

UDC 821.111

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32342/anuJPh.2026.31.5>

Navigating the Liminal Spaces: Intertextual Journeys and Monomyth Structures in Fowles' *The Magus*

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Мета статті полягає у визначенні специфіки міфологічних алюзій як засобів конструювання лімінальних просторів та виявлення лімінальних станів персонажів у романі Джона Фаулза *Mag*, зважаючи на функцію засобів створення лімінальності у наративному кодуванні тексту та етико-екзистенційний вимір лімінальності крізь призму бахтінської «філософії вчинку». *Завдання* статті включають виявлення та обґрунтування специфіки міфо-лімінального та містично-лімінального просторів; простеження їх взаємодії в рамках психонаративу протагоніста, враховуючи інтертекстуальні засоби актуалізації лімінальності; аналіз кореляції між техніками побудови лімінальності та наративним кодуванням тексту; визначення відповідності між етапами ініціації протагоніста та фазами Подорожі Героя в Мономіфі Кемпбелла, а також їх переосмислення з точки зору відповідальності та етичної дії як онтологічних категорій «філософії вчинку».

Для досягнення цих цілей застосовується комплексна *методологія*, що поєднує інтертекстуальний аналіз зі структурно-нاراتивними підходами, включаючи наративне кодування за Бартом, сегментацію тексту на основі інваріантної архетипної структури мономіфу Кемпбелла, аналіз мотивів, зосереджений на міфологічній інтертекстуальності в межах герменевтичного коду, теорію хронотопу Бахтіна та концептуальні рамки філософії дії Бахтіна.

За *результатами* дослідження, виокремлено два лімінальних простори: міфо-лімінальний простір, що зумовлює «пороговий» стан оповідача-протагоніста і наповнений міфологічними елементами, та містично-лімінальний простір мета-гри як місця ініціації головного героя. Лімінальні простори кодуються за допомогою інтертекстуальних засобів, що залучають міфологічні топоси, надають фізичним топосам та локусам міфологічних та містичних властивостей або конотують позапросторовість та позачасовість.

Міфологічна лімінальність характеризується розмитим хронотопом, де минуле і майбутнє зливаються в теперішнє, пов'язане з міфологічним часом. Завдяки численним міфологічним алюзіям «реальні» події та персонажі набувають міфологічних властивостей. Ключовим топосом цього простору є Лабіринт, а локусом – його Центр з Мінотавром як місце концентрації неконтрольованих інстинктів у свідомості головного героя, яким він має протистояти, щоб вирватися з лабіринту лімінальності.



Містико-лімінальний простір метагри включає реальні топоси та локуси: Грецію, острів, будинок та картини як вихід у вимір іншого світу, які набувають містичних властивостей завдяки включенню містичних елементів. Сприйняття топосів і локусів як лімінальних відтворюється через алюзії, що віддзеркалюють межові стани та відчуття протагоніста в опозиціях зловісне-прекрасне, обмеження-нескінченність, життя-смерть, гармонія-руйнування, свобода-пастка. Одним із засобів створення містичної лімінальності є «опредметнення» античних персонажів та сюжетів, які інтегруються в основний сюжет подій на острові, створюючи у головного героя лімінальні відчуття психологічної дезорієнтації.

Засоби створення лімінальності сприяють актуалізації наративних кодів роману. Герменевтичний код підкріплений алюзіями та ремінісценціями, що кодують лімінальні міфологічні мотиви лабіринту, духовної одиссеї, випробувань та трансформації. Семантичний код спирається на алюзійні конотації амбівалентності, емоційної напруги, безнадії та відчуження, пов'язані з «пороговим» досвідом головного героя. Символічний код маркований алюзіями, що актуалізують опозиції «метафорична смерть vs відродження / воскресіння», «помста vs прощення», «свобода vs пастка». Акціональний код базується на інтертекстуальних елементах, що передвіщають дії головного героя у подоланні лімінальності, що відповідає фазам подорожі героя в моделі мономіфу.

Аналіз засвідчує, що лімінальність у романі *Mag* функціонує як міфопоетичне та наративне явище і водночас набуває етико-екзистенційного змісту. Інтертекстуально побудовані лімінальні простори сприяють переходу протагоніста від онтологічної невизначеності до етично значущого акту, інтерпретованого з погляду бахтінських концепцій відповідальності та не-алібі у бутті. Засоби конструювання лімінальності спрямовують ініціацію протагоніста та призводять до трансформації, що відповідає завершальній фазі подорожі Героя.

Перспективи подальших досліджень вбачаємо у розширенні аналізу лімінальних просторів як на інші твори Джона Фаула, так і на сучасну постмодерністську літературу, з акцентом на етичних функціях лімінальності та інтертекстуальності в наративних репрезентаціях порогового досвіду.

Ключові слова: лімінальні простори, наративні коди, інтертекстуальні засоби, мономіф, алюзія, «філософія вчинку».

To cite this article: Kravchenko, N., Nikolska, N. (2026). Navigating the Liminal Spaces: Intertextual Journeys and Monomyth Structures in Fowles' *The Magus*. *Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology*, 1 (31), 66-83, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32342/anuJPh.2026.31.5>

Introduction

The problem of liminal spaces and states associated with the transition from the profane to the sacred with a “falling” outside of reality, a deviation from the usual configuration models with “threshold” sensations of ambivalence, irrationality, diffusion, mysticism, abnormality, unnaturalness and supernaturalness suggesting the potential for transformation, is consistently relevant in the interdisciplinary paradigm of humanities research, including literary studies. The concept of the liminal worlds is most extensively developed in philosophy and anthropology, e.g., in the works of Beech [2010], Thomassen [2014], Turner [1974, 1977], Van Gennep [1960] and others. The liminality is associated with the three-phase transition from an established system to an alternative one—through the pre-liminal stage of separation from the world, the middle stage of transition as an intermediate “journey” between worlds, and the post-liminal stage of reintegration with the world, but in a transformed state [Van Gennep, 1960, p. 11]. In the liminal phase, the individual dwells neither “here” nor “there,” in zones of “interderminancy.” From a literary perspective, the philosophical interpretation of liminality corresponds to the three-component structural model of the monomyth by Campbell [1949], which includes separation, initiation, and return as stages of the hero’s transcendent “journey.”

The choice to analyze Fowles’s novel *The Magus* [2004] is justified by the fact that the blurring of boundaries between worlds is a structurally defining principle in this work, supported by intertextual play with liminal spaces. The focus of the article on the intertextual connections of the novel with ancient Greek mythology is explained by three premises. Allusions to ancient sources are among the most frequent in Fowles’ text. The myth here creates ambivalence and spatial-temporal uncertainty in the narrator’s perception of the world, blurring the boundaries between the ‘real,’ mythological and mythical. In addition, the engagement with intertextuality based on ancient source texts is justified by the fact that in ancient culture, liminal spaces, and liminal creatures, inevitably drawn towards each other, were a recurring literary motif, as noted, in particular, in Johnson’s study [2013].

Theoretical framework

The article is written within theoretical frameworks related to: (a) the concept of liminal spaces in literary studies, (b) M. Bakhtin's philosophy of the act, (c) the exploration of narrative codes as tools for navigating liminal spaces, and (d) the theory of transtextuality—in view of the fact that the means of intertextuality, paratextuality and metatextuality are used in *The Magus* as ways of creating liminality.

