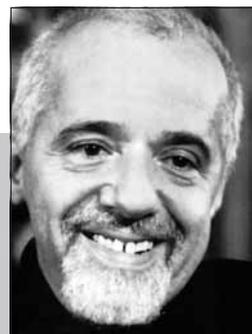


# PAULO COELHO



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**P**aulo Coelho, seen by some as an alchemist of words and, by others, as a mass culture phenomenon, is considered by some as the most influential author of the present century. Readers from over 150 countries, irrespective of their creed and culture, have turned him into a reference author of our time.

His books, translated into 56 languages, have not only topped the best-seller lists, but have gone on to become the subject of social and cultural debate. The ideas, philosophy and subject matter covered in his books touch the aspirations of millions of readers searching for their own path and for new ways of understanding the world.

Paulo Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1947 into a middle-class family, the son of Pedro, an engineer, and Lygia, a housewife.

At seven he entered the Jesuit school of San Ignacio in Rio de Janeiro. Paulo came to detest the obligatory nature of religious practice. However, although he hated praying and going to mass, there were compensations. In the school's austere corridors, Paulo discovered his true vocation: to be a writer. He won his first literary prize in a school poetry competition, and his sister, Sonia, recounts how she won an essay prize by entering something that Paulo had discarded in the wastepaper bin.

However, Paulo's parents had very different plans for their son's future. They wanted him to be an engineer and tried to stifle his desires to devote himself to literature. Their intransigence and his discovery of Henry Miller's **Tropic of Cancer** aroused Paulo's spirit of rebellion, and he began routinely to flout the family rules. His father took this behaviour as a sign of mental illness and, when Paulo was seventeen, he twice had him committed to a psychiatric hospital, where Paulo underwent several sessions of electroconvulsive therapy.

Shortly after this, Paulo became involved with a theatre group and began working as

a journalist. In the eyes of the comfortably-off middle classes of the time, the theatre was a hotbed of immorality. His frightened parents decided to break their promise not to confine him again and had him re-admitted to hospital for the third time. When he came out, Paulo was even more lost and more enclosed in his own private world. In despair, the family called in another doctor who told them: Paulo isn't mad and he shouldn't be in a psychiatric hospital. He simply has to learn how to face up to life. Thirty years after these experiences, Paulo Coelho wrote **Veronika decides to die**.

According to Paulo: '**Veronika decides to die** was published in Brazil in 1998. By September, I had received more than 1 200 e-mails and letters describing similar experiences. In October, some of the subjects discussed in the book - depression, panic attacks, suicide - were addressed at a conference that went on to have national repercussions. On 22 January of the following year, Senator Eduardo Suplicy read out some extracts from my book at a plenary session and managed to get approval for a law that had been doing the rounds of the Brazilian Congress for ten years - a law prohibiting arbitrary hospitalisation.'

After this period, Paulo returned to his studies and it looked as if he was finally going to follow the route his parents had prepared for him. Not long afterwards, though, he dropped out and went back to the theatre. This was in the sixties, and the hippie movement had exploded onto the world scene. These new trends took root even in Brazil, ruled at the time by a repressive military regime. Paulo wore his hair long and made a point of never carrying his identity card; for a time, he took drugs, wanting to live the hippie experience to the full. His passion for writing drove him to start a magazine, of which only two issues were ever published.

Around this time, the musician and composer, Raul Seixas invited Paulo to write the words to his songs. Their second

record was a huge success and sold more than 500 000 copies. This was the first time Paulo had earned a large amount of money. Their partnership continued up until 1976. Paulo wrote more than sixty songs with Raul Seixas, and together they changed the Brazilian rock scene.

In 1973, Paulo and Raul became part of the Alternative Society, an organisation that opposed capitalist ideology, defended the individual's right to do what he or she pleased, and also practised black magic. He later described these experiences in **The Valkyries** (1992).

During this period, they began publishing *Kring-ha*, a series of comic strips, calling for more freedom. The dictatorship considered these subversive, and Paulo and Raul were detained and imprisoned. Raul was soon released, but Paulo was kept in for longer because he was considered to be the 'brains' behind the comic strips. His problems did not end there, however; two days after his release, Paulo was seized as he was walking down the street and taken to a military torture centre where he remained for several days. According to him, he only escaped death by telling them that he was mad and had already been admitted to mental hospitals three times. He started physically harming himself when his kidnappers were in the room, and, in the end, they stopped torturing him and let him go.

