of their journey, obtaining what they strive to achieve. In order to obtain a fulfilling happiness, he says, people have to struggle and make a lot of sacrifice because it isn't easy to get. In this way he gives a message of hope and optimism to his readers (Ijohmn).

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Clarification of Terms**

In *Eleven Minutes*, Coelho sees love as an existential human need. In love, we find the need to unite with another while also losing part of our self, which, according to existentialism, is always something being constantly redefined as we stare into the absurdity and meaninglessness of the world. The universality and actuality of love are able to infiltrate and reach various dimensions of life which make this theme always an interesting study. In addition, the urgency of love is born from the fact that love is an existential human need that cannot be denied or negotiated. Love exists because it must exist. Love is the basis and the main condition for a harmony in life (Kristo).

Existentialism is concerned with the human condition, exploring such topics as the purpose of life, freedom, the experience of the other and how each person is completely responsible for his or her own actions (Dictionary). Existential means, to exist (verb) to be real, to continue living. To have a real sense of being whether it is

material or spiritual, and to be in a specified place or with respect to certain limitations or conditions. Existence (noun) is a state of existing, to believe in the existence of God, way of life. Existent (adjective) living and real. Having reality or existence, the fact or state of living or having objective reality. Existential can be the need to survive, or the meaning of life, or used to poke fun at others who might take themselves a bit too seriously. Existential can seem like a big, incomprehensible word until we realize it's related to the word exist. The meaninglessness of human life and a person's individual freedom and responsibility to make his or her life meaningful in some way. Existential is a philosophical branch that argue that people are free agents who have control over their choices and actions.

Sartre in his book also describe the concept of *Freedom and Responsibility*. He stated that every individual human is condemned to be free. In which every person has to make their life choices constantly within the absence of a predetermined moral guidelines. He argued that an individual is free to pursue any of their desires but ultimately responsible for the consequence of their action in pursue of said desire. (Jean-Paul Sartre)

Existentialists believe that society should not restrict an individual's life or actions and that these restrictions inhibit free will and the development of that person's potential. For instance, struggling with one's uniqueness or identity in the face of one's own mortality. A central focus, or at least seems to be, of existentialism is that one confronts questions for which common answers do not easily states. An existential question is when a person frequently wonders whether or not life has any inherent meaning or purpose. A person may also question their own existence within a world that might seem meaningless (Jhonson).



## 2.2 Theory and Method

Since this study intends to reveal that the novel is the representation of people experience grief and affection, therefore, the discussion in this study is seen through the mimetic theory. It is the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe. However, literature as an art does not merely imitates the universe but it creates a new world that is based of the real world. It means that the story is a reflection of real life through the literary work (Abrams 9).

The study use the the library research method. By using this method, data are collected from online libraries, author's website, journal and other online sources. In the process of preparing this study, the researcher has gone through three necessary step until the decision to write this topic as a study is reached. The primary source in this study is the novel Eleven Minutes. Secondary sources are taken from various books and other relevant sources from the internet. After all the secondary zsources has been collected, the analysis is done by selecting the most crucial episodes from the novel relating to existential human needs that can be found in the main character, Maria. All the data are taken together then interpreted for a comprehensive and meaningful result for literary appreciation and interpretation.

## III. THE ANALYSIS

Eleven Minutes, a novel written by Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho, tells about a young woman Brazilian who worked as a prostitute. Who after faillig at her first love, prioritize money to love in order to survive. At the age of fifteen she was dating a young man but yet again, she was hurt by the fact that she found out that her boyfriend was having an affair with her friend. This in turn made her more hesitant to forge romantic relationship. Feeling betrayed, she felt that to be in love is tiresome and vowed to herself to never fall in love again. At a later age, she started to

travel where she meets a Swiss citizen named Roger who convinced her that she can become a successful dancer in Switzerland. She then decided to travel to Geneva, Switzerland, hoping to become a samba star there in hope to find fame and fortune. However, in Geneva, the only break that she gets is to offer sex in exchange for money. This led her to Copacabana, a brothel on the Rue de Berne, where she engaged in prostitution for a living. While she was there, she met a Filipino prostitute who work in a library, and they became good friends. Maria believed that she should never fall in love again because she believed that being in love only lasted for Eleven Minutes. However, she later fell in love. She fulfills her need for love by having a relationship with a young handsome painter's. He is the one who taught her many things in life and also one of the main reasons that made her want to change to be a better person. Nearing the end of the story they had to part, Maria bought a ticket to return to her hometown albeit sadly. She, however, coincidentally meets with the painter in the airport and finally able to confirms their mutual love.

