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Elements of the Court Masque in *The Magus* by John Fowles

Elementy maski dworskiej w *Magu* Johna Fowlesa

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The Magus by John Fowles is often analyzed as an example of a postmodernist novel. Although it is not as experimental as the works of John Barth or Italo Calvino, it does contain certain features of postmodernist writing, one of them being great generic syncretism. The novel contains characteristic features and motifs taken from various genres, such as the romance in its many variations, the gothic novel, the detective novel, the Bildungsroman, the novel of manners, as well as the masque.

The last of the above mentioned genres plays a very important role at the level of the world presented in the novel – it helps the main protagonist understand his ordeal – as well as at the level of the implied reader, since the masque patently shapes the novel's construction and interpretation. The aim of the following article is to trace the elements of the masque in Fowles's novel and to examine the extent to which they influence the interpretation of the events by the main protagonist and the interpretation of the whole book by the reader. Since the masque has been extinct as a genre for a few centuries, the first part of the article will be devoted to a short description of the genre itself, with particular attention paid to those characteristics which will reappear in the study of the novel. The second part of the paper will be devoted to tracing the elements of the masque in *The Magus* in its two forms, namely the masque as a theatrical genre (the masque-in-performance) as well as a literary one (the literary masque). The analysis of the masque elements in Fowles's book would not be complete without references to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as this play – which also contains many elements of the masque – is the most important intertext in the novel. Finally, the author will try to examine the influence of the masque elements on the way the novel is perceived and interpreted by the reader.

What is meant by the masque in the novel and the following paper is the court masque, which was a theatrical genre popular in the 16th and 17th centuries in England – especially during the reign of James I and Charles I¹ – as well as in Italy and France. The masque was a very eclectic form comprised of verbal and non-verbal elements, a mixture of poetry, dialogue and monologue, pantomime, dance and music. It was also very spectacular as it required sumptuous costumes and masks, complicated stage design, sometimes even included special effects created by means of ingenious machinery². As a result, shows like this were extraordinary and unique. However, not everyone could enjoy them as masques were a form of courtly entertainment and they were not staged in public theatres.

In a typical masque professional actors and courtiers performed disguised as mythological figures and participated in a simple plot with an allegorical meaning, followed by the removal of masks and a joint dance known as revels³, in which some members of the audience took part⁴ along with the courtiers. Masques required the presence of the King or/and some other members of the Royal Family, as the main aim of the masque was to celebrate the monarch and his or her divine qualities. The throne was usually placed opposite the stage, on the other side of the dance floor, thus providing the monarch with the best view and underlining his or her role as the guest of honour. It was the monarch who was the focal point of the masque and the recipient of the allegorical message behind the show. He could also interfere in the show or even stop it at any moment⁵.

Symbolically almost always masques represented order and harmony, whereas antimasques – introduced by Ben Jonson⁶ – were grotesque, humorous and presented a lack of harmony which was restored in the masque proper. In the antimasque or antimasques preceding the main masque professional actors usually featured as bizarre characters (e.g. witches, peasants, even objects) representing various vices such as ignorance or gluttony. Their performance was interrupted by loud music and the actors were replaced by courtiers who embodied virtues such as chastity or bravery. After that the masque proper started, in which dialogues and monologues mixed with music and songs. Later the individuals on stage came down and

¹ See J. Limon, *The Masque of the Stuart Culture*, 1990, p.17.

² See D. Daniell, *The Tempest. An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism*, London, 1989, p. 19.

³ See A. Daye, *Youthful Revels, Masks, and Courtly Sights: an introductory study of the revels within the Stuart masque*, "Historical Dance", 1996, 3 (4), pp. 5–22.

⁴ See C. Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, New York, 2001, p. 148.

⁵ See J. Limon, *The Masque of the Stuart Culture*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁶ The purpose of introducing antimasques was to create a foil to the main masque or to allow the main masque to provide a resolution. See S. Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, New York, 1981, p. 76.

asked some members of the audience to dance with them, which led to characteristic "breakdown of the barrier between stage and spectator"⁷. After the dance the masquers were called back to the stage with a song or a monologue, and left the stage soon afterwards.

Of course, the masque genre evolved and took slightly different forms⁸ at different stages of its development, but in its prime time (the Stuart masque) it had the form described above. Thus, the structure of the masque can be summarized as follows: 1. introduction / prologue 2. antimasque or antimasques 3. the masque proper 4. communal dance (revels) 5. epilogue. The last element was not always present, sometimes the revels were the final act of the show. There were also a few masques without revels, but such instances were extremely rare.