This experience marked him deeply. At twenty-six, Paulo decided that he had had enough experience of 'life' and wanted to be 'normal'. He got a job at the record company, Polygram, where he met the woman who would later become his wife.

In 1977, they moved to London. Paulo bought a typewriter and started writing, without much success. The following year, he returned to Brazil, where he worked as an executive for another record company, CBS. This only lasted three months, after which he separated from his wife and left his job.

In 1979, he met up with an old friend, Christina Oiticica, whom he would later marry and with whom he still lives.

The couple travelled to Europe where they visited several countries. In Germany they went to the concentration camp at Dachau. There Paulo had a vision in which a man appeared to him. Two months later, he met that same man in a café in Amsterdam and spent a long time talking to him and exchanging views and experiences. The man, whose identity Paulo has never revealed, suggested that he should return

to Catholicism. Paulo started studying the symbolic language of Christianity. He also proposed that Paulo should walk the Road to Santiago (a medieval pilgrim's route between France and Spain).

In 1987, a year after completing that pilgrimage, Paulo wrote his first book, **The Pilgrimage (The diary of a Magus)**. The book describes his experiences during the pilgrimage and his discovery that the extraordinary occurs in the lives of ordinary people. It was published by a small Brazilian publishing house and, although it received very few reviews, it sold quite well.

In 1988, Paulo wrote another, very different book: **The alchemist**. This was a highly symbolic book, a metaphor of life, which reflected his eleven years spent studying alchemy. The first edition sold only 900 copies, and the publishing house decided not to reprint.

Paulo would not give up the pursuit of his dream. He got a second chance: he found a bigger publishing house, Rocco, that was interested in his work. In 1990, he published **Brida**, in which he wrote about the gift that we all carry within us. The publication of this book, which, this time, received plenty of press attention, took **The alchemist** and **The pilgrimage** to the top of the best-seller lists. **The alchemist** went on to sell more copies than any other book in the history of Brazil, and even made it into the **Guinness Book of Records**. In 2002, the Portuguese literary review, **Jornal de Letras**, the great authority on literature and the Portuguese literary market, declared that **The alchemist** had sold more copies than any other book written in Portuguese in the entire history of the language.

In May 1993, HarperCollins published 50 000 copies of **The alchemist**, which was the largest ever initial print run of a Brazilian book in the United States. At the launch, the executive director of HarperCollins, John Loudon, said: 'It was like getting up at dawn and seeing the sun rise while the rest of the world still slept. Wait until everybody else wakes up and sees this too.' Paulo was overwhelmed by HarperCollins' enthusiasm for the book. 'This is a very special moment for me,' he said. His editor ended the launch by saying: 'I hope the publication of the book will be as long, exciting and successful as his Latin American story has been.'

Ten years later, in 2002, John Loudon wrote to Paulo: '**The alchemist** has become

one of the most important books in our company's recent history. We are so proud of the book and its success. The story of its success with us mirrors the story of the book!'

Julia Roberts said: 'It's like music, really, the way he writes, it's so beautiful. It's a gift that I envy above all others.' Madonna said in an interview in the German magazine **Sontag-Aktuell**: '**The alchemist** is a beautiful book about magic, dreams and the treasures we seek elsewhere and then find on our doorstep.'

The success of **The alchemist** in the United States marked the beginning of his international career. Several Hollywood producers showed immediate interest in the film rights, which were acquired in 1993 by Warner Brothers.

Before publication in the United States, **The alchemist** had been published by small publishing houses in Spain and in Portugal. In Spain, the book did not make the best-seller lists until 1995. Seven years later, the Spanish Publishers Guild wrote that **The alchemist (Editorial Planeta)** had been the top-selling book in Spain in 2001. Paulo Coelho is the top-selling author in Portugal (**Editorial Pergaminho**), with more than a million copies sold.

In 1993, Mônica Antunes, who has been collaborating with Paulo since 1989 after reading his first two books, established in Barcelona the literary agency Sant Jordi Asociados together with Carlos Eduardo Rangel, with the mission of selling the rights of Paulo's works.

In May of that year, after the publication of **The alchemist** in the United States, Mônica offered the title to several international publishers. The first publishing house to acquire the rights was Ex Libris from Norway.

In September 1993, **The alchemist** topped the best-seller lists in Australia. **The Sydney Morning Herald** claimed: 'It's the book of the year. An enchanting work of infinite philosophical beauty.'

