

IJTIMOIIY FANLAR

SYMBOLS OF INITIATION IN THE NOVEL “MAGUS”

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Abstract: This paper explores the symbolic elements in John Fowles' novel *The Magus*, focusing on how they contribute to the theme of initiation and personal transformation. Central symbols such as the labyrinth, masks, death and rebirth, the godgame, and the island of Phraxos are examined as metaphors for the psychological and emotional trials faced by the protagonist, Nicholas Urfe. These symbols highlight the non-linear nature of self-discovery, emphasizing that initiation requires disorientation, loss, and the stripping away of false identities. Death and rebirth signal moments of loss and renewal, illustrating that transformation demands the destruction of previous beliefs and relationships. The godgame symbolizes life's unpredictability and the necessity of embracing ambiguity. Through these symbolic elements, *The Magus* suggests that initiation is not a single event but an ongoing process, requiring the individual to navigate uncertainty and transformation continually.

СИМВОЛЫ ПОСВЯЩЕНИЯ В РОМАНЕ «ВОЛХ»

Ключевые слова:

лабиринт,
маски,
смерть и
возрождение,
игра богов,
интертекстуаль-
ность, персонаж,

Аннотация: В данной статье исследуются символические элементы романа Джона Фаулза «Волхв», уделяя особое внимание тому, как они способствуют теме инициации и личной трансформации. Центральные символы, такие как лабиринт, маски, смерть и возрождение, игра богов и остров Фраксос, рассматриваются как метафоры психологических и эмоциональных испытаний, с которыми сталкивается главный герой Николас Урфе. Эти

символы,
переживания.

символы подчеркивают нелинейный характер самопознания, подчеркивая, что инициация требует дезориентации, потери и избавления от ложных личностей. Смерть и возрождение сигнализируют о моментах утраты и обновления, иллюстрируя, что трансформация требует разрушения предыдущих убеждений и отношений. Игра богов символизирует непредсказуемость жизни и необходимость принятия двусмысленности. Посредством этих символических элементов «Волхв» предполагает, что инициация — это не отдельное событие, а непрерывный процесс, требующий от человека постоянного преодоления неопределенности и трансформации.

“AFSUNGAR” ROMANIDAGI TANLANGAN RAMZLAR

Kalit soʻzlar:
labirint, niqoblar,
oʻlim va qayta
tugʻilish,
xudo oʻyini,
intertekstuallik,
xarakter,
ramzlar, tajribalar

Anotatsiya: Ushbu maqola Jon Faulzning “Afsungar” romanidagi ramziy elementlarni oʻrganib, ular tashabbus va shaxsiy oʻzgarish mavzusiga qanday hissa qoʻshishiga eʼtibor qaratadi. Labirint, niqoblar, oʻlim va qayta tugʻilish, xudo oʻyini va Phraxos oroli kabi markaziy ramzlar bosh qahramon Nikolay Urfe duch kelgan psixologik va hissiy sinovlar uchun metafora sifatida koʻrib chiqiladi. Ushbu ramzlar oʻz-oʻzini kashf qilishning chiziqli boʻlmagan xususiyatini taʼkidlab, boshlash uchun yoʻnalishni yoʻqotish, yolgʻon identifikatorlardan xalos boʻlishni talab qilishini taʼkidlaydi. Oʻlim va qayta tugʻilish, yoʻqotish va yangilanish lahzalarini bildiradi, bu transformatsiya avvalgi eʼtiqod va munosabatlarni yoʻq qilishni talab qilishini koʻrsatadi. Xudo oʻyini hayotning oldindan aytib boʻlmaydiganligini va noaniqlikni qabul qilish zarurligini anglatadi. Ushbu ramziy elementlar orqali “Afsungar” tashabbusni yagona hodisa emas, balki doimiy jarayon ekanligini va shaxsdan noaniqlik va oʻzgarishlarni doimiy ravishda boshqarishni talab qiladi.

INTRODUCTION

In *The Magus* by John Fowles, the protagonist Nicholas Urfe embarks on a transformative journey that resembles an initiation into deeper self-awareness. The novel is structured around a series of bewildering experiences designed by the enigmatic Maurice Conchis, each challenging Nicholas to confront illusions, personal

insecurities, and emotional truths. Throughout this psychological odyssey, Fowles weaves potent symbols such as the labyrinth, masks, and death and rebirth, which reflect the archetypal stages of initiation. These symbols not only illustrate Nicholas's struggle to strip away false identities and understand his authentic self, but they also evoke universal themes of growth, loss, and renewal. Ultimately, *The Magus* explores how initiation is not about finding definitive answers but about learning to embrace uncertainty and change as essential elements of the human experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The primary material for this learning is John Fowles' novel, *The Magus* (revised edition, 1977). Specific passages involving key symbolic elements such as the labyrinth, masks, and death and rebirth are analyzed to explore how these motifs contribute to Nicholas Urfe's initiation.