The contemporary interpretation of the concept of liminal space in literary studies, genealogically rooted in the anthropological theory of liminality developed by Victor Turner [1974, 1977] and Arnold van Gennep [1960], largely intersects with the philosophical concept of *heterotopia* formulated by Michel Foucault [1997], which has become one of the principal theoretical frameworks for the reinterpretation of liminal spaces in the humanities at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Foucault's "other spaces," operating according to their own logic of temporality, behavior, and the organization of experience—including cemeteries, hotels, museums, prisons, gardens, and ships—resonate with Turner's notion of liminality, as both categories are united by the ideas of thresholdness (the liminal zone, in Turner's terms), in-betweenness, and transgression of normative social experience. Much like liminal spaces, heterotopias constitute zones of uncertainty in which conventional social roles and spatial-temporal coordinates become blurred, causing the subject to experience disorientation, transformation, and transition between different forms of cultural and existential identity. Drawing on the concept of heterotopia, scholars emphasize such characteristics of liminal spaces as their capacity to perform a mediating function (between the living and the dead in the cemetery, the healthy and the sick in the hospital, the sacred and the mortal in the temple), to function as spaces of play understood as rituals of crossing heterotopic boundaries, to serve as political or economic refuges, and to act as experimental landscapes [Dehaene, De Caeter, 2008, pp. 94–97]. Equally significant is the fact that the researchers associate heterotopia with the phenomena of marginality, spatial fragmentation, "terrain vague," and transience, whereby liminal space transcends the boundaries of a purely anthropological category and comes to be conceptualized as an aesthetic model for the representation of alienation and the individual's cultural disorientation [Dehaene, De Caeter, 2008].

The poetics of liminality has been explored in literary studies from various perspectives: with a focus on "threshold" spatial images; on the ambivalence of the liminal subject existing in multiple guises and states of consciousness; on temporal and spatial liminality; on the boundary experiences of the author and the reader; on liminal beings and objects, etc.

In particular, in his essay Dietrich René [2007] examines the liminality of the shoreline image in the poetry of American poets of the second half of the twentieth century, such as S. Merwin, Elizabeth Bishop, A. R. Ammons, and Denis Johnson. The researcher's focus is on the struggle "with the limits of poetic language" and on the unstable status of the poet as a marginalized liminal figure. Other perspectives on liminality in literature are addressed in the study by Melissa Marie Damico [2024]. On the one hand, drawing on the Victorian novels *Jane Eyre* by Brontë and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Hardy, the author analyzes "threshold" female characters through the lens of a "decentered perspective," which generates liminal experiences for readers by blurring subjectivity and erasing cultural boundaries and binary oppositions. On the other hand, interpreting contemporary works of documentary prose, the author examines a liminal reading experience that minimizes the human perspective and amplifies the nonhuman one—the mysterious and inexplicable world of nature.

Among other works exploring the poetics of liminality, the dissertations by Joan Wry and Michelle Dreiding deserve particular attention. Wry's study [2010] examines the features of nineteenth-century threshold poetics through an analysis of the works of such diverse authors as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. The researcher focuses both on liminality as a principle shaping the topos of the natural landscape and on the blurring of boundaries between the polarities of Soul and Nature. In Dreiding's dissertation [2019], the structural and thematic manifestations of liminality in Morrison's literary texts are investigated. These texts challenge conventional binary oppositions, create spaces that allow for the coexistence of paradoxical concepts such as love and hatred, inclusion and externalization, being here and there, being subject and object, as well as spaces accommodating conflicting versions of American history.

One of the most extensively developed topics in literary studies is the poetics of liminality in the poetry of William Blake. In “Fearful Symmetry” [1947], Northrop Frye offers a comprehensive view of Blake’s mystical system, demonstrating how the poet creates liminal zones between the material and spiritual worlds as sites of transformation and revelation. According to Carme Font [2020], liminality in Blake is not a state but an intermediate, dynamic process of transformation, in which mediators between worlds symbolize spiritual transcendence and the renunciation of physical, corporeal form.

One of the conclusions reached by scholars is that liminal spaces in Blake’s works function as key moments in which characters confront and struggle with their identity and the world, leading to significant insights into the nature of humanity and spirituality [Sophonpanich, 2023]. This observation, in our view, intersects with an important theoretical and methodological premise of our study—Bakhtin’s *philosophy of the act*. From this perspective, overcoming the metagame’s borderland space is understood as an initiation aimed at transforming the hero in order to attain existential integrity. Equally important for the analysis of liminality in Fowles’s novel is the conclusion that Blake viewed femininity as a dynamic force situated at the center of transformation and capable of facilitating spiritual change [Keynes, 1972]. In *The Magus*, it is precisely the female characters who are most actively involved in constructing the mystical-liminal space of the metagame for the initiation and transformation of the protagonist, enabling his transition from a potential state of being to the actualized “being of the act.”

A separate strand of research addresses liminal entities in ghost stories and narratives featuring fantastical beings [Price, 2018; Ogden, 2009], which function as mediators of transition between possible worlds [Kravchenko et al., 2021].

Among Ukrainian scholars, the concept of liminality within the literary-critical paradigm has been addressed by Zh. Bortnyk, who has examined the liminal chronotope in contemporary Ukrainian drama [Bortnyk, 2012], as well as liminal projections of the poetics of corporeality [Bortnyk, 2023]. Within the framework of corporeal aesthetics, based on N. Blok’s dramaturgy, the author identifies liminal manifestations in the following projections: the image of the body as the character’s initiatory sacrifice and as transgressive corporeality; a liminal “corporeal topography” that foregrounds metaphors of body parts; the image of the fragmented or destroyed body that fails to perform social, gender, and other functions; and the motif of bodily disintegration or, conversely, the reassembly of body parts into a whole [Bortnyk, 2023].

O. Visych and K. Bugera [2024] conceptualize the the topos of sanatorium as a transitional space that is bounded and ambivalent in nature, governed by its own, often absurd, rules, characterized by specific rituals of “entry” and “exit,” capable of mediating between life and death, and exerting a transformative influence on all those who inhabit it. An attempt to substantiate the connection of liminal spaces with a narrative-plot architecture that reflects the universal stages of the hero’s journey was undertaken in a study by Ukrainian scientists [Kravchenko et al., 2025] in connection with the material of immersive story-driven video games.

In addition to liminal spaces, Ukrainian scholars also investigate liminal objects. Specifically, in the article by Khrystyna Semeryn [2017], based on an analysis of the poetics of Vasyl Stus’s collection *Palimpsests*, the role of such liminal elements as the “threshold,” “window,” “door,” “wall,” and “mirror” in constituting the dwelling as a “liminal semiosphere” is elucidated.

Despite sustained scholarly interest in the poetics of liminality, John Fowles’s *The Magus* has received little systematic attention from this perspective. Existing studies address liminality only fragmentarily, most notably through the analysis of Conchis as a boundary identity [Andonova-Kalapsazova, 2006] and the associated idea that liminal identities imply the liminality of the spaces chosen by the characters. The novel’s liminal space has also been examined through its intersemiotic and intermedial codes [Zhykharieva et al., 2024]; however, this research is limited to linguistic analysis of intermedial allusions and does not address liminality as a comprehensive poetic principle.

The present study addresses this gap by distinguishing mytho-liminal and mystico-liminal spaces within the novel’s chronotope. The novelty of the article also lies in analyzing liminal spaces through their intertextual mechanisms and narrative coding.