In April 1994, **The alchemist** was launched in France (Anne Carrière Editions). It received marvellous reviews, and the reading public went wild about the book, which began its climb up the best-seller lists. Two days before Christmas, Anne Carrière wrote to Mônica: 'As a Christmas gift, I am sending you the best-seller lists from France. We are first!' **The alchemist** had reached number one in every list in France, where it stayed for five consecutive years. After its phenomenal

success in France, Paulo's books left the purely literary world behind to become a European phenomenon that has spread throughout the world.

Ever since then, each and every one of Paulo Coelho's six novels so far translated into French have made it to number one in the best-seller lists, remaining there for months. He has even had three of his titles in the top ten at the same time.

**By the River Piedra I sat down and wept**, published in Brazil by Rocco in 1994, confirmed his international status. In this book, Paulo explored his feminine side.

In 1995, **The alchemist** was published in Italy (Bompiani), immediately reaching the top of the best-seller lists. The following year Paulo received two prestigious Italian awards, the Super Grinzane Cavour Book Award and the Flaiano International Award.

In 1996, Editorial Objetiva acquired the rights to his book, **The fifth mountain**, paying an advance of one million dollars, the biggest ever paid to a Brazilian author. That same year, Paulo was made a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. In 1996, Paulo was also appointed special advisor to the UNESCO programme Spiritual Convergences and Intercultural Dialogues.

The same year, **The alchemist** was published in Germany (Diogenes). The hard-back edition beat all records in 2002 after remaining over 306 weeks in **Der Spiegel** best-seller list.

At the 1997 Frankfurt Book Fair, his publishers, along with Diogenes and Sant Jordi, held a cocktail party to honour Paulo and to announce the simultaneous international launch of **The fifth mountain**. This took place in March 1998 with a main event in Paris. Paulo enjoyed huge success at the Salon du Livre, spending more than seven hours signing books.

In 1997, Paulo published his remarkable book, **The manual of the warrior of light**, a collection of philosophical thoughts aimed at helping us to discover the warrior of light within. The book has become a point of reference for millions of readers. It was first published in Italy (Bompiani), where it was a spectacular sales success.

**Lire** magazine (March 1999) declared him to be 1998's second best-selling author worldwide.

According to the World Economic Forum, Paulo's most important contribution has been to touch and unite so many different cultures through the power of language, which clearly marks him out for

this award.' Paulo has been an invited member of the World Economic Forum from 1998 until the present day.

In 1999, the French government made him a Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.

In that same year, Paulo took part in the Buenos Aires Book Fair with **Veronika decides to die**. The reaction to Paulo's presence there was unprecedented and highly emotional. The media all agreed that no other author could attract so many people. 'Colleagues who have been working at the Book Fair for the last 25 years say that they have never seen anything like it, not even when Borges was alive. On the day of the signing, people started queuing more than four hours before the appointed time, and the directors of the Fair agreed to close later than usual so that no one would be disappointed.

In 1999, he was given the prestigious Crystal Award.

In 2000, he was appointed to the Board of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.

In May 2000, Paulo visited Iran and became the first non-Muslim writer to make an official visit to the country since 1979. He was invited by the International Centre for Dialogue among Civilisations. Before his visit, it is estimated that millions of pirated copies of his books had already been sold (Iran has never signed the International Copyright Agreement). Since that visit, Paulo has become the only non-Muslim writer to receive royalties. He could never have imagined receiving such a warm welcome in a land so distant from and so different to the West. According to Paulo's words, 'I received many gifts, I received much love, but above all I received the understanding of my work, and this touched me profoundly. To my great surprise, my soul had arrived before myself, my books were present and I found old friends in the people I had never met before. I did not feel like a stranger in a foreign land. It was something that moved me deeply and filled me with joy since I felt that beyond anything else, the possibility of a dialogue with any human being on the face of the earth exists. Iran showed me this was possible.'

In September **The devil and Miss Prym** was published simultaneously in Italy (Bompiani), Portugal (Pergaminho) and Brazil (Objetiva). To coincide with the launch, Paulo, in his house in Rio de Janeiro, gave dozens of interviews to media from all

over the world. The existence of the Instituto Paulo Coelho was made public for the first time; set up in 1996 by Paulo Coelho and his wife, Christina Oiticica, it provides support and opportunities for the underprivileged in Brazil, especially children and the elderly.

Paulo was awarded the BAMBÍ 2001, the oldest and most prestigious award in Germany. In the jury's opinion, Coelho's belief that the destiny and gift of every human being is to become a 'warrior of light' in a dark world, contains a deeply humanistic message, a message that had particular poignancy that year.