Additional secondary sources include: critical essays and literary analyses of *The Magus* that discuss themes of identity, existentialism, and transformation.

Jungian psychology and mythological studies, which provide theoretical frameworks for understanding archetypal initiation.

Comparative literature on initiation rites and symbolism from classical myths (e.g., the Theseus and the Minotaur myth) to highlight the influence of ancient narratives on Fowles' work.

Moreover, this study employs a symbolic and thematic analysis to examine how the recurring motifs in *The Magus* reflect the stages of initiation. The methodology involves the following steps: textual analysis: thematic categorization, disciplinary approach, synthesis, and interpretation.

The Magus is told from the point of view of Nicholas Urfe, who is bored with life. Having attended Oxford and taught for a year at a public school, he decides to take a position as the English teacher at the Lord Bryon School in Greece, on the island of Phraxos. Nicholas looks up a former teacher there and is warned to "beware of the waiting room", without explanation. Nicholas is not deterred, but during the last few weeks before he leaves, he meets Alison Kelly, an Australian girl who is about to begin training as an airline stewardess. They are both sophisticated about sex and somewhat cynical, but each experiences some regret as they go their separate ways [1].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The themes we are describing from *The Magus* by John Fowles are rich with symbolic meaning, reflecting Nicholas's journey of self-discovery and transformation. The novel's themes of initiation, myth, and performativity focus on how Nicholas Urfe undergoes a psychological transformation through a symbolic "godgame" [2].

1. Labyrinth: The labyrinth represents the complex and often surprising path of life and personal growth. Like Theseus in Greek mythology, Nicholas must navigate this metaphorical labyrinth, encountering challenges and revelations that challenge his

identity, desires, and beliefs. His journey through the Labyrinth is both external, within the strange events of Bourani, and internal as he confronts the complexities of his psyche.

2. **Masks and Role-Playing:** Magus characters engage in deception and manipulation, often taking on roles and identities that blur the lines between reality and illusion. It represents a process of self-discovery where people have to peel back the layers of their personality to reveal their true selves. Conchis, in particular, embodies the role of a manipulative puppet master, using masks to guide Nicholas through a series of psychological tests, which he says reflect how life can force us to face our own masks. .

3. **Death and Rebirth:** The motif of death and rebirth is central to Nicholas's psychological transformation. His journey requires him to let go of old beliefs, illusions, and attachments in order to gain a deeper self-awareness and “rebirth”, especially in his relationship with Alison. This symbolic death and rebirth parallels classic hero’s journey stories in which the hero undergoes profound transformation through suffering and enlightenment.

4. **The Island of Phraxos: Example:** The remote, isolated nature of Phraxos serves as a symbolic setting for Nicholas’s transformation. **Scene:** Nicholas initially arrives on the island seeking freedom and escape from his mundane life in England, but he soon realizes that the island holds deeper psychological challenges. **Significance:** The island acts as a liminal space—where Nicholas is cut off from his old life and subjected to trials that will reshape his identity. It mirrors ancient myths where heroes undergo transformative journeys on remote islands.

5. **The Rose: Example:** During one of Nicholas’s encounters with Lily, she gives him a rose, which later withers and dies. **Scene:** The fleeting beauty of the rose reflects the brief romantic moments Nicholas shares with Lily/Julie, which are ultimately revealed to be illusory. **Significance:** The rose symbolizes both the allure and fragility of idealized love. Its decay hints at the impermanence of beauty and relationships, reinforcing the novel’s theme of loss and disillusionment.

6. **Alison as the Anima: Example:** Alison, though initially undervalued by Nicholas, becomes a crucial figure in his psychological development. **Scene:** After believing she is dead, Nicholas learns the truth—that Alison has been alive all along, and his misunderstanding of their relationship was part of his emotional immaturity. **Significance:** Alison represents Nicholas’s emotional and feminine side (his anima). Recognizing her importance is a step towards integrating his rational and emotional selves.

7. **Mirrors: Example:** Nicholas frequently faces moments of self-reflection, both literal and metaphorical. **Scene:** At several points, Conchis forces Nicholas to confront himself—through reenactments and psychological games that act as mirrors of his

behavior and beliefs. **Significance:** The mirrors symbolize the need for self-examination. Nicholas must look beyond illusions and face his flaws honestly to achieve personal growth.

