

Monsieur Ibrahim film response

A comparison with *The Alchemist*

Even while the majority of Moses' story takes place in Paris, his journey east begins the moment the audience meets Monsieur Ibrahim. Many times in European narratives, the journey westward is one of bold adventure, and the hero steps into the unknown in spite of dangers known and unknown. However the journey east, while equally bold, maintains a calmer reserve and resists the idea that change on the part of the hero must be strictly outward. Indeed, Moses' journey is about personal change, and growth into a person that can balance their feelings of anger and love, and that the only real treasure worth obtaining is a quiet happiness.

It is in this way that *Monsieur Ibrahim* and Paulo Coelho's 1988 novella *The Alchemist* contains many parallels. Coelho's narrative reading more closely as a self-help book (Cowles 2009) told via Santiago's story, however remaining faithful to *Monsieur Ibrahim*, in style, humor, and reliance on religious mysticism. In both tales, Santiago and Moses must navigate through this transitory period in their lives in which they begin to define themselves as the men they would like to become. In particular, Moses' relation with his father undermined Moses' self-image, or any aspiration if his by his father's consistent comparison of his son to a nonexistent older-brother of Moses. Additionally, Moses' relation with the prostitutes in his neighborhood only reinforced a notion on what he thought it meant to be a man. More explicitly, Moses equated his sexual progress as a metric of his masculinity exploiting his childhood savings, and common courtesy as a means to have sex, often times citing his humble age as a determinant for his availability.

Santiago's story doesn't begin as bleak as Moses. Santiago amicably defected from his parent's wishes to enter seminary and became a sheep shepherd. Inasmuch as Moses' experience with his father was very negative, Santiago's wasn't. However, the dialogue between the two conveyed a quiet

disappointment from the father as he remarked "... and someday you'll learn that our countryside is the best, and our women the most beautiful." While Santiago did not abbreviate his sexual maturation as did Moses, his encounter with the merchant's daughter early in the story underscored a pull between what was culturally acceptable for a male youth to be. Santiago's literacy and occupation being a Shepard were generally mutually exclusive and gave an opportunity for the merchant's daughter to question him about his reading.

Both characters deal with different forces attempting to change their something distinct about them, and work to shape them into a perceived "correct" image. Both parental figures contended that their imaging of their child to be the most fitting, while making their children extremely unhappy. While at the same time, both characters are attempting to fit themselves into mold of a person is not compatible with who they are. It is in this way, that in an attempt to remove the differences from themselves that they manage to alienate themselves further. Moses can not be the quiet bookish type his father would prefer nor in his youth can he successfully act in a hyper-masculine with the prostitutes, as Santiago can not want to be a priest nor can he entertain a lasting relationship as the case was with the merchant's daughter.

Enter the saviors of the stories: the film's namesake Monsieur Ibrahim, and a slew of characters from Biblical canon and Arabic mystique in the alchemist both give our heroes a new perspective on what they can grow into. Both borrow heavily from Semitic religions, and send our characters east to discover a great treasure, only to discover the real treasure to be found at the journey's origin. But it's here the parallels depart. Unlike the sage characters in *The Alchemist*, Moses wasn't sold on journey by some vague idea of treasure. In fact, the physical journey played an extremely minor role in the film, giving way to the real heart of Moses and Ibrahim's time together. Ibrahim shared very real and dear parts of himself and his culture with Moses in such a way that the mere exposure to it was so profound

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that it changed the very lens on Moses' life. Moses remarking not even at the journey's end "My head's clear. All my hatred" as to indicate a substantial change. Ultimately, Moses' change comes down to a choice of personal acceptance. In the same vein of kindness that Ibrahim treated Moses, and in turn Moses chose Ibrahim as his father; Moses granted himself that same kindness and grew into a man of greater spirit than what had been previously available to him.

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Works Cited

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