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Exploring Literature and Writing I

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**“Singular pursuit of one’s dreams and goals is the only way one can achieve their life’s purpose, sometimes at great sacrifice.”**

*The Alchemist,* written by Paulo Coelho, focuses on the idea that personal legends exist as the means by which someone can live a pleasant life, devoid of any sense of regret. It suggests that the universe will acquire its ultimate destiny if everyone undergoes the process of achieving their personal legend. Therefore, one can evolve to develop a new personal legend, in order to exercise the human nature of ambition. *The Alchemist* shows that the individualistic pursuit of a personal legend exists as one of life’s most dominant, innate senses. Although the world is full of greedy, narcissistic, self-centered, egotistic individuals, singular pursuit of one’s dreams and goals is the only way one can achieve their life’s purpose, sometimes at great sacrifice.

John D. Rockefeller, founder of the Standard Oil Company in 1870, gained great affluence as he rose to the top of the fledgling oil business during the late 1800’s. Rockefeller became the face in the oil business, and by the early 1880’s, he controlled 90 percent of America’s oil refineries and pipelines, according to history.com. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company attained its superiority in the oil industry “by buying rival refineries and developing companies for distributing and marketing its products around the globe.” (history.com, “John D. Rockefeller”). However, Rockefeller faced many obstacles on his way to prominence.

His extensive wealth and success subjected him to criticism. Cynical journalists, reform politicians, and many others considered him to be a symbol of corporate greed and scrutinized Rockefeller’s methods by which he gained power. As The New York Times reported in 1937:

“He was accused of crushing out competition, getting rich on rebates from railroads, bribing men to spy on competing companies, of making secret agreements, of coercing rivals to join the Standard Oil Company under threat of being forced out of business, building up enormous fortunes on the ruins of other men, and so on.”

(New York Times, “Financier's Fortune in Oil Amassed in Industrial Era of 'Rugged Individualism.”). Although Rockefeller was readily criticized by brutal reporters, his never ending strive for success is what ultimately led him to becoming one of the greatest business men in history. John D. Rockefeller maintained a clear vision of his professional goals, and his unyielding pursuit of his life’s purpose enabled him to achieve a level of business prowess that has rivaled only a handful of American businessmen. This relates to Santiago, a young shepard, in Paulo Coelho’s novel, *The Alchemist.*

Santiago has a soul purpose in life, to achieve his personal legend. Santiago pursued his life’s purpose, even when he ran into great obstacles, like when he was robbed by the young man in Section 4. “He was so ashamed that he wanted to cry” (pg.). This human nature to go on no matter what is how Santiago achieved his personal legend. This quality can also be found in John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller’s predatory business practices sacrificed much in the way of competing businesses, jobs and livelihoods, there was a silver lining: his career.

Cornelius Vanderbilt is another of history’s most distinguished business men. Like Rockefeller, Vanderbilt was at his prime during the 19th century. He began as a rather ordinary steam boat captain, but in the late 1820’s, he started his own business, to become one of the country’s largest steamboat operators. In the process, Vanderbilt “gained a reputation for being fiercely competitive and ruthless.” (history.com, “Cornelius Vanderbilt”).

Soon after he acquired his first ferry, Vanderbilt earned a cutthroat reputation; he would win at any cost. His upbringing was also a big factor in his business career. For instance, according to *The Men Who Built America*, he was born into modest and humble circumstances, which led his competitive attitude essential for success in the business world.

Although his steamboat business took off, in the 1860s, he transitioned into the promising railroad industry. This led to the development of another empire, and helped make railroad transportation more efficient. This was the pinnacle of his career. Unfortunately, in the midst of Vanderbilt’s rise, his most favored son, George, suffered a tragic death. Not to be deterred, however, Vanderbilt’s ambition and ruthless character led him to throw himself into building his railroad empire, and ultimately, sacrificing family. This is exemplified by Santiago in numerous ways. For example, Santiago had to sacrifice Fatima, his true love that he met on his journey to his treasure. “Maktub,’ she said. ‘If I am really a part of your dream, you'll come back one day’ ” (Coelho, 291). In order to fully attain his personal legend, he would have to sacrifice their potential future together, just like Vanderbilt did with his family.

The forty-fourth President of the United States, Barack Obama, is man who one could say heeded the lessons and admonitions of the Crystal Merchant to avoid regret by becoming complacent in one’s own safe circumstances. Obama pursued his personal legend while overcoming some of the toughest obstacles one could ever face. For instance, Obama was born to a single white mother and African father, into humble conditions. He rarely saw his father, who had abandoned the family, and was left to be raised by his single mother. For a time, he even lived with his grandparents in Kansas. Unlike so many who have gone on to become President, Obama was not wealthy. Despite these circumstances, Obama was able to enroll into Occidental College in Los Angeles for two years, and then graduate from Columbia University with a degree in political science. This ultimately led him into entering Harvard Law School in 1988. From there, Obama joined the prestigious law firm of Sidley Austin in Chicago, Illinois.

Rather than remaining in what certainly would have provided a lucrative and stable lifestyle for him and his family, Obama left Sidley Austin to pursue his life’s purpose. In 2000, Obama made an unsuccessful run for Illinois’s first congressional district. Not only did this loss threaten to end his political career, dailymail.co.uk reported that it made him question the strength of his marriage as well. However, his ambition led him to become a democratic U.S. Senator for Illinois. In his rise to the top, he became the first African American to run for President of the United States in 2008. President Obama’s remarkable achievements perfectly reflect how ambition in human nature leads to success in finding personal legend described in *The Alchemist.*

Indeed, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and Obama have been described as greedy, narcissistic, and egotistic individuals, but it is undeniable that their everlasting pursuit for personal legend with great sacrifice is shown in the form of Santiago in *The Alchemist.*  He faces great obstacles that he has to overcome, including having to let go Fatima, his true love. All of these historical figures that have accomplished remarkable things, and they all possess the common characteristic that Santiago has; the strive for personal legend.

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