As was said, each masque was an original and unique phenomenon; rarely was it staged more than once, mainly because it required a lot of preparation and the cooperation of a number of professionals – a poet, an architect, a composer, a choreographer – working under the supervision of the masque manager. Masques were performed at court and in aristocrats' houses, so this form of entertainment was reserved for a small group of viewers. Moreover, such performances were often prepared at the request of the monarch or a nobleman (and sponsored by them⁹), usually to celebrate an important event such as a wedding or a visit of foreign dignitaries¹⁰. Allegorical figures appearing in the masque – usually taken from the Greek or Roman mythology – were supposed to symbolize members of the court, so they were a good means of self-promotion and self-glorification of the court and the monarch, who was presented as a God figure with the power to unify and bring harmony.

What is more, this progress from chaos into order was presented in the form of a ritual. The masque was highly ritualistic and it was the main feature distinguishing it from a traditional drama¹¹ – it was not a drama, but "a courtly ritual (with elements of drama)"¹². The masque genre seems to resemble liturgy, it was a "secular counterpart to the cult of religious images"¹³. Such a perception of the masque is supported by the fact that the

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸ Anne Daye proposes a division into six kinds of masques: the march, the professional masque, the noble masque, the masque with ante-masque, the running masque, the masque to present a banquet. See A. Daye, *Youthful Revels*, op. cit., p. 8.

⁹ See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage, Volume 1*, Oxford, 1951, p. 155.

¹⁰ See L. Barroll, *Inventing the Stuart Masque*, in: *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, D. Bevington, O. Holbrook (eds.), Cambridge, 1998, p. 123.

¹¹ See T. Demaibus, *Ritual, Ostension and the Divine in the Stuart Masque*, "Literature & Theology", 2003, 17 (3), pp. 299-301.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹³ D. Norbook, *The Reformation of the Masque*, in: *The Court Masque*, D. Lindley (ed.), Manchester, 1984, p. 97.

world presented in it actually consisted of two spheres, the real one (the court) and the metaphysical one, the latter being much more prominent. Thus, the essence of the masque was – as Stephen Orgel proves – “Allegory, symbol, and myth”¹⁴.

The above mentioned features of the masque characterize it as a theatrical spectacle. However, it was not the only form the masque took. Jerzy Limon makes a distinction between what he calls the masque-in-performance and the literary masque. The former is the realization of the masque on stage, as described above. The latter is divided into two types, a dramatic and nondramatic masque. The dramatic masque (or the literary pre-text) was its written form before the performance and it was part of the scenario. The scenario consisted of the poetic part of the masque (the dramatic masque) – dialogues, monologues, lyrics – as well as stage directions, drawings of stage design, costumes and other non-verbal elements of the performance¹⁵, thus Limon describes the scenario as “syncretic”¹⁶. It was usually written by several people involved in the production of the masque (at least four – the poet, the stage designer, the composer, the choreographer), whereas the dramatic masque had only one author (the poet). Masques were hardly ever published in such a form. The vast majority of the extant printed texts are masques in their nondramatic form (the post-performance or the literary masque). These are masques written after the actual performance took place. They contain journalistic narrative passages¹⁷ – written in the first person and in the past tense reports of performances already seen – as well as marginal notes, descriptions of the audience’s (and the monarch’s) reactions. They often include forewords, authorial notes, references to criticism as well as explanations of the allegorical meaning of the spectacles (sometimes the viewers did not understand or misunderstood masques). There are no stage directions in the literary masque, as it does not need to project the staging of the masque; it describes a performance which has already taken place.

The Magus reinvents¹⁸ the masque genre in its two forms described above – the masque-in-performance and the literary (nondramatic) masque – which must be discussed separately, because – as Limon proves – these

¹⁴ S. Orgel, *The Poetics of Spectacle*, “New Literary History” 1971, 2 (3), p. 384.

¹⁵ See J. Limon, *The Masque of the Stuart Culture*, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ What is meant by «reinvention» here is not “making as if for the first time something already invented” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online - definition 1) but “remaking or redoing” (definition 2), creating a different, contemporary variant of the genre which ceased to exist in the 17th century. *The Magus* is not a masque, but alludes to it very extensively and uses many elements of the genres, but not all. The elements which are used, though, play a vital role in the structure of the novel and form an integral part of the action as well as the meaning of the book.

two subgenres represent totally different sign systems (theatre and literature) and thus they “create meanings in a different way, but also (...) these meanings are essentially different”¹⁹. To be precise, theatre creates meaning by means of ostension – “an act or process of showing, pointing out, or exhibiting”²⁰ combined with the verbal element, whereas literature by describing, explaining or defining²¹, so the verbal element only. Another difference is that theatre and literature are aimed at totally distinct recipients, the spectator and the reader respectively. Therefore, the masque-in-performance should be analyzed from the perspective of the spectator, while the literary masque – from the perspective of the reader.