Finally, the article proposes an original interpretative framework that relates the protagonist’s liminal experience and initiation to Bakhtin’s *philosophy of the act*. The protagonist’s threshold

states of consciousness and the blurring of boundaries between reality, myth, and mystical irreality reflect an attempt to compensate for a “lack in Being,” while the overcoming of liminality corresponds to Bakhtinian ethical categories such as responsibility of the act, participatory thinking, being-as-event, and non-alibi in Being.

In this regard, part of the methodological framework of the present study draws on M. Bakhtin’s philosophy of the act, which conceptualizes human existence as Being-as-event—a concrete, once-occurrent reality produced through an answerable act. According to Bakhtin, only the moral responsible performed act opens access to actual being, since “Being (...) can be determined only in the categories of an actually performed act, in the categories of participative-effective experiencing” [Bakhtin, 1993, p. 13].

Central to Bakhtin’s ethical ontology is the category of responsibility, grounded in the principle of non-alibi in Being, whereby the subjects acknowledge their unique and irreplaceable participation in existence: “It is only my non-alibi in being that transforms an empty possibility into an actual answerable act or deed” [Ibid., p. 42]. Responsibility thus operates both as moral accountability for the content of an action and as answerability for one’s very being, uniting special and moral responsibility within a single act [Ibid., pp. 2–3].

Bakhtin emphasizes that there are no self-sufficient moral norms detached from the subject; rather, moral meaning arises through participative thinking, in which understanding an object entails understanding one’s obligation toward it within a unique event of being [Ibid., pp. 6, 20–21]. From this perspective, life itself can be conceived as “a single complex act or deed” performed by the subject [Ibid., p. 3].

This theoretical framework is particularly productive for the analysis of liminality in Fowles’s *The Magus*, as it allows liminal spaces to be interpreted as existential testing grounds in which the protagonist’s capacity for an answerable act is examined. The overcoming of liminality thus corresponds to the transition from hypothetical modes of existence to Being-as-event, where identity is actualized through an ethically meaningful act, consistent with Bakhtinian categories of participation, responsibility, being-as-event, and non-alibi in Being.

Liminal spaces are underpinned by various levels of textual meaning-making, such as subtextual, connotative, and cultural-symbolic. This determines the article’s appeal to narrative-semiotic codes associated with the construction of liminal spaces. Roland Barthes [1974] delineates (a) actional code, predicting the actions of characters and their consequences, associated in the article with the protagonist’s actions in overcoming the liminal space; (b) semantic code, associated with stable connotations of uncertainty, anxiety, ambivalence, indexing the hero’s state in such spaces; (c) hermeneutic code that is encoded with allusions and reminiscences related to the motifs of the hero’s spiritual journey, his initiation into liminal spaces and his transformation to exit them; (d) symbolic code, revealing the system of value oppositions in the pre-liminal and post-liminal worlds of the protagonist, and (e) cultural code based on allusions and reminiscences to ancient mythology.

As a fourth theoretical and methodological framework, the article draws on the category of intertextuality and the classification of types of intertextual relations, introduced by Gérard Genette [1997] and referred to as transtextuality—considering that intertextual means incorporate into the semiotic space of the text the spatio-temporal dimension of myth and mystical reality, functioning as a mechanism for actualizing liminal spaces. The Genette’s classification includes (a) Intertextuality proper, which refers to the presence of one text within another, (b) Paratextuality, which encompasses the connections between a text and its title, preface, postscript, epigraph, and more, (c) Hypertextuality, which involves the parodying of one text by another, (d) Metatextuality, which includes the retelling and commentative referencing to pretexts, and linguistic play with them, and (e) Architextuality, which pertains to the genre-related connections between texts of the same type [Genette, 1997, pp. 1–7].

The paper puts forward the hypothesis that mythologically based intertextuality serves as the meaning-making mechanism, contributing to the liminal chronotope of *The Magus*. Considering the characteristics of liminal spaces as transitional stages from pre-liminality to post-liminality, the article attempts to connect these stages with the universal cultural script of the hero’s journey proposed by Joseph Campbell [1949].

The aim of the article is to identify the distinctive features of mythological allusions as activators of liminal spaces and the protagonist’s liminal states in John Fowles’ novel *The Magus*,

taking into account the role of mythological references in the narrative coding of the text. The stated goal involves solving the following *research problems*: (a) to identify and substantiate the specificity of mytho-liminal and mystic-liminal spaces, to trace their interaction within the protagonist's psychonarrative, taking into account the means of actualizing the liminality through intertextual devices; (b) to analyze the correlation between the techniques of constructing liminality and the narrative encoding of the text; and (c) to determine the correspondence between the protagonist's stages of initiation and the phases of the Hero's Journey in Campbell's Monomyth.

The article employs various *methods*, such as (a) intertextual analysis, (b) Roland Barthes' structural method of narrative coding, (c) motif analysis (focused on the role of mythological intertextuality in the actualization of the hermeneutic code motifs), (d) descriptive analysis, and (e) structural-narrative analysis based on Joseph Campbell's invariant archetypal structure of the monomyth. The latter identifies correlations between this structure and the invariant stages of the hero's spiritual "journey" —the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages; (f) a method based on Bakhtin's [1981] chronotope theory, which is used for the purpose of describing and categorizing the different forms of space-time relations in liminal spaces. According to Bakhtin, narrative texts are defined by the construction of a particular fictional world or chronotope, that is, "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships," with the "fusion" of spatial and temporal indicators "into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" [Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84].

This multi-faceted approach should provide a comprehensive understanding of how mythological allusions guide both the protagonist's psychological evolution and the narrative architecture.

Liminal spaces, intertextuality, and narrative codes: an exploration of interconnections

Intertextual devices contribute to the construction of two types of liminal spaces in the novel: (a) mytho-liminal space, filled with mythological elements, creating the threshold state of the narrator, and (b) the mystic-liminal space of the metagame as the site of the protagonist's initiation. Entering and overcoming these liminal spaces is associated with the protagonist's initiation, which correlates with the stages of Campbell's Monomyth.

The differences and similarities between the mythical-liminal and mystical-liminal spaces in *The Magus* are visualized in Figure 1.

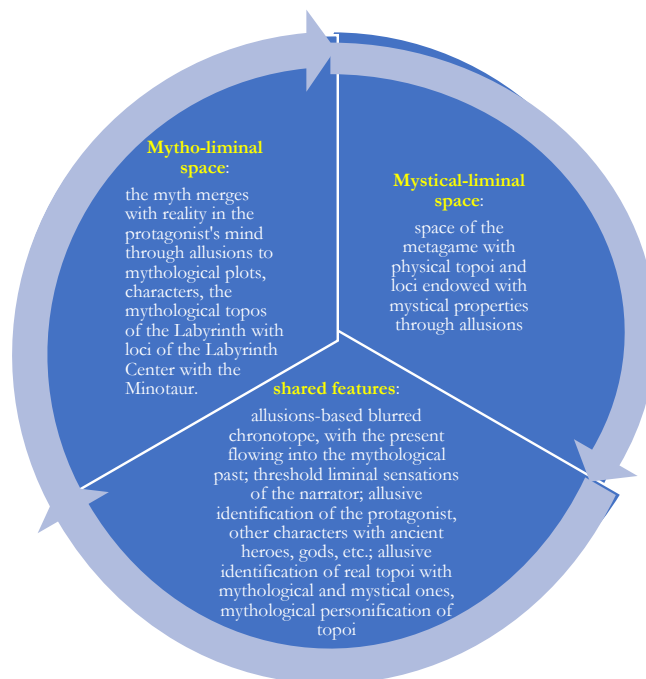


Fig. 1. Mythical-liminal and mystical-liminal spaces in *The Magus*

Let's analyze each of the liminal spaces from the perspective of the intertextual means that actualize them and in terms of the narrative coding associated with intertextuality.