The narrative mirrors the three phases of initiation found in many rites of passage: *separation* Nicholas isolates himself from his old life in England, breaking away from his relationship with Alison and arriving on Phraxos. This stage represents a severing of past connections and an entry into an unfamiliar realm.

Liminality (Trial and Transformation): The bulk of the novel occurs in this liminal phase. Conchis subjects Nicholas to a series of surreal experiences—psychological manipulation, reenactments of historical events, and encounters with multiple identities. Here, Nicholas is suspended between reality and illusion, forced to question not only his beliefs but his very sense of self.

Reintegration: By the end of the novel, Nicholas's transformation is incomplete but profound. He returns to the "real world" with a deeper awareness of the complexities of human nature and the fragility of truth. His ambiguous reunion with Alison suggests that his initiation is not a final resolution but an open-ended process of continuous learning. In contrast to Nicholas, Alison not only behaves according to her own ideas and values instead of trying to cast herself in a preconceived role for the benefit of others, but she also sees through the pretenses of Nicholas:

"I drove some way before she spoke again".

"You treated me as if I didn't really belong to you".

"Don't be silly".

"As if I'm a bloody abo".

"Rubbish".

"In case my pants fell down or something".

"It's so difficult to explain".

"Not to me, sport. Not to me". [M; 36]

By the time he is writing, however, Nicholas has learned to adopt a more critical attitude towards his past behavior. Talking about the fascination that existentialism had for him in his student days, Nicholas is aware that they didn't understand what existentialism was all about, for they tried to simply imitate the heroes of the existentialist novels they were reading, "mistaking metaphorical descriptions of complex modes of feeling for straightforward prescriptions of behavior" [M; 17]. The existentialist mask is only one of the various roles that Nicholas adopts to justify his own behavior. Unable to see through his own pretenses, he continues in a simile vein during his first days in Greece: *"At half-term, I went with Demetriades to Athens. He wanted to take me to his favorite brothel in a suburb. He assured me the girls were clean. I hesitated, then – isn't it a poet's, to say nothing of a cynic's, moral duty to be immoral? I went."* [M; 54]

In contrast to Nicholas, Alison is a lot more aware of the realities that surround them both. When she comes to Athens to meet him, and he tells her about the mysterious experiences he had on Phraxos, she offers a very plausible explanation for the fact that Nicholas considers his experiences to be mysterious: *“All those mystery balls. You think I fall for that? There’s some girl on your island and you want to lay her. That’s all. But of course that’s nasty; that’s crude. So you tart it up. As usual. Tart it up so it makes you seem the innocent one, the great intellectual who must have his experience. Always both ways. Always cake and eat it. Always”* [M; 274].

Here, it needs to be pointed out that, as some of the interpretations of the symbols and experiences he’s confronted with collapse while others again are confirmed, it becomes obvious that he believes some of the interpretations that he advances not because of their inner plausibility but because they are in keeping with Nicholas preferences. Rommerskirchen has analyzed this phenomenon for the exemplary situation of Julie’s revelation that both she and her sister are actresses hired by Conchis. Nicholas is prone to believe this explanation because it comes close to his own preconception of seeing women in terms of the madonna/whore complex (a very prominent theme in Fowles’ fiction): *“He uses his images of Lily-Julie and Alison to confirm the images he has created of each other; in Alison’s behavior, he always sees the complete opposite of the way he believes Lily-Julie would behave”*.

CONCLUSION

Hence, the novel illustrates such postmodern techniques as intertextuality (“Robinson Crusoe” by Daniel Defoe and Twelfth Night a play, William Shakespeare’s comedy), existence and the extremes of human sufferings, historical events like [3] an apparition of the Reverend Robert Foulkes, executed in 1679 for murdering his unborn child; Conchis’ desertion of his trench-bound military unit during the First World War; a mythic masque depicting Apollo and Artemis; and finally, the execution of Greek villagers, where, during the German occupation, Conchis had, he implies, been mayor. The symbols of the labyrinth, masks, and death and rebirth converge to illustrate the complexity of Nicholas’s journey toward self-awareness. Each symbol reveals a layer of his psychological and emotional transformation. The labyrinth captures the non-linear nature of self-discovery, emphasizing that true understanding requires navigating uncertainty and confusion. The masks and role-playing highlight the fluidity of identity, showing that confronting one’s authentic self involves peeling away illusions. Finally, the theme of death and rebirth underscores that personal growth is only possible through the destruction of old beliefs and ego. Through these intertwined symbols, *The Magus* suggests that life is an enigmatic process of initiation, where meaning emerges not from clear answers but from enduring the challenges of self-exploration.

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