The spectator in the case of the masque staged in *The Magus* is Nicholas Urfe, the main protagonist and the narrator of the novel. Throughout the book, the hero gets entangled in a strange game, a sort of a psychological experiment conducted by a rich and eccentric elderly man called Conchis. In the experiment Nicholas is exposed to a lot of stimuli in the form of countless literary works (fiction and non-fiction) and spoken tales, the most prominent of which is Conchis’s autobiography, but also inexplicable and bizarre events as well as stupefying spectacles. The world in which the protagonist is immersed is highly theatrical and ritualistic, and almost from the beginning of his experience Nicholas refers to it as “the masque”.

The analogy between the experiment and the masque is suggested by Conchis himself, when he presents Nicholas with a copy of *Le Masque Français au Dix-huitième Siècle*. The protagonist is asked to read a selected passage describing the inhabitants of Saint-Martin entertaining themselves:

Visitors who went behind the high walls of Saint-Martin had the pleasure of seeing, across the green lawns and among the groves, shepherds and shepherdesses who danced and sang, surrounded by their white flocks. They were not always dressed in eighteenth-century clothes. Sometimes they wore costumes in the Roman and Greek styles; and this way the odes of Theocritus and the bucolics of Virgil were brought to life. It was even said that there were more scandalous scenes – charming nymphs who on summer nights fled in the moonlight from strange dark shapes, half man, half goat...²²

From that moment Nicholas treats everything he experiences as parts of a theatrical play. After reading the above passage, he says: “At last I began to see plain. All that happened at Bourani was in the nature of a private masque (...)”²³.

¹⁹ J. Limon, *The Masque of the Stuart Culture*, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁰ Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> (definition 1)

²¹ See K. Elam’s *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, London, 1980, p. 30.

²² J. Fowles, *The Magus*, London, 1997, p. 165.

²³ Ibid., p. 165. As a well-read person educated at Oxford and specializing in literature, the protagonist undoubtedly knows the masque genre very well. Thus, he can easily catch the likeness between Conchis’s enterprise and the court masque. He also realizes that the masque is staged specially for him and his role is to be its participant and spectator at the same time.

The word “masque” is used by Nicholas over forty times throughout the novel, which in itself emphasizes the importance of this genre, especially in the protagonist’s perception of the events. Whenever Nicholas feels confused or bewildered, he processes his experiences through the prism of this theatrical form: “After all, it was a masque, and I wanted (...) to play my part.”²⁴, “(...) the masque, the masque: it fascinated and irritated me, like an obscure poem.”²⁵, “(...) he was inventing a new stage of the masque.”²⁶, “The masque had moved outside the domaine(...)”²⁷. While describing his ordeal, Nicholas also uses other words belonging to the semantic field of the theatre, such as “stage”, “mask”, “actors”, “play”, “script”, “costume” “cast”, “rehearsal”, “plot”, “act”, “sequel”, “stage property”.

The world of illusion in which the protagonist is immersed has the same features and performs the same functions as the court masque. First of all, the novel abounds in references and allusions to classical mythology, and mythological characters actually appear in a number of scenes. The world presented is also full of poetry – the main hero frequently reads or even writes poems, all of which are quoted in the novel – and music. The latter is mainly performed by Conchis, who often plays the harpsichord, on one occasion with Lily accompanying him on the flute. However, music in *The Magus* may be understood in a wider sense as all the sounds which penetrate the island – including the sounds of nature – and make it a unique, magical place. This special significance of aural sensations is emphasized by Lily when she quotes Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: “Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs, that are delight, and hurt not”²⁸. Music is ubiquitous in the novel and functions as an expression of order and harmony which the protagonist lacks.

Some of the spectacles staged by Conchis resemble court masques not only because of mythological or supernatural characters – the world is governed by fairy-tale laws, which makes anything possible – but also because they are as elaborate and sumptuous as masques. Nicholas is clearly very impressed with the complexity and precision of the spectacles, he even tries to calculate how much it must cost Conchis to make such an enterprise work.

Another masque element in the novel is the presence of the monarch figure (Conchis) who initiates and manages the show which also conveys some allegorical meaning – the characters often refer to the masque as “a metaphor”. Allegory, symbol and myth are at the core of the novel in the same way they underlie the court masque.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 169.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 224.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 373.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 204.

What is more, the experiment conducted by Conchis has the same purpose as the court masque – it is designed to represent a progress from chaos to harmony and lead to the transformation of the main hero. All this happens in a masque-like atmosphere of a ritual in which the world of the real mixes with the world of the unreal or metaphysical. Consequently, the world presented in the novel consists of two spheres and – like in the masque – the metaphysical one is much more prominent.

Like the court masque, Conchis's experiment is unique, it is especially tailored for that particular participant (Nicholas). We know that Conchis has been doing this experiment for many years and Nicholas is by no means the only "guinea pig" he has had, there were many others before him (other teachers on Phraxos, e.g. Leverrier, Mitford) and there will be others after him. In fact, in the last part of the novel Nicholas meets his successor and knows he will be subjected to a similar ordeal. The experience of each man is totally different because they are different, thus "the meanings generated during the particular performance are unique for the occasion and cannot be retrieved"²⁹.