The mytho-liminal space is encoded through allusions in the protagonist's narrative, underlying the "blurred" spatio-temporal modality, where the present in his consciousness merges with the mythological past, with sensations "*of having entered a myth*" [Fowles, 2004, p. 151]: *I remembered the feeling (...) of being Odysseus or Theseus* [Ibid., p. 297]. The blurred chronotope in the narrator's consciousness, a detachment from time and space conveying the liminality of his state, becomes a recurrent characteristic of Nicholas's entire psychonarrative, as he experiences a "*disengagement between... existence and nothingness*" [Ibid., p. 49]:

I was a townsman; and I was rootless. I rejected my own age yet could not sink back into an older [Ibid., p. 47].

In his authorial verse, the protagonist compares himself to "*Icarus eternally damned, the dupe of time...*" [Ibid., p. 87], projecting the state of the mythological Icarus, who is "cast out" of his time, onto his own threshold state. The cultural code, supported by allusions to ancient characters, simultaneously contributes to the semantic code of connotations of uncertainty and ambivalence, hopelessness and alienation, indexing the hero's state at the pre-liminal stage of separation from the familiar world and entry into the mythological space.

Time that transcends chronological time is referred to in the novel as *Time with a capital T* [Ibid., p. 364]. It is perceived by the protagonist-narrator as both real and physical, while also merged with mythological time, where the past and future blend into the present, existing simultaneously and forming a sacred cyclical and suspended time [Assmann, 2002; Kravchenko, Goltsova, Snitsar, 2022]. The liminal sensation of the chronotope is conveyed through Nicholas's feelings, which are simultaneously *present and concrete yet intensely mysterious* [Fowles, 2004, p. 152]. The narrator describes this threshold experience of time and space through allusive references to ancient plots and characters—Odysseus, Theseus, Oedipus—physically feeling himself to be each of them, "young and ancient" (blurred temporality), while existing simultaneously in different spaces (blurred topos): on the way to meeting Circe, traveling to Crete, passing Oedipus's paths of suffering, all linked to the initiation of each ancient hero:

It was like physically, moment by moment, to have been young and ancient, a Ulysses on his way to meet Circe, a Theseus on his journey to Crete, an Oedipus till searching for his destiny. I could not describe it. It was not in the least a literary feeling, but an intensely mysterious present and concrete feeling [Fowles, 2004, pp. 151–152].

In addition to highlighting the narrator's sense of liminality, these allusions contribute to the actional code of the text, foreshadowing Nicholas's own initiation, similar to that of the ancient characters.

The projection of the fused present and mythological time into the space of liminality, with "falling outside of reality," explains the emergence of loci such as "trap" and "maze," metaphorically characterizing the protagonist's liminal experiences, entangled between reality and myth, intentionally constructed for him in the metagame space: *to lead you into a sort of trap* [Fowles, 2004, p. 207]; *the sense that I was now deep in the strangest maze* [Ibid., p. 297]. This creates a semantic tension in the actional code of the novel, implying the actions of the protagonist to overcome the threshold of the mytho-liminal space. In the hermeneutic code, allusions to Odysseus, Theseus, and Oedipus refer not only to the blurred chronotope in the hero's consciousness but also to the motif of trials, encoding myths with the common theme of the quest and transformation of ancient heroes through trials. This motif becomes defining for Nicholas's spiritual odyssey in the mytho-liminal space and is supported by allusions to the Labyrinth, Theseus and the Minotaur:

Now I was Theseus in the maze; and the Minotaur [Fowles, 2004, p. 297];
I thought, I am Theseus in the maze [Ibid., p. 306].

The mythological topos of the Labyrinth becomes, in the mytho-liminal space, a place of spiritual initiation for the protagonist. In the hero's psychonarrative, the locus of the Labyrinth is its Center as a place of concentration of a chaotic, uncontrollable element that Nicholas must confront and which is embodied in the image of the inner Minotaur, resonating with Nietzsche's "cave-Minotaur of conscience" [2002]:

Let it all come, even the black minotaur, so long as it comes; so long as I may reach the center [Fowles, 2004, p. 306].

The metaphorical self-identification of the protagonist with Theseus, and his inner self with the Minotaur, is linked to the motif of the protagonist's initiation and projects image of the Labyrinth onto the second liminal space—the mystical metagame—within which this initiation occurs. In the hermeneutic code of the text, mystic-liminal space is encoded through allusions to Tartarus, which refers to the physical topos of Burani Island, where Nicholas undergoes physical trials and *spiritual vivisection* at the hands of the metagame participants:

Tartarus (Burani Island – authors) was ruled by a king, Hades [Fowles, 2004, p. 543].

For Nicholas, Hades is embodied in the image of Conchis as a mystical, "god-like" figure who directs the intricate "Godgame," creating for the hero a liminal parallel reality in which the boundaries between the supernatural and the natural, past and present, truth and lies, life and death are erased, and in which Nicholas cannot distinguish mysticism from reality.

Mythological allusions underly the intersection of two liminal spaces—the mythic and the mystical. The allusive identification of the island topos with the mythological topos endows the island with characteristics of mystical liminal space, as it retains the reality of an image existing in the physical world while being imbued with mystical attributes through allusion. The topos of Burani-Tartarus, where the liminal space of the metagame unfolds, is embedded within the broader topos of Greece, becoming its locus:

None of the books I had read explained this sinister-fascinating, this Circe-like quality of Greece [Fowles, 2004, p. 40].

Greece is marked as a liminal topos through an allusion *Circe-like quality of Greece* that solidifies the ambivalent connotations of *sinister-fascinating*. This projection draws from the source of the allusion associated with the mythological Queen Circe, known as a cunning and cruel goddess of *magic*. These connotations contribute to the semantic code of the text, with its key meaning of 'magic,' thereby underpinning paratextual connections to the novel's title, *The Magus*. Simultaneously, the semantic ambivalence marked by the allusion is connected to the symbolic code—the opposition of "sinister vs admirable," which is not limited to the image of Greece but recurs throughout the text: the image of the antagonist Conchis evokes in the protagonist both mystical fear and admiration, and Lily-Julie embodies both beauty and danger. This recurrence of the "sinister-admirable" opposition serves as a central motif, amplifying the tension between attraction and repulsion that defines the protagonist's experience, aligning with broader themes of liminal ambiguity and duality in the narrative.

The metaphor-personification *sinister-fascinating quality of Greece* is projected in the hermeneutic code of the text as a scenario of dangers and trials, contributing to the actional code. The allusion *Circe-like*, contextually synonymous with *sinister-fascinating*, marks the ambivalence of the situation of transition into a new chronotope, with threshold sensations for the narrator.

The topos of Burani includes a locus such as the home of Conchis—the organizer of the metagame. In this locus, strange mystical events occur, and it, in turn, becomes a topos for other loci. For instance, the paintings in the house become peculiar loci associated for the narrator with connotations of eternity, not as infinite time, but as a spatial dimension unbound by temporal constraints, into which the narrator seeks to enter:

Those Bonnards, their eternal outpouring of a golden happiness, haunted me; they were like windows on a world I had tried to reach all my life, and failed [Fowles, 2004, p. 377].