The first time that Paulo travelled to Colombia was on the occasion of the 2001 International Book Fair in Bogotá. Thousands of people awaited the arrival of their idol, who received a welcome worthy of a pop star. Paulo called for calm and patience; everyone's book would be signed. After five hours, 4 000 books had been signed and sold.

In September, he also attended an amazing book signing at the Borders bookshop in London. According to events manager, Finn Lawrence, Paulo's signing of his new novel, **The devil and Miss Prym** (HarperCollins) 'was, without doubt, the biggest event of the year', with people present from all five continents (Japan, Pakistan, Angola, America and all the European countries). In November, he travelled to Mexico, where thousands of readers waited for hours for him to arrive at the Guadalajara Book Fair.

In early 2002, Paulo travelled for the first time to China and visited Shanghai, Beijing and Nanjing, taking part in numerous events, including book signings and meetings with readers.

On 25 July 2002, Paulo Coelho was elected to chair number 21 of the prestigious Brazilian Academy of Letters (ABL). The aim of the Academy, whose headquarters is in Rio de Janeiro, is to safeguard the Brazilian language and culture. Following the announcement of his election and during the following night, Paulo received more than three thousand messages from his readers and became the focus of media attention throughout the country. Despite being adored by millions of readers, he has always been spurned by certain literary critics, which is why his admission to the Academy was such an important social event.

On 28 October, Paulo took up his charge at the ABL. He quoted his predecessor, the

economist Roberto Campos, 'The violence of the arrow dignifies the target', and added, 'many times, at moments in which I felt judged with excessive severity by the critics, I remembered this sentence. And I remembered another dream I was not willing to give up: to enter the Brazilian Academy of Letters one day.'

In September 2002, Paulo caused a real sensation when he travelled to Russia where five of his books were simultaneously on the best-seller lists, with **The devil and Miss Prym** at number one, followed by **The alchemist**, **The manual of the Warrior of Light**, **Veronika decides to die** and **The fifth mountain** (Sophia Publishers). In only a fortnight, more than 250 000 copies of his books were sold in Russia, bringing to more than a million the total number of copies sold in just one year. According to the marketing director of the MDK chain, Paulo's signing was the biggest ever. 'We have never had so many people coming in to get the signature of their favourite author. We organise a lot of signings and readings at our bookshop, and we have had famous guests here before, like the Russian presidents Messrs Yeltsin and Gorbachev, or even Mr Putin, but we have never had this many people.'

In October 2002, Paulo received the Club of Budapest Planetary Arts Award 2002 in Frankfurt, and the Best Fiction Corine Award 2002 in Munich.

In November, the author visited the Scandinavian countries and took part in fantastic events organised at the bookstore Tanum Karl Johan and at Rockfeller (for Bokbadet television programme) in Oslo, as well as at the Academic bookstore in Helsinki, and the NK bookstore in Stockholm.

Various theatre companies have seen the great dramatic and poetic potential of his work. **The alchemist**, for example, has been adapted and produced on all five continents in various theatrical forms - musicals, dance theatre, puppets, dramatised readings, opera. The book will eventually appear on the Broadway stage in the form of a musical.

Alongside the books are a whole series of products related to the author and his work, amongst them, diaries, calendars, journals, appointment books, art books and even three electronic games: The Pilgrim, The Legend and The Secrets of Alamut (The Arxel Guild), designed in collaboration with the author.

Paulo's constant presence in the media

can also be seen through articles and newspaper columns. Over the years, he has written a large number of articles and essays for all the most important newspapers and magazines.

In March 1998, he began writing a weekly column in the Brazilian newspaper **O Globo**. Such was its success among readers, that Sant Jordi started syndicating the columns in other international media. Four years on, newspapers such as **Reforma** in Mexico are still publishing the columns.

His columns have been published on a regular basis in **Corriere della Sera** (Italy), **El Semanal** (Spain), **Ta Nea** (Greece), **TV Hören + Sehen** and **Welt am Sonntag** (Germany), **Anna** (Estonia), **Zwierciadlo** (Poland), **El Universo** (Ecuador), **El Nacional** (Venezuela), **El Espectador** (Colombia) and **The China Times Daily** (Taiwan), amongst many others.

Paulo has written a series of 365 brief essays, which have been published in the form of a daily message on the following Internet portals: Ynet (Hebrew), RCS (Italian), UOL (Portuguese) and Terra (Spanish). Paulo has also created a newsletter, **The manual on-line**, which has 30 000 subscribers.

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