Despite all the above mentioned similarities to the court masque, however, Conchis's experiment is not a typical masque (and neither is the novel as a whole), but a reinvention of the genre. The main difference is that in a typical masque music, dance and spectacle were much more important than words³⁰, whereas in the world created by Conchis words are of paramount importance, especially Conchis's own narration, but also other written and spoken tales. Therefore, the spectacles bearing masque-like features are not staged for their own sake, but function as illustrations to those tales and help the hero understand the stories as well as the events on the island.

As was said, there are numerous scenes in the novel which have the character of a private masque. One of them is the "mythological scene" in chapter 29. While Conchis is telling Nicholas and Lily his biography, his yarn is suddenly interrupted by the sound of a horn. The characters, who are seated on the terrace of Conchis's villa, have a perfect view of the beach, where they can see a very unusual scene. There appears a naked man in a laurel wreath (Apollo), a naked woman in antique sandals (a nymph), a satyr (half-man, half-goat) with an enormous and erect penis, and a goddess clad in a gladiator's outfit (Artemis). The satyr chases the nymph who disappears in the forest. Artemis kills the satyr with an arrow shot from her bow, after which she and her brother Apollo bow, greet the audience and disappear. This scene takes place soon after Nicholas reads the passage from

²⁹ J. Limon, *The Masque of the Stuart Culture*, op. cit., p. 30.

³⁰ See K. Whitlock, *Shakespeare's The Tempest: Some Thought Experiments*, "Sederi" 1999, X, p. 172.

Le Masque... and it is undoubtedly designed to be an example of “more scandalous scenes” in which “charming nymphs (...) fled in the moonlight from strange dark shapes, half man, half goat (...)”³¹. Nicholas sees the analogy very well. What he does not understand yet is that the performance is a metaphor referring to him – it is him who is the satyr.

Another scene like this occurs in chapter 31. Nicholas is coming back to the villa after secretly meeting Lily. Suddenly he sees two figures on the terrace, a girl who looks exactly like Lily (he does not know yet that she has a twin sister) and a mysterious creature: “(...) the figure was all in black, shrouded in the sun, and wearing the most sinister mask I had ever seen: the head of an enormous jackal, with a long muzzle and high pointed ears”³². The figure is Anubis, an Egyptian god associated with mummification and the afterlife. Nicholas is aware of the fact that the scene is just another element of the masque and this time he realizes that the sinister figure of the god refers to him: “I had (...) no belief that this was more than another nasty twist in the masque, a black inversion of the scene on the beach”³³.

The two scenes described above undoubtedly resemble the court masque – there are actors playing some mythological figures, there is an audience of some special people (Conchis often emphasizes that he, and probably Nicholas as well, are among the “elect”³⁴), finally there is a metaphor behind these performances which the audience (Nicholas) has to decipher. Moreover, the scenes represent certain vices and lack of harmony in the protagonist’s mind and life³⁵. Thus, they can be treated as examples of antimasques.

Another scene with antimasque qualities is Nicholas’s encounter with two strange individuals (a man and a girl) whom he is expected to regard as ghosts. The individuals in question are Robert Foulkes and the girl murdered by him, and the encounter takes place soon after Nicholas reads Foulkes’s autobiography given to him by Conchis.

The three scenes described above – the “mythological scene”, the scene with Anubis and the scene with the ghosts – function as pictorial tableaux, as no words are uttered and Nicholas has to interpret them using only visual sensations. Thus, they are like dumb shows – “short pieces of silent action or mime included in a play, a common device in Elizabethan and

³¹ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, op. cit., p. 165.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 199.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

³⁴ This is strictly connected with Fowles concept of «the few» and «the many», the two groups into which he divides the human race. By saying that Nicholas is «elect», he means that he belongs to «the few», people who are intellectually and morally above the rest of the society.

³⁵ Nicholas’s mental disharmony is particularly evident in his attitude to women. He treats them solely as sexual objects and is unable to experience any deeper feelings. He is unable to love, and one of Conchis’s aims is to change that.

Jacobean drama”³⁶ – which were also used in the court masque. All these dumb shows are used to present the protagonist’s vices, but also to prepare him for the ensuing masque proper. They are what McNamara calls “scenes of chaos” whose purpose is to give “the courtly spectators a bit of a thrill before the triumph of the monarch over the now visible enemy”³⁷. In this case this enemy is Nicholas himself, his vices and his inauthenticity, but also great scepticism which he has to overcome in order to appreciate the masque.