The main character is Maria, a young independent woman though she sometimes wishes to be just a simple housewife. She dreams of success and fame and she works hard to achieve it. This is shown by her determination to work in a foreign land, which require quite a bit of bravery and determination. Ever since she was just a young girl, she wishes for adventure. This is also one of the reasons that made her took Roger's proposal to work in Switzerland. This travel to Switzerland, which she considers as an adventure, causes her to grow emotionally and become a more mature woman. Despite her boldness and later her choice of profession, deep down Maria is a caring woman. This can be seen from her time while she is working as an escort. Although indeed she decided to become an escort due to monetary reason, in which she finds that



she can obtain a lot of money with little to no investment, besides giving her clients sexual pleasures she listens to their problems. Though it does not resolve any of her clients' problem this act of listening does give her clients' a sense of clarity and relief.

The minor characters are Ralf Hart, Maria's mother, Mailson, Heidi, Vivian, Roger, Milan, Terence, Nyah and Maria's boss. Ralf Hart is a painter who fell in love with Maria, saying that he saw Maria's light and appreciates it. He is a man who lost his desire for sex and through Maria's help, obtained his desires back. He explained that once he can love another yet lost his desire and asked for Maria's help to get it back, not as a prostitute but a companion.

Roger is a Swiss citizen who deceives Maria and promises to make her a Samba star in Geneva but instead leads her towards prostitution. He gives off a friendly and helpful attitude at first but shows his true color after he managed to convince his "victim" to work for him. He was frustrated of his own marriage and found solace by tricking women from other countries, brought them into Switzerland and forced them to work for him.

Terence is a married man who is suffering from depression because of his wife's infidelity. He is considered a "special client" in the club where Maria is working. He indulged her in a ritual called sadomasochism, a sexual ritual of pain and pleasure.

Milan is a married man who is the owner of the club. He is so concerned about his image that he doesn't want the prostitutes working in his club to mess around and screw up. He is a well-mannered man, and he tries his best to keep his business in check and treats his employees well.

Nyah is a Filipino prostitute who works with Maria in the same club. Among all the prostitutes in the club, she is the only one Maria can confide in. She is very friendly, and gives advice to Maria. Just like Milan, she respects Maria.

Heidi is another of Maria's friend. Maria thinks of her as an open book, partly because she works as a librarian. Maria, through some book reading, learns the context of sexual intercourse because of her. Maria come to her in the hopes of borrowing some books but later find a friend figure in Heidi.

The story is set mostly in Brazil and Switzerland. There are also some minor locations that function as the story's setting including: Maria's small hometown and the Copacabana beach.

### **3.1 Love**

Human's need for Love includes the desire for friendship, between man and woman, the desire for a mate and children, the need to belong whether it's a family, a club, a neighborhood, or a nation. The author creates the character Maria, Maria's parents, Heidi, Nyah, and Ralf Hart as a portrayal of people who agree that love is one of the existential need of a human being.

Maria's first experienced love when she was eleven years old. Her first love did not worked out, because the boy that she loved did not have similar feeling towards her. Her first love experience became gives the young and innocent Maria a bitter taste of love. Maria hid her feeling for the boy even when she got the chance to get closer to him. When the boy tried to borrow a pencil from her and start a conversation with her, Maria was too afraid to talk to him and she is also afraid that the boy might notice that she like him.

Sometime later, Maria also feels attracted towards her neighbor, a boy that she usually meets in the route from her house to school. This however is not the experience of love that she was looking for, for it does not have intimacy or a commitment in it.

Another of Maria's love experience is when she fell in love with a boy that she met in the Holy Week procession, but this time she promised not to make the same mistake she did when she was young. She



learned to love more seriously during this time and wants to give all the love that she has. She also believes that this boy is the right person to be her future husband. Maria showed that she is serious not only from her feeling but also from her action and she was happy with her relationship with her boyfriend. She also experienced an intense emotion and sexual activities when she had her first kiss with the boy. So strongly she fell in love she write down all of her love experience during this time period into her diary.