The paintings in the house become spatial images pointing to harmonious worlds that Nicholas aspires to from the confined psychological and physical spaces of liminality.

The mystical-liminal space of the metagame is constructed through a number of literary devices—numerous flashbacks and framing—plots within the plot, including supernatural fragments, omens that acquire symbolic meaning, the revival of dead characters, etc. One such device is the “objectification” of ancient characters and plots.

In the liminal space of the island, mythological characters “come to life,” coexisting with real ones: a laurel-crowned naked man (Apollo), a naked woman in ancient sandals (nymph), a satyr, pursuing the nymph, and a goddess dressed in gladiatorial gear (Artemis), who kills the satyr [Fowles, 2004, p. 177-179]. The realism of the scene is marked by the appearance of mythological characters, their actions and weapons: *the glint of goldenleaves, laurel leaves, raised the horn, pulled an arrow, the quiver, silver-painted bow*. The mythological images and plots retain their allusive connotations associated with ancient plots—the kinship of Artemis and Apollo, the narratives of nymphs being pursued by satyrs, Artemis’s role as the protector of nymphs. The inexplicability and otherworldliness of the mythological plot, which unexpectedly intertwines with the ordinary life of the physical topos of Burani and initially defies rational explanation, creates liminal sensations in the protagonist, a feeling of psychological disorientation. Nicholas’s attempt to establish the referential status of the mythological plot as a game through metafictional comments (*spectacularly terrified* and *effectively theatrical*) does not eliminate the liminality of the episode.

The integration of mythological space into both the real chronotope and the mystical-liminal space of the metagame is aimed at making Nicholas perceive the mythological scene with the satyr as a kind of metaphor, implicitly identifying the protagonist himself with the satyr in the mythological scene. Ultimately, the liminal scene with its mythological plot and characters contributes to the intratextual semantic coherence of the novel—much like the satyr, the protagonist metaphorically “dies” at the end of the novel in the “detoxification” scene [Fowles, 2004, p. 365] involving Lily-Julie, who had played the role of Artemis in the retrospective mythological scene. In this regard, the reference to the mythological plot contributes to the hermeneutic code of the text—motifs of downfall, death, and transfiguration, related to overcoming the liminal state of Nicholas.

The space of the metagame, merging reality with mystical unreality, is simulated by the antagonist Conchis, who is allusively marked as *an omniscient Zeus, with a haunting, brooding omnipresence* [Fowles, 2004, p. 356], *a deity-Conchis* and *Hades*, under whose power the protagonist finds himself. Conchis, in his “godgame,” exerts control over life and death in his meta-theater, blurring the boundary between reality and mysticism, and inducing in the protagonist liminal sensations of anxiety and fear: *A bat’s wing of fear flickered through my mind* [Fowles, 2004, p. 376]. Alongside feelings of spatiotemporal disorientation, anxiety and fear become recurrent connotations in the text, contributing to its semantic code.

The name Conchis, at the level of the hermeneutic code, returns to the motif of initiation through the reminiscence, encoded by this name, which is based on a combination of homography and homonymy with the name Conchis. The islanders pronounce the name Conchis with a hard “ch” sound:

“Conchis.” *He pronounced the ch hard – the ch of ‘loch’* [Fowles, 2004, p. 62].

This creates homonyms between Conchis’s name and the plural of ‘conch,’ which denotes a spiral-shelled mollusk, symbolizing in Greek mythology the trumpet of the Tritons that awaken the elements of the sea and govern them. Conchis invisibly controls the seemingly elemental events in his metatheatre, intentionally creating a liminal space that prompts the protagonist toward initiation through trials and temptations to awaken Nicholas’s conscience, akin to the trumpet of the Tritons. Thus, the reference to the trumpet of the mythological Triton, encrypted in the name of the antagonist, is connected with the hermeneutic code of the text—the motif of initiation and rebirth.

The hero feels that in the liminal metatheatre, he is expected to enter liminal spaces in a literal sense, as he is pushed to cross the threshold beyond which his initiation begins. The function of the semantic operator, connecting the mythological and the real in the space of the metagame, is

fulfilled by the overarching allusive metaphor to the mythological topos of the realm of the dead and the mythological Orpheus, equating the trials of the protagonist with Orphean performance by means of allusive metaphors:

Something was expected of me, some Orphean performance that would gain me access to the underworld. (...) I had apparently found the entrance to Tartarus. But that brought me no nearer Eurydice [Fowles, 2004, p. 568].

The allusion simultaneously contributes to several narrative codes—the hermeneutic, with the motif of trials and initiation, the symbolic, underlying the opposition “reality vs otherworldliness” (marked by all three allusions—Tartarus, Orpheus and Eurydice) and the actional—foreshadowing the protagonist’s actions in searching for himself and resurrecting his ability to love.

The recurrent motif of the hermeneutic code—initiation, trials, and the search for an exit—shifts from the mythical to mystical space, localized in the real topos of the island of Burani. However, the real topos invariably merges with the mythological topos of Tartarus. The blurriness of the boundaries between physical, mythological and mystical is emphasized by the protagonist’s perception of other characters, who appear to him as liminal entities, indexed by allusions to the underworld:

She seemed as strange to me as if she had come from Tartarus; so cold, so calm (...). Returned from the dead [Fowles, 2004, p. 610].

The liminality of other characters is activated by parodic hypertext marked by allusions to mythological heroes and ancient Greek philosophers:

I had become far too used to hearing not conspicuously brilliant boys called Socrates and Aristotle, and to addressing the ill-favored old woman who did my room out as Aphrodite [Fowles, 2004, p. 64].

The allusion here is part of the ludic context implicitly referencing the hero’s emergence beyond reality into a liminal space with blurred boundaries between the real and mythological worlds.

The main intertextual devices contributing to narrative coding in liminal spaces are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Given the scope of the article, which focuses on the role of mythological allusions in the actualization of liminality, the cultural code is dominant, shaping other types of narrative coding. This code runs throughout the table, marked as CC (Cultural Code).

Table 1

Intertextual devices in *The Magus*: narrative codes in Mytho-liminal space

Intertextual devices: allusions and reminiscence	Narrative codes
<i>the feeling of being Odysseus or Theseus</i>	CC-based semantic code – connotations of ambivalence, ambiguity
<i>Icarus eternally damned, the dupe of time</i>	CC-based semantic code – connotations of hopelessness, and alienation
<i>Now I was Theseus in the maze; and the Minotaur</i>	CC-based hermeneutic code: the motif of the protagonist’s initiation
<i>I thought, I am Theseus in the maze; let it all come, even the black minotaur, so long as it comes; so long as I may reach the center</i>	CC-based hermeneutic code: the motif of the protagonist’s initiation; symbolic code of oppositions “freedom vs imprisonment”
<i>it was like physically, moment by moment, to have been young and ancient, a Ulysses on his way to meet Circe, a Theseus on his journey to Crete, an Oedipus till searching for his destiny. It was an intensely mysterious present and concrete feeling</i>	CC-based semantic code – connotations of ambivalence; actional code that predicts the plot line of the protagonist’s trials; hermeneutic code, with the motif of quest and transformation