The masque proper – and at the same time the most spectacular masque-like scene in the novel – is presented in chapter 61, which is devoted to the symbolic trial of the main hero. The scene is permeated with the imagery and symbols characteristic of the court masque. The place is also designed to resemble a typical masque stage. Nicholas is led into a huge room with a podium on which there is a throne, he is seated on it bound and gagged and witnesses a spectacular entrance of the most bizarre characters wearing sophisticated costumes and masks: Herne the Hunter, a witch, a man with a crocodile head, an Aztec, a female vampire, an African, a succubus, a pierrot-skeleton, a fish-woman-bird, Anubis, a magician, a corn-doll, a goat-figure. There is also a coffin-sedan with the symbols of Artemis-Diana, which is carried into the room by four men in grotesque masks. After a while of anticipation, Nicholas sees the figures remove their masks and costumes. A group of students enters the room and Nicholas’s trial begins, which turns out to be a pseudo-psychological analysis of his personality and the people behind the masks appear to be specialists in psychology and psychiatry.

Undoubtedly, the scene described above is highly ritualistic. It is also constructed as a masque in miniature. However, the genre is subverted and parodied here. Although on the surface it resembles the main masque of the court entertainment – the participants take off their masks and Nicholas is given the role of the monarch figure – the scene is also extremely grotesque and filled with brutality (Nicholas is bound to the throne and gagged). Thus, it is another echo of *Le Masque...* Moreover, there are no revels after the removal of the masks and the show is not designed to glorify the “monarch”. On the contrary, Nicholas is presented with a description of his personality which is far from being flattering. He is described as an egoist, a cynic, a liar, a coward and a traitor. Such a picture of the protagonist’s personality seems a bit exaggerated, but it is rather accurate. Nicholas himself – despite his wrath and hatred – accepts some aspects of it: “There was a grain of truth in what she was saying”³⁸. Thus, Nicholas starts to appreciate the

³⁶ C. Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, op. cit., p. 73.

³⁷ K. McNamara, *Golden Worlds at Court: The Tempest and Its Masque*, “Shakespeare Studies”1987, 19, p. 185.

³⁸ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, op. cit., p. 511.

allegorical meaning of the masque, although he is yet to reach a full understanding of it. This is why the typical structure of the court masque is subverted in the trial chapter. Applying a typical masque structure would entail restoring harmony and the glorification of the King (Nicholas). These are, as was stated before, the main aims of the masque genre. Nicholas in chapter 61 is far from being in harmony with himself and the rest of the world and, consequently, he is not worth glorifying yet.

The scenes which follow the trial are even more violent and grotesque. First, Nicholas is given a chance to flog Lily, which he eventually declines. Later, it is Nicholas who is bound to the flogging frame and he is made to watch a pornographic film with Lily. Then he is confronted with a live performance in which the girl has sex with Joe in front of Nicholas's eyes. The scene is referred to as "disintoxication" and may be interpreted as a metaphorical flogging of the main protagonist and its aim is to help him overcome his infatuation with Lily. These two scenes, again, have the qualities of antimasques. Placing antimasques after the main masque is rather unusual and it helps to postpone the masque-like resolution of the story.

In the passages analyzed so far Nicholas refers to the masque genre explicitly, he openly talks about the masque and its elements. However, the analogy between Conchis's experiment and the court masque is also suggested implicitly, namely by numerous references and allusions to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a play which also contains elements of the court masque.

The analogy is, again, suggested to Nicholas by Conchis during their first encounter: "Come now. Prospero will show you his domaine"³⁹. Conchis's referring to himself as Prospero triggers in Nicholas's mind a chain of associations between his experiences at Bourani and Shakespeare's play. As a result, he often looks at the events on the island through the prism of *The Tempest*. The novel has ten direct references to the play, even a quotation, as well as numerous allusions. At one point, for instance, when Julie disappears, Nicholas the narrator says: "She had vanished into thin air"⁴⁰. He refers to the same passage of *The Tempest* after discovering Conchis's grave: "(...) detective work would lead me nowhere – to a false grave, to yet another joke, a smile fading into thin air"⁴¹. On some other occasion, when he thinks that the game is over, he comments: "(...) I remembered Conchis's fairy-godfather exit: the gay farewell, the fireworks, the bottle of Krug. Our revels are now ended"⁴². All the three passages refer

³⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 450.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 559.

⁴² Ibid., p. 458.

to the words uttered by Shakespearean Prospero at the end of his wedding masque.

Not only does Nicholas perceive Conchis as an incarnation of Shakespearean magician, but he also aspires to the role of Ferdinand. In fact, there are many ways in which the characters of *The Magus* resemble the characters of *The Tempest*: Conchis is like Prospero, Nicholas oscillates between the roles of Ferdinand and Caliban, Lily is seen by the main protagonist as Miranda, but in the end it is Alison who should be treated as Prospero's daughter. There are also many similarities between the two works at their thematic and structural levels. However, tracing all the analogies between *The Magus* and *The Tempest* is not the aim of this article. What is important here is how the references to the play help the reader identify the novel as a reinvention of the court masque. Thus, the focus has to be given to the figures of Prospero and Conchis as the creators of the masques.