It is clear that Maria experienced multiple romantic relationships including instances where her romantic relationships are based on passion and intimacy, unfortunately however it lacks commitment. Romantic love is characterized by a couple who emotionally and physically drawn to one another however the commitment to a long term relationship is not necessarily needed.

Maria falls in love many times and with many men. Her first love turns to unforgettable experience because it leads to many disappointments. She finally concluded, from her own previous experiences that love is not as beautiful as she thinks. After all those disappointing romantic experiences, she realizes what kind of love that she needs and she starts to look for it. The kind of love that Maria seeks is a love towards a person who she could love freely, in which she would not have to feel like she owns her partner. Thus, in Maria's point of view, she could love him wholeheartedly. Maria's sentiment can be seen in the passage down below.

In love, no one can harm anyone else; we are each of us responsible for our own feelings and cannot blame someone else for what we feel. It hurt when I lost each of the various men I fell in love with. Now, though, I am convinced that no one loses anyone, because no one owns anyone. That is the true experience of freedom: having the most important thing in the world without owning it (97).

This is the conclusion that she reached based off all of her previous romantic relationship that mostly ends with disappointment rather than happiness. Maria tries to accept the reality that her partner will not cause hurt, pain and suffering. Those negative feelings do not stem from love, but they come from within herself.

There was a struggle in Maria's mind during her time after failed to become a famous dancer in Switzerland. She knew that she should not work as an escort but circumstances forced her to do so. During this period of her life, she worked in a club owned by a man named Milan. Milan helped Maria build her career, taught Maria about everything she needs to know to work as a prostitute. How she needs to be good at acting in order to please her customers. Maria herself was a resourceful woman and these teaching turned her into a successful prostitute. Her intelligence and beauty make her into a high class prostitute compared to peers.

"That's not true; a man is also a woman; he wants to find someone, to give meaning to his life" ( 225). In the sense of human needs, Coelho explains to the readers that one of the most important things to achieve is love. One's can only relate to others when one has satisfied one's need for love. They are also free to explore the need for self-esteem, which include, self-confidence, competence, knowledge which others value highly, integrity, and finally, freedom. Every human being has love, within himself, and in this love one can find something even more important than oneself. A person is loved because he deserves to be loved, and there is no need for any reason to love something.

### **3.2 Money**

Money is one of the primary needs in life, in which it is the means for a person to meet their various needs, including improving the quality of personal life. This is one of the main reasons why most people will always try to make more money over





time. The author shows it in the character of Maria who really needs money. It has become her motivation to live without thinking about what she does, to disregard, or at least put aside her morality.

Coelho describes that Maria, at first, was responsible to help her family in earning money and while at the same time she kept trying to find a way to improve the quality of her life. During the beginning of the story Maria started working at a draper shop, her first job, to fulfill her physiological need for money so that she could save up and achieve her dream of traveling.

Coelho wrote Maria as a person who cannot be satisfied easily. She keeps on wanting more money and wishes she can have a better life than her current state at the time. She was offered by several entertainment agents to invest in some self portraits in order to further her career. She spent some of her money to pay for great photographers and asked for some of the best photographs to be sent to her family to show them how happy she was in Switzerland. She keeps believing in her dream of getting a job from a modeling agency, becoming famous, having a rich husband, having a family, having children, grandchildren, beautiful clothes and finally returning to Brazil as a successful person.

Maria needs for money become exponentially greater after she decided to pursue a career in Switzerland as a samba star, she left everything behind in Brazil and focused on her life in Switzerland. During her life in Switzerland, she has to suffer financially, mentally, and also physically. She has to fight for herself without anyone's help to obtain money. But she is able to overcome it all, from love, financially, mentally, and physically by becoming a prostitute.

In the end, she manages to regain control of her life and escape the life of an escort or prostitute. The novel Eleven Minutes by Paulo Coelho places economic factors as the main driving factor that causes Maria, the main character in this

novel, to decide to become a prostitute.

### **3.3 Sex**

Sex will always be one of existential human need. Because, in addition to being given mind, humans are also endowed with lust by the Creator. In the context of this analysis, sex can be in the form of human physical relationships such as kissing to having sexual intercourse. It is also one of the most basic need in life. Coelho creates Maria as a representation of the people who experience sexual desires. Maria's sexual needs are carried out without coercion, she enjoys the relationship that she had. The sexual intercourse done by Maria is done in order to fulfill her biological needs but during her time in Switzerland sex is not only a need for her but also became a mean. For it was by becoming an escort or a prostitute who sells the service of providing sexual intimacy, Maria earned her living.