Table 2

Intertextual devices: narrative codes in Mythical-liminal space

Intertextual devices: allusions and reminiscence	Narrative codes
<i>Tartarus</i> (Burani Island in Greece – <i>authors</i>) was ruled by a king, <i>Hades</i>	CC-based semantic code – connotations of emotional tension and anxiety; symbolic code of oppositions “reality vs otherworldliness,” “life vs death”
<i>sinister-fascinating, this Circe-like quality of Greece</i>	CC-based semantic code – connotations of ambivalence, alienation and magic; symbolic code of oppositions “sinister vs admirable”
<i>Apollo, nymph, satyr, Artemis</i> and related mythological stories, coming to life on a real island	CC-based symbolic code: the oppositions “reality vs. myth,” «real vs supernatural / mystical”
<i>an omniscient Zeus, with a haunting, brooding omnipresence; a deity-Conchis; Hades</i> - allusive nominations of the antagonist – organizer of the metagame	CC-based semantic code – connotations of anxiety and ambivalence; symbolic code of oppositions “reality vs otherworldliness,” CC-based hermeneutic code: the motif of the protagonist’s initiation
homonyms between Conchis’s name and the plural of ‘ <i>conch</i> ,’ symbolizing in Greek mythology the trumpet of the Tritons	CC-based hermeneutic code – the motif of initiation and rebirth
<i>Something was expected of me, some Orphean performance that would gain me access to the underworld. I had apparently found the entrance to Tartarus. But that brought me no nearer Eurydice</i>	CC-based symbolic code – the oppositions “reality vs otherworldliness”; hermeneutic code – the motif of the protagonist’s trials and initiation; actional code – foreshadowing the protagonist’s actions in searching for himself and resurrecting his ability to love.
<i>I had become far too used to hearing not conspicuously brilliant boys called Socrates and Aristotle, and to addressing the ill-favored old woman who did my room out as Aphrodite</i>	CC-based semantic code – the connotation of ambivalence and liminality

Liminal spaces and the Monomyth: unifying intertextuality

The protagonist’s transformation correlates with the stages of the Hero’s Journey from Joseph Campbell’s model of the Monomyth. The structure of the novel reproduces itself as a triptych composed of three parts, including (a) The Beginning of the Journey before the crossing of the boundary of the liminal space between the physical and magic worlds; (b) The Initiation portraying the protagonist’s trials in liminal space of metagame; (c) The Return with the hero’s transformation and exit from liminal space.

In the preliminary, separative stage, Nicholas overcomes the ‘first threshold’ by crossing the boundary of the safe world while *entering a myth* marked by allusions to the mythological characters such as Circe, and the Minotaur, metaphorically attributing the qualities of ‘danger’ and ‘deception’ to the new world. In the semantic code, this stage is marked by the opposition of allusion-based connotations: sinister vs fascinating (*sinister-fascinating, Circe-like quality of Greece* [Fowles, 2004, p. 40]), admiration vs alienation, associated with ambivalent-liminal sensations in mythical space, and reinforced by a series of allusions:

The world around me took wing, and I was stuck to the ground; a Catullus without talent forced to inhabit a land that was Lesbia without mercy [Fowles, 2004, p. 50].

The allusive metaphor ascribes to the protagonist the characteristics of the unfortunate lover—Catullus—while Greece, implied by ‘a land,’ embodies traits of Lesbia—the woman who rejected Catullus, combining magical beauty and cruelty. This conveys the liminal sensations experienced by the protagonist, who is in love with a country yet feels rejected by it. The allusion marks the ‘preliminal’ stage of the hero’s transformation, with detachment and isolation from the previous world. This component of the hero’s transcendent journey is associated with the

hermeneutic code. The connotations of hopelessness and alienation, connected to the separation phase of the Monomyth, contribute to the semantic code of the novel and, at the same time, are linked to the actional code, as the threshold sensations prepare for the ‘trials’ stage. The contrast between the sensations of admiration—emotional lift (*taking wings*) and letdown (*stuck to the ground*) is associated with a symbolic code in opposition of the heavenly, free, and higher to mundane, limited, and lower.

The pre-liminal stage reproduces the archaic ritual of asceticism, solitude, and detachment necessary for transition and preceding the main trial: *there were always new solitudes* [Fowles, 2004, p. 47], and concludes with the archetype motif of ‘death’ present in the Monomyth. It is actualized by the allusion “*So I ended like Sciron, a mid-air man*” [Fowles, 2004, p. 47], which encodes mythological plot of the ancient Greek myth—Sciron thrown off a cliff, found itself in the moment of falling, between the sky and the earth. The prefix ‘mid’ signifies ‘between,’ referring to the narrator’s liminal psychological state ‘between life and death.’ The allusion contributes to the hermeneutic code—the motif of the Nicolas’ symbolic death as an exit from the liminal space: *it seemed to me that my own death was the only thing left that I could create* [Fowles, 2004, p. 51].

The narrator’s threshold sensations are enhanced by the connotations of the semantic code, which are based on the allusive comparison of his face with an acroterion—a sculptural representation of a human figure (in ancient architecture, acroterion denoted elements forming a pediment, including a statue, a sculpted image of a griffin, a sphinx, and others):

My face set into a stiff fierce mask, like that of an acroterion [Fowles, 2004, p. 49].

A reference to the acroterion not only reflects the protagonist’s internal state but also evokes connotations of ‘lifelessness.’ This aligns the comparison not only with the semantic code of connotations but also with the hermeneutic code, conveying Nicholas’s liminal, “threshold” sensations.

The proper liminal stage corresponds, in terms of the Monomyth, to initiation, as indicated by the allusion in the text to *the Eleusinian mysteries* associated with initiation [Fowles, 2004, p. 541]. Nicholas undergoes a series of trials, supported by allusions to the motifs of the labyrinth and encountering the Minotaur. In the metagame space he encounters Lily, whose ambivalent image is conveyed simultaneously by allusions to Ariadne, Electra, Clytemnestra, Persephone [Fowles, 2004, p. 543].

The play with allusions emphasizes the liminality of the world in which the hero resides. On one hand, the allusion to Ariadne corresponds to the archetypal components of receiving supernatural aid and reward, with the protagonist’s confidence that Lily-Ariadne will guide him, like Theseus, out of the liminal labyrinthine topos. On the other hand, the transformation of Lily into Electra (the inspirer of Orestes’ revenge), Clytemnestra (who cunningly kills Agamemnon), and Persephone (the queen of the Underworld), plunges the hero into an even more convoluted liminal space.

At the same time, the allusively designated hypostases of Lily are metaphorically interpreted by the protagonist as a healing mechanism of his initiation, leading him to the stage of his transformation:

The metamorphoses of Lily ran wildly through my brain, like maenads, hunting some blindness, some demon in me down [Fowles, 2004, p. 489].

During the transitory stage, the archetype motif is the encounter with the guide-figure Conchis—*old center to the whole enigma* [Fowles, 2004, p. 342], which creates for the protagonist a liminal space between the magical and the real world: *I had an uncanny apprehension of a reality of witchcraft* [Fowles, 2004, p. 356].

The merging of the real and the mystical occurs at the stage of the protagonist’s initiation when he enters an intermediate zone with new threshold guardians. This is presented in the court scene with *the presiding doctor* [Fowles, 2004, p. 543], whom Nicholas metaphorically identifies with Minos, the judge of Tartarus and with the judges-psychiatrists in the guise of mythical creatures: the bird-woman, the magician, the jackal-devil, the Pierrot-skeleton, the witch [Ibid., p. 356].