The Tempest contains elements, images and figures typical of the court masque. There are songs and dances (revels), mythological and supernatural figures (spirits, nymphs, reapers). The play contains scenes which function as masques or antimasques, and the whole play follows – at least according to some scholars – the structure of the masque. The scene which should be treated as a masque is the betrothal scene (the wedding masque), whereas antimasques are: the scene with Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban chased by “dogs and hounds” and the scene with a vanishing banquet.

The most elaborate of these is the wedding masque in act IV, scene i., which can be treated as a play within a play. In the scene in question Prospero presents his guests with an extraordinary pageant with some mythological figures (Iris, Ceres, Juno) descending from the sky in order to perform some dialogues and songs, and bless the union of Ferdinand and Miranda. Prospero announces their appearance with the words “No tongue! All eyes! Be silent”⁴³. Later on, there appear some reapers and nymphs, who join in “a graceful dance”. Up to that point the scene is a faithful representation of a typical court masque. It is, however, interrupted by “a strange, hollow, and confused noise” and the characters of the masque “heavily vanish”. It is not important here whether or not Prospero had to break the masque, which he finishes with the words “Our revels are now ended. These our actors, / As I foretold you, were all spirits and / Are melted into air, into thin air”⁴⁴. What interests us is that the wedding masque shows Prospero as the creator and controller of the masque. Thus, he functions as a poet and an architect on the one hand (he is like Ben Jonson

⁴³ W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Walton-on-Thames, 1997, p. 97.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

and Inigo Jones in one person⁴⁵), on the other hand he represents the monarch figure. As the latter he has divine qualities, it is his power that can eventually restore peace and harmony, and – just like the King watching a typical Stuart masque – he can stop the masque any time. Because the wedding masque is a miniature of the play, the above mentioned attributes of Prospero can be found in the entire play and the whole play may be treated as a masque, which is supported by the play's ending.

The resolution of *The Tempest* is typical of the court masque – in the end the divine power of the monarch figure (Prospero) restores peace and harmony. The ending is a happy one – Miranda and Ferdinand are happily married, Prospero forgives his treacherous brother and his allies, he regains his dukedom, whereas Ariel gets his longed-for freedom. All the characters, apart from Ariel and Caliban, happily return home.

It is all achieved by means of the illusion which Prospero creates with his art and with the assistance of Ariel and his music. Prospero's art is usually interpreted as theatrical art and the play is indeed permeated with imagery and vocabulary connected with a theatrical production (e.g. "spectacle", "pageant"). Thus, Prospero functions as a playwright and a stage director, whereas Ariel is often seen as his stage assistant. In some interpretations Prospero is even identified with Shakespeare himself and Prospero's final words are interpreted as Shakespeare's farewell to stage⁴⁶.

The attributes ascribed to Prospero can be also found in Conchis, which Nicholas is well aware of. At one point, he says: "Conchis had turned away – to talk with Ariel who put records on (...)"⁴⁷. Later on, he refers to Conchis's royal qualities: "He raised both his arms in his peculiar hieratic way (...) the most ancient royal power. He appeared (...) to bless, to command; *dominus* and his domaine. And once again I thought of Prospero (...)"⁴⁸. Conchis – just like Prospero – creates some kind of illusion in order to

⁴⁵ Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones created quite a few masques together. Jonson was responsible for the poetic part, whereas Jones was the architect famous for his elaborate set designs and special effects. Their fruitful cooperation eventually ended in a dispute over whose role was more important in the creation of the masque. See D. Norbrook, *The Reformation of the Masque in: The Court Masque*, D. Lindley (ed.), Manchester, 1984, p. 97.

⁴⁶ For more information on different interpretations of Prospero, see Raymond Powell's *Shakespeare and the Critics' Debate*. In Chapter 4 of the book Powell skillfully proves that it is better not to identify Prospero with Shakespeare, but undoubtedly Prospero "is a dramatist. He wrote the part which Ariel, transformed into a harpy, delivered to the «three men of sin», and he was there as an audience to applaud it. He also conceived, wrote and directed the masque that dominates Act IV, a «vanity of mine art», as he termed it (IV i 41), which he put on for the benefit of Ferdinand and Miranda." R. Powell, *Shakespeare and the Critics' Debate*, London, 1980, p. 100.