This analysis found that Coelho describes Maria knows that all prostitutes do this, but they didn't teach it the first day she was there, purposefully to keep the guests coming back to the club. In the end, Maria had to do that, because she was already paid for and she must provide the service. Maria must listen to all of her guests' laments however she must be careful not to give out any strong opinions, where she criticizes and in general being disapproval towards them. She also has to groan when her guests are approaching orgasm, all of that is the totality of sexuality that Maria must do as a prostitute, as if it is an act of performance. Coelho draws attention to the topic of sex in prostitution and he portrays the contrast between adventurous sex and love expression.

Until that afternoon, almost six months after the kiss. She began touching it and found that she couldn't stop; the feelings provoked were so strong and so pleasurable, and her whole body particularly the part she was touching became tense...Orgasm ! (8)

Maria's character increasingly feels that sex is a necessity for her. Besides



being a prostitute, Maria also has sexual relations with the people she loved. When she had a sexual relation with the person she loves, she does it with great tenderness. A direct contrast of her almost performance like sexual intercourse if she were attending her guests. The process was natural, and she enjoyed it. It is also portrayed that even though Maria is a very experienced prostitute, if she was making love to the person she loves, she acts like a virgin who is still innocent. This can be seen from her interaction with Ralf. Her sexual intercourse with Ralf Hart is described as full of tenderness and gentleness. Once again, a direct contrast with her professional escort services. It is because this study has found that the writer, Coelho, wanted to convey the idea that most prostitutes have forgotten the beauty of touching.

Another aspect of sexual need by Maria can be seen when she was faced with the act of sadomasochism. A special customer in a club called Copacabana in Rue de Berne where she works as a prostitute introduced it to her. She has always felt like after becoming a prostitute, her sex life is just like a routine. Similar to how people go to work every day. She had always thought she didn't know what she wants but when she enters the sadomasochism world she feels like it suits her. She starts to associate pain with pleasure. It's not necessarily a proper way to feel safety but during her sadomasochism acts, Maria felt safe. It is a different way in which the author tried to convey that sex is an existential human need. Among the characters in this novel there are several small characters which had not been mentioned in the small character section beforehand. These characters are Maria's clients. They are: Terence a special client, an arrogant Frenchman, a headhunter for a top executive job, an actress, the director of an accounting firm, a pilot, a shop owner specializing in selling knives and an Arab man who works in the fashion industry.

These characters are people who crave sexual intercourse because of the feeling of loneliness. They wanted physical contact rather than personal approach, paying money to fulfill their desires, to indulge in fantasies while making love, to have the opportunity to make love to a sexier woman. All of them see Maria as a very beautiful and friendly woman.

Coelho also argues that, within all humans there exist light. He uses the word "light" to describe the persona or sublime personality contained in the human body. He also believes, and directs his readers, to the concept that sex between a man and a woman is a sacred act. In conclusion, sacredness presupposes love between two humans who are involved in sexual intercourse.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The novel *Eleven Minutes* written by Paulo Coelho's reflects the existential human needs. The author wants to describe what are those needs and how someone tries to achieve those existential needs. He wants to show that humans are full of imagination and desire. A being that always tries to find their love, money and sex. Which was portrayed through many of the characters throughout this novel.

There are three existential human needs provided in the novel, love is the first which is represented by Maria who trusts that love is a basic need for a person in their life. Money is the second basic need for the people to survive which is experienced by the character Maria that has a responsibility to help her family to earn money, and later is starting to take care of herself and needs money so she can save up to fulfill her dream of traveling. Sex becomes one of human existential needs. This can be seen from the portrayal of Maria and her clients: Terence a special client, an arrogant Frenchman, an actress, the director of an accounting firm, a pilot, a shop owner specializing in selling knives and an Arab man who works in the fashion industry. All of them crave for sex because



they feel lonely. Before Maria worked as a prostitute, her sexual needs are carried out without coercion, she enjoys it as is and it is done to fulfill her biological needs. However, due to an economic factor, which is also the main driving factor, causes Maria to work as a prostitute. It is also found that in order to obtain love, money and sex are not as easily obtained.

In conclusion, the author in his novel Eleven Minutes shows that money, love and sex are existential human needs.

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