Here, the liminal space is associated with the topos of the Inmost Cave from Campbell's Monomyth, where the protagonist must confront his inner self. The protagonist's decision to reject revenge and attempt forgiveness demonstrates a sense of freedom akin to Sartre's Orestes. The allusion to *the new Orestes*, battling the flies [Ibid., p. 67], is present in the novel, albeit in the form of ironic hypertext. Nicholas, who throughout the metagame had been a victim of spiritual "dissection," suddenly gets a chance to punish his tormentors. However, the desire to seize this opportunity grips the protagonist for only a fleeting moment, when Nicholas conveys his state through an allusive identification with the goddesses of vengeance:

I was the Eumenides, the merciless Furies [Fowles, 2004, p. 472].

For a moment, the hero no longer identifies with Sartre's or the mythological Orestes, but with the Furies who pursued them both, thereby reversing the roles of "pursuer / judge-victim." However, the liminality of the situation resolves with his rejection of the role of pursuer, which, in the symbolic code, is revealed through the opposition of two forms of freedom—freedom for revenge and freedom from revenge—symbolizing the protagonist's transformation and his overcoming of liminality: *And my freedom too was in not striking, whatever the cost* [Fowles, 2004, p. 475]. At this stage, a key motif in the hermeneutic code emerges: the choice of one's freedom, which is recurrent in the retrospective of the novel and referred to through intertextual coding—the repeated use of the Greek word *eleutheria* (freedom): *only one thing had that quality of pricelessness. It was eleutheria: freedom* [Fowles, 2004, p. 402]; *that same word, that one word: eleutheria* [Ibid., p. 396].

In the philosophy of existentialism, the main philosophical foundation of the novel [Pticina, 2019; Rackham, 1972], freedom is understood as overcoming the borderline situation "from existence to essence," from despair to free choice—acceptance of oneself, which Kierkegaard designated as "despair of defiance" [Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 67]. Unlike the mythological and Sartrean Orestes, for whom freedom was linked to revenge, Nicholas chooses freedom as a renunciation of vengeance. However, the possibility of Nicholas's exit from the liminal space with his ultimate transformation is only hinted at towards the end of the novel through a quotation from an anonymous Roman lyric poem 'Pervigilium Veneris': *Let tomorrow love those who have never loved; let those who have loved love once again tomorrow* [Fowles, 2004, p. 618].

The poetics of liminality in *The Magus* through the lens of Bakhtin's *Philosophy of the Act*

The entire metagame in *The Magus* is constructed by the antagonist Conchis as a deliberate ethical experiment designed to awaken in Nicholas a sense of answerability, conceptualized by Bakhtin as the principle of non-alibi in Being, the foundation of an answerable act that should ultimately encompass one's entire life. As Bakhtin emphasizes, "For my entire life as a whole can be considered as a single complex act or deed that I perform" [Bakhtin, 1993, p. 3]. It is therefore no coincidence that Conchis repeatedly insists in his dialogues with Nicholas: *You are still becoming. Not being* [Fowles, 2004, p. 101]; *you must accept yourself. It is not any more what you will become* [Ibid.]. It is what you are and always will be. In Bakhtin's terms, the achievement of "being" is understood as a non-alibi in it, the unique moral answerability of the subject: "An act must acquire a single unitary plane to be able to reflect itself in both directions—in its sense or meaning and in its being; it must acquire the unity of two-sided answerability – both for its content (special answerability) and for its Being (moral answerability). And the special answerability, moreover, must be brought into communion with the unitary and unique moral answerability as a constituent moment in it" [Bakhtin, 1993, pp. 2-3].

Nicholas's existential anxiety, which first prompts him to seek meaning in the theoretical constructs of existentialism and then to flee "from himself" to the island, is explained, according to Bakhtin, by his disconnection from the "ontological roots of actual being," by the disunity between "being and ought," which is inevitable for a subject who has not yet become "a moral subject with a determinate structure," "marked by the moral ought" [Ibid., p. 6]. Nicholas is completely deprived of participative-effective experiencing [Ibid., p. 13], lacks a synthesis between sensuous experience (the realm of concrete actions) and reason (discursive systems that rationalize or retrospectively justify actions), and therefore cannot "bestow sense" on himself or understand his own, "unique place in Being" [Ibid., p. 16].

Nevertheless, he intuitively experiences what Bakhtin conceptualizes as a “lack in Being,” “a hole in the fabric of the world.” This existential deficiency motivates his escape to the island, conceived as a potential “act.” This pre-liminal phase is marked by a persistent state of boredom, which becomes a key element of the protagonist’s psychonarrative, following him like a cloud. This experience resonates with Heidegger’s description of boredom as a condition in which one drifts, “through the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog” [Heidegger, 1993, p. 99]

However, the move to the island fails to resolve this lack in Being. Nicholas’s practical actions are not grounded in what Bakhtin terms the act of responsible seeing, thinking, and doing—an act that can only arise from the acknowledgment of one’s non-alibi in Being and one’s unique participation in the world [Bakhtin, 1993, pp. 56–57]. Nicholas still lacks, in Bakhtin’s words, that “sole center from which the deed issues or comes forth” [Ibid., pp. 56–57]. Bakhtin observes that modern individuals often experience precisely this loss of existential orientation, no longer knowing where they themselves are as the center from which action should originate [Ibid., p. 19].

The island thus represents an attempt to compensate for the existential void not “from within oneself” (in Bakhtin’s sense), but externally: *I needed a new mystery* [Fowles, 2004, p. 7]. Since, as Bakhtin insists, “from the theoretically cognized world there is no way out into the actually performed act” [Bakhtin, 1993, p. 12], Nicholas enters a state of existential solitude on the island: *the world around me took wing, and I was stuck to the ground* [Fowles, 2004, p. 50]; *always new solitudes* [Ibid., p. 47]. This liminal condition is experienced as a radical lack of belonging (*I have no place in it* [Ibid., p. 47]), which closely corresponds to Heidegger’s notion of “thrownness,” the experience of being cast into a world from which one feels fundamentally estranged [Heidegger, 1963].

Unable to gain access to Being-as-event through an internally grounded answerable act, Nicholas allows myth to enter his consciousness in an attempt to construct an alternative configuration of a “unitary and unique world.” This evasion of responsibility for one’s own being—what Bakhtin defines as moral answerability for the very fact of one’s existence—results in a liminal condition in which the genuinely expected act is replaced by mythological substitutes. Consequently, a mytho-liminal space emerges in Nicholas’s consciousness, characterized by blurred boundaries between myth and actual being.

The mystical-liminal space of the metagame (Godgame), orchestrated by Conchis, is designed to compel Nicholas to undergo initiation and to perform a decisive “leap” into the world of the act—that is, to move from hypothetical modes of existence to actuality, not “contemplated from outside or thought of theoretically, but to take it from within, in its answerability” [Bakhtin, 1993, p. 28]. As Bakhtin states, “The answerable act or deed alone surmounts anything hypothetical” [Ibid., p. 28]. From this perspective, the liminal transition in the novel can be interpreted as an act in the Bakhtinian sense: an ethical-existential event in which the protagonist becomes the subject of his own being.

This process culminates in the mystical-liminal trial scene, where Nicholas reaches what may be described as a singular and unrepeatable act by consciously renouncing revenge. This renunciation is not a passive gesture but an “the answerable act or deed as the actualization of a decision—inescapably, irremediably, and irrevocably” [Ibid., p.28], answerable affirmation of the self in Being: “This is not simply an affirmation of myself or simply an affirmation of actual Being, but a non-fused yet undivided affirmation of myself in Being” [Ibid., p. 41].