⁴⁷ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, op. cit., p. 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

achieve particular moral aims⁴⁹. He also resembles a playwright and a director of a theatrical production, in which the other characters – Nicholas in particular – are actors and spectators at the same time. Conchis is also a monarch figure who has divine power to create harmony out of chaos. He openly admits to being such a figure and refers to his experiment as a “godgame” on several occasions. When Nicholas says “You honestly do think you’re God, don’t you?”⁵⁰, he does not deny. He is omniscient and omnipotent, just like God. Thus, Powell’s words used to describe Shakespearean magician may be used in reference to Conchis, too, as he “has absolute power, (...) can control the destinies of all the people on it [the island], and (...) he seems to be using his power for benign ends”⁵¹ and “is playing God with people’s lives”⁵². What is more, Conchis is often identified with Fowles in the same way as Prospero is identified with Shakespeare⁵³.

The masque-like character of Conchis’s experiment is further emphasized by his referring to it as “meta-theatre” which is nothing more than a modern variation on the court masque. Conchis defines his meta-theatre as a kind of performance in which there is no clear division between the actors and the spectators, in which there are no limits and everything can happen. “There is no place for limits in meta-theatre”⁵⁴ – Conchis boldly says to Nicholas and he really thinks so. The world created in his “experiment” has no limits, either.

One of the elderly inhabitants of the island, Barba Dimitriaki, tells Nicholas about Conchis’s theatre before the war. It appears that there used to be a real playhouse in the garden, where numerous guests took part in plays, listened to music, sang and danced. We can infer from his account that these were not ordinary plays, but masques. He also remembers fireworks in 1938. Conchis clarifies this detail explaining that 1938 was the year in which he set fire to his theatre. This might be an allusion to the Globe, Shakespeare’s theatre which burnt in 1613, which may indicate that Conchis regards himself as an artist equal with Shakespeare.

However, Conchis’s main objective is not asserting his power or genius, but leading to the metamorphosis of the main protagonist. Undoubtedly, he succeeds in educating Nicholas, although the transformation does not take place in the trial scene (the masque proper). This is why the main masque is

⁴⁹ The difference between Prospero and Conchis is that the former has a few aims – uniting Ferdinand and Miranda, regaining his dukedom, taking revenge on his persecutors - whereas the latter has only one objective, namely educating Nicholas.

⁵⁰ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, op. cit., p. 440.

⁵¹ R. Powell, *Shakespeare and the Critics’ Debate*, op. cit., p. 80.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁵³ See S. Loveday, *The Romances of John Fowles*, London, 1985, p. 45.

⁵⁴ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, op. cit., p. 406.

followed by additional antimasques and the masque convention in that scene is subverted. His transformation takes place much later, in Part 3 of the novel, because only then does he fully understand the masque and the metaphors behind it. Eventually, Conchis succeeds in making Nicholas a better and more authentic person. Thus, the ending of the story is masque-like – the order and harmony are finally restored thanks to the power of the monarch figure (Conchis).

All the elements of the masque discussed so far are the elements of the masque-in-performance, parts of a theatrical spectacle of which the main protagonist is a participant and a spectator. These elements are scattered throughout *The Magus*, but the entire novel – which is divided into three parts – seems to follow, at least symbolically, the pattern of the masque, too. Let us examine two ways in which the structure of the novel may be compared to the structure of the masque.

In the first version Part 1 of the book may be treated as an introduction / prologue and an antimasque (points 1 and 2 in the masque structure described at the beginning of the article) – it introduces the main character and the beneficiary of the masque (Nicholas) as well as it presents the lack of harmony in his life and his numerous vices, which is the main purpose of the antimasque. Part 2 may be seen as the masque proper (point 3), as it describes a regenerative process of Nicholas's transformation. It is worth noting here that most of the elements of the masque-in-performance are contained within this part of the novel⁵⁵. Finally, Part 3 stands for the revels (point 4), whereas the final epigraph – “crasamet qui numquam amavit / qui queamavitcrasamet”⁵⁶ – may be taken for an epilogue (point 5). Of course, there are no physical dances in the novel, but the last part of the book fulfils the same function as revels in the masque. This function was to represent in a concrete way the harmony restored by the monarch. The dances were very carefully choreographed and based on extreme precision, they even involved the formation of geometrical shapes and intricate patterns⁵⁷. They were also used to transfer the restored order onto the audience. Part 3 of *The Magus* presents the protagonist as a new, better person, which means the harmony in his life has been restored.

The second version takes into account the fact that although revels were present in the majority of masques, there were a few ones devoid of them. Because there are no physical dances in the book, it is possible to draw an analogy between *The Magus* and a revelless masque – Part 1 may be seen as an introduction / prologue, Part 2 as an antimasque and Part 3 as the main

⁵⁵ The novel presents a struggle between reality and fantasy, which is mirrored in the construction of the book - Part 1 and Part 3 represent the world of reality, whereas Part 2 is the realm of fantasy.

⁵⁶ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, op. cit., p. 656.