It is precisely in such answerable inclusion in the once-occurrent uniqueness of Being-as-event that, according to Bakhtin, truth is constituted: “Answerable inclusion in the acknowledged once-occurrent uniqueness of Being-as-event is precisely what constitutes the truth” [Ibid., p. 39].

Conclusions

Liminal spaces in *The Magus* are coded through intertextual means that blur chronotopic boundaries and facilitate the merging of the real, mythological, and mystical. Liminality permeates the overall spatial continuum of the novel, in which physical topoi and loci are endowed with mythological or mystical properties through illusion. The article has identified two interpenetrating liminal spaces. The mytho-liminal space is associated with the narrator’s threshold state, characterized by a blurred chronotope and the destruction of stable temporal–spatial coordinates through the mythologization of “real” events and characters. Within this space, the metaphor of

the protagonist's liminal sensations is structured as the mythological topos of the Labyrinth, with the locus of the Minotaur functioning as the symbolic center of uncontrollable instincts that must be confronted in order to exit the state of liminality.

The mystic-liminal space of the metagame, which constitutes the organizing framework of the novel, incorporates real topoi and loci—Greece, the island, the house, and paintings as portals to another dimension—endowing them with mystical properties through the integration of mythological and ritual elements. One of the principal mechanisms of mystical liminality is the objectification of ancient characters and plots, which are embedded into the island's events and generate a sustained sense of psychological disorientation and existential uncertainty in the protagonist.

At the narrative level, liminality operates through intertextual devices that activate a system of narrative codes. The hermeneutic code unfolds through allusions and reminiscences that encode motifs of downfall and symbolic death, the labyrinthine quest, spiritual odyssey, and transfiguration. The semantic code is shaped by allusive connotations of ambivalence, emotional tension, boredom, anxiety, alienation, and metaphysical lack, marking the protagonist's pre-liminal and liminal experiences. The symbolic code is constructed through oppositions such as metaphorical death versus rebirth, reality versus myth and otherworldliness, vengeance versus forgiveness, freedom versus spiritual and physical confinement. The actional code, in turn, is supported by intertextual cues that anticipate and motivate the protagonist's actions aimed at overcoming liminal space.

The analysis demonstrates that liminality in *The Magus* acquires an ethical-existential dimension when examined through Bakhtin's philosophy of the act. The metagame orchestrated by Conchis functions as a liminal mechanism designed to provoke the protagonist's transition from a state of ontological indeterminacy to an ethically grounded mode of being. The protagonist's experience of liminality is thus interpreted as a process of acquiring answerability (non-alibi in being), in which mythological and mystical substitutions for action are gradually displaced by the necessity of an internally motivated, responsible act. The climactic refusal of vengeance in the trial scene marks the hero's passage from potentiality to actuality, transforming liminal experience into an ethically meaningful act that establishes the protagonist as the subject of his own being.

The protagonist's initiation within liminal spaces unfolds in stages that correspond to the phases of the Hero's Journey described in Campbell's monomyth. Intertextual references encode the pre-liminal stage as the departure and existential boredom preceding the crossing of the threshold; the liminal stage as initiation through trials within the mystic-liminal space of the metagame; and the post-liminal stage as return, accompanied by ethical transformation and the exit from liminality. In this sense, liminality in *The Magus* functions as a multidimensional narrative principle that integrates mythopoetic, intertextual, and ethical structures, culminating in the realization of the act as an event of being.

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Navigating the Liminal Spaces: Intertextual Journeys and Monomyth Structures in Fowles' *The Magus*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32342/anuJPh.2026.31.5>

Key words: *liminal spaces, narrative codes, intertextual devices, monomyth, allusion, "philosophy of the act."*

The aim of the article is to identify the distinctive features of mythological allusions as a means of constructing liminal spaces and to identify the liminal states of the main character in John Fowles' novel *The Magus*, with particular attention to the role of intertextuality in the narrative encoding of the text and to the ethical-existential dimension of liminality through the lens of Bakhtin's *philosophy of the act*. *The objectives* of the article are to identify and substantiate the specificity of mytho-liminal and mystic-liminal spaces; to trace their interaction within the protagonist's psychonarrative, taking into account the intertextual means of actualizing liminality; to analyze the correlation between the techniques of constructing liminality and the narrative encoding of the text; and to determine the correspondence between the protagonist's stages of initiation and the phases of the Hero's Journey in Campbell's Monomyth, as well as their reinterpretation in terms of answerability and ethical action as ontological categories of the philosophy of the act.

To achieve these aims, a comprehensive *methodology* is applied, combining intertextual analysis with structural-narrative approaches, including narrative coding after Barthes, text segmentation based on the invariant archetypal structure of Campbell's Monomyth, motif analysis focused on mythological intertextuality within the hermeneutic code, Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, and the conceptual framework of Bakhtin's philosophy of the act.

The study identifies two interrelated liminal spaces: the mytho-liminal space underlying the threshold state of the narrator-protagonist and saturated with mythological elements, and the mystic-liminal space of the metagame as the site of the protagonist's initiation. Liminal spaces are encoded through intertextual devices that introduce mythological topoi, endow physical topoi and loci with mythological and mystical properties, and connote non-spatiality and timelessness. Mythological liminality is characterized by a

blurred chronotope in which past and future merge into a mythological present, while “real” events and characters acquire mythological features. The key topos of this space is the Labyrinth, whose central locus—the Minotaur—symbolizes the concentration of uncontrolled instincts in the protagonist’s consciousness that must be confronted to overcome liminality.

The mystic-liminal space of the metagame includes real topoi and loci—Greece, the island of Burani, the house, and paintings as passages to another world—which acquire mystical qualities through the integration of ritualized and mythological elements. These spaces are perceived by the narrator as liminal through allusions that encode threshold experiences within oppositions such as ominous-beautiful, limitation-infinity, life-death, harmony-destruction, and freedom-trap. One of the mechanisms of mystical liminality is the reification of ancient characters and plots, embedded into the island’s storyline and producing sustained states of psychological disorientation.

The means of creating liminality contribute to the actualization of the novel’s narrative codes. The hermeneutic code is supported by allusions and reminiscences that encode liminal mythological motifs of the labyrinth, spiritual odyssey, trials and transformation. The semantic code relies on allusive connotations of ambivalence, emotional tension, hopelessness and alienation associated with the protagonist’s “threshold” experience. The symbolic code is marked by allusions that actualize the oppositions “metaphorical death vs rebirth / resurrection,” “revenge vs forgiveness,” “freedom vs trap.” The actional code is based on intertextual elements that foreshadow the protagonist’s actions in overcoming liminality, which corresponds to the phases of the hero’s journey in the monomyth model.

The analysis shows that liminality in *The Magus* functions as a mythopoetic and narrative phenomenon and at the same time acquires an ethical-existential dimension. Intertextually constructed liminal spaces facilitate the protagonist’s transition from ontological indeterminacy to an ethically meaningful act, interpreted in terms of Bakhtin’s concepts of answerability and non-alibi in being. The means of constructing liminality guide the protagonist’s initiation and lead to a transformation that corresponds to the final phase of the Hero’s Journey.

The prospects for further research lie in extending the analysis of mytho- and mystic-liminal spaces to other works by John Fowles and to contemporary postmodern literature, with a focus on the ethical functions of liminality and intertextuality in narrative representations of threshold experience.

Дата надходження до редакції / Submitted: 19.10.2025

Дата прийняття до публікації / Accepted: 03.04.2026

Дата публікації / Published: 04.06.2026