⁵⁷ See J. G. Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition*, Cambridge, 1968, p. 12.

masque with the epigraph performing the same function as in the first version.

Because the transformation of the main protagonist means his becoming more authentic, we may say that he metaphorically removes the mask which he has been wearing all his life. In fact, the narrator often uses the word "mask" in this sense and in many places in the novel he openly admits to be wearing a mask, which means being inauthentic, pretending to be someone else. His metaphorical removal of the mask takes place after Part 2, that is why the structure presented in the first version seems more plausible – in the court masque the removal of masks took place between the masque and the revels. What happens to Nicholas as a result of taking part in the experiment is what happens in the court masque after the removal of masks:

When the spectator joined in dancing the revels, he was participating in the mimesis; and seeing beneath the disguise, recognizing the identity of the masquers, was the first step toward understanding the wisdom they embodied, because it revealed the relation between the idealization and the reality.⁵⁸

As a result of his ordeal Nicholas is able to see "beneath the disguise", but it is his own "disguise" and he discovers his own "identity". Like the characters of *The Tempest*, he starts to appreciate reality as a consequence of being immersed in an illusion.

So far, the analysis of the masque elements in the novel has been conducted from the perspective of the protagonist who deals with the masque-in-performance and has to work out the meaning of the masque by interpreting the language of the theatre. His experience is multi-dimensional and all his senses are involved – his sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell – as well as his feelings and emotions.

Taken as a whole, however, the novel may be treated as a modern reinvention of the printed masque in its nondramatic form (the literary masque). Because Nicholas is the main hero and the narrator of the story, the novel may be seen as an account of an eye-witness to a spectacle which took place at some time in the past. The novel is narrated in a way similar to the literary masque. Apart from the narrative – which in the literary masque was usually in the first person and in the past tense – it contains numerous pieces of literature (poetry and prose), very detailed descriptions of the scenery, masks and costumes. Moreover, the narrator explains many of the symbols and emblems used in the novel, which is a typical feature of the literary masque (the spectators often failed to understand the meaning of the spectacle). In fact, some passages in the novel look like glossaries

⁵⁸ S. Orgel, *The Poetics of Spectacle*, op. cit., p. 384.

giving definitions and explanations of the most puzzling symbols, objects and characters. In chapter 70, for instance, the narrator clarifies the significance of the magus (the sorcerer on the Tarot cards), hypnotism, raising both arms above the head, the wheel symbol, the ribbon on the leg and many others. Such explanations are to be found in many places in the novel, which suggests that the narrator wants the reader to interpret the story in a particular way. *The Magus* is provided with a foreword, which is also an element frequently found in the literary masque. Moreover, the novel's highly intertextual character may also be seen as a typically masque-like phenomenon. As Demaubus writes, printed masques "include entire apparatuses critici with elaborate marginal notes, footnotes, lengthy quotations, and references to dozens of ancient and contemporary sources"⁵⁹. Such references are in fact the most distinguishing feature of the narrator's idiolect. While telling his story, he refers or alludes to hundreds of mythological and literary characters, such as Circe, Orestes, Zeus, Theseus, Ulysses, Oedipus, Alice in Wonderland, Robinson Crusoe, Mercurio, Casanova, to name but a few.

As a result, the task of the reader of the literary masque seems to be much easier than the spectator's of the masque-in-performance, as the narrator provides a lot of clues concerning the way the story should be interpreted. However, contrary to the masque, the novel does not have only one correct interpretation. The reader's interpretation cannot be the same as the spectator's because the reader's experience is totally different, it is one-dimensional and what he/she has to interpret is the language of literature and its signs. The readers cannot perceive the described events in the same way as the protagonist does and they have to use their imagination despite very detailed descriptions. This is because certain meanings or emotions expressed in the language of theatre cannot be translated into the language of literature or their translation is not precise. As Fowles writes in his Foreword, "novels (...) are not like crossword puzzles, with one unique set of correct answers behind the clues (...)It's meaning is whatever reaction it provokes in the reader"⁶⁰.

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⁵⁹ T. Demaubus, *Ritual, Ostension and the Divine in the Stuart Masque*, op. cit., p. 36. (emphasis added)

⁶⁰ J. Fowles, *The Magus*, op. cit., p. 9.

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Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje powieść *Mag* Johna Fowlesa jako uwspółcześioną wersję maski dworskiej. Część wstępna zawiera opis najważniejszych cech tego gatunku. W części głównej autor analizuje elementy maski w powieści w dwóch jej formach, to znaczy maski teatralnej i maski literackiej. Cechy maski jako gatunku teatralnego analizowane są z punktu widzenia głównego bohatera, natomiast cechy maski literackiej z perspektywy czytelnika. Celem artykułu jest także określenie, w jaki sposób elementy maski wpływają na interpretację powieści.