

## Various aspects of freedom in John Fowles novels *The Collector* and *The Magus*

Różne aspekty wolności w powieściach Johna Fowlesa *Kolekcjoner* i *Mag*

Edyta ŁADUCH<sup>1</sup>

Ateneum-Akademia Nauk Stosowanych w Gdańsku (Polska)

### Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the various aspects of freedom pictured by John Fowles in his novels *The Collector* and *The Magus*. The analysis consists of elements related to freedom in terms of social conventions, morality, sexuality, and free will. The methodology of the work is based on theories of postmodernism with an emphasis on existentialism and magical realism. The issue of freedom is a very extensive and up-to-date concept in the contemporary world, full of situations related to the violation of human rights, which is why this work is an interesting dialogue relating to this topic, so important for the humanity.

**Keywords:** freedom, John Fowles, postmodernism, existentialism, magic realism

### Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia analizę różnych aspektów wolności przedstawionych w powieściach Johna Fowlesa „Kolekcjoner” i „Mag”. Przedmiotem analizy są takie elementy, jak wolność w odniesieniu do konwencji społecznych, moralności, seksualności i wolnej woli. Praca wprowadza aspekty postmodernizmu z uwzględnieniem egzystencjalizmu i realizmu magicznego. Zagadnienie wolności jest tematem niezwykle rozległym i aktualnym we współczesnym świecie przepełnionym łamaniem praw człowieka i prawa jednostki do samostanowienia, dlatego też esej ten wpisuje się w dialog o tych, jakże ważnych dla ludzkości, sprawach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wolność, John Fowles, postmodernizm, egzystencjalizm, realizm magiczny

---

<sup>1</sup>  Ateneum-Akademia Nauk Stosowanych w Gdańsku, Wydział Neofilologiczny

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0954-4325>

 [edyta.laduch@gmail.com](mailto:edyta.laduch@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

Freedom can be defined as the state of power or right to act according to individual needs and will (Soanes, 2010). However, it also refers to the state of being imprisoned in terms of liberty rather than under any physical restraint (Soanes, 2010). Over the years, the term has been and continues to be widely used and expressed in various media, including news, films and books, not only because of its universality, but also because of its continued relevance. It is important to emphasise that everyone interprets freedom differently. Those who fight for their freedom may not always be seen as right by others. Terrorism is often attributed to those who believe they are fighting for freedom, whilst others see their acts as cruel and brutal. Freedom should mean that every person has the right to be free in both physical and mental terms. Unfortunately, many of the world's governments claim that they guarantee freedom, while, in fact, people around the world often do not have absolute freedom of speech or action. For these reasons, the motif of freedom is a powerful concept, which is also illustrated in John Fowles' fiction.

This essay explores the motif of freedom as described in two novels written by John Fowles: *The Collector* (1963) and *The Magus* (1965). The analysis introduced within this paper is based on the quotations from these novels, which shows that the problems of the main protagonists are encircled by many aspects of freedom, including social conventions, morality, sexuality and free will. This essay aims to discuss the constructions of the main characters and their actions concerning the various aspects of freedom. The first part of this paper presents the analysis of the female character of *The Collector*, who experiences the state of limited freedom in terms of making free choices towards her civil liberties. The second part pictures the figure of Urfe, the protagonist of *The Magus* – a free man who, despite his freedom of choice, agrees to be led by a man named Conchis and loses his liberty in search of moral and sexual freedom. The methodology is based on postcolonial theory with a clear emphasis on existentialism and magical realism, which are the most influential aspects of literary trend at hand. The conclusions present the main ideas described in this work and support the assumption that the novels written by John Fowles are still relevant, despite their date of publication, and focus on aspects that have been extremely important to humanity to this day.

When considering the theme of freedom in the novels of John Fowles, it is worth starting with a few words about the author. John Robert Fowles (1926–2005) was a British novelist who grew up in a conservative family

surrounded by the English culture of the 1930s suburbs. Fowles reluctantly recounts his childhood, emphasising his determination to escape his hometown, which he called the 'bloody city' because of the damaged environment and family problems he was trying to escape (Goosman). Perhaps his first instance of fighting for freedom was his own. He has since used his own quest for freedom as an inspiration for his books (Sutherland, 2011, p. 619). According to John Butler, the author of the publication called *John Fowles and the Fiction of Freedom* (1991), "he [Fowles] is obsessional about freedom and at the same time critical of the uses to which it has been put" (62). Furthermore, many references to Fowles' own life can be found in his books; including a character in the novel *The Collector* who collects butterflies, just like the author did, while a character in the novel *The Magus* leaves England to teach on a Greek island, and the same experience befalls the author, who, after graduating from Oxford, moved to the island of Spersai, near the Greek capital, Athens, to teach for several years (Goosman). Fowles also drew a great deal of literary inspiration from the works of French existentialists, such as Albert Camus or Jean-Paul Sartre, which he used repeatedly in his novels. Fowles' characters have elements of human free will and explore it in many different aspects, creating a veritable mosaic of freedom (Vipond, 1999). Both the autobiographical elements in his novels and how he fought for his own freedom right from his youngest age undoubtedly helped him to create a picture of freedom that continues to inspire and interest readers over a number of years.

## 2. Postmodernism

It is also significant to introduce the postmodernism theory in this article as the basis of John Fowles' novels. *The Collector* and *The Magus*, connect the features of postmodernist literature with the exploration of existentialism and magical realism. Starting with postmodernism, this literary movement can be characterised by eclecticism, which can take many forms. One of its manifestations is hybridity. According to Dominic Head, "hybridity is perceived to go hand-in-glove with overtly experimental forms" (Head, 2002, p. 172). Hybridity is about combining different literary motifs in one novel, and Fowles does this by combining elements of 17th-century literature with the demands of postmodernism. His works also reveal the features of magic realism, which appears as a magic ingredient sneaked into the rational world presented in his novels. The discovery of new literary forms has become

a major goal of John Fowles' novels. The novel's function evolved into one of entertainment and improvement (Eagleton, 1998). The postmodernists also break with the traditional description of reality and time. It involves the creation of an alternative world which connects with the current situation presented in the novels. This aspect can be seen in *The Collector*, where the author connects Miranda's diary with the main plot of the novel (Head, 2002). Moreover, John Fowles' novels are undoubtedly rich in intertextual relations, which are one of the main principles of postmodernist literature. The novels analysed in the scope of this paper present characters which refer intertextually to those presented in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–11) (Eagleton, 1998). Characters pictured in the play seem to be evoked in the protagonists' constructions in Fowles' works. In *The Magus*, Conchis is a reflection of the character from *The Tempest* called Prospero. The connection between those characters is seen in their mystique, magical aspects, and social status. Nicholas, the protagonist of *The Magus*, reflects the character from *The Tempest* called Ferdinand. Furthermore, Nicholas and Ferdinand are both pictured as naive and easy to manipulate. In *The Collector*, the character of Ferdinand reflects the character of *The Tempest's* Caliban, which may be seen in his aim to become better and more respectable. These examples show how Fowles incorporated elements taken from other books into his novels, and the invocation or explicit inspiration of literature from previous periods also features among the characteristics of postmodern literature.

Freedom is also a very important aspect in existentialism. For the existentialist movement, freedom of an entity was a major concern. The greatest figures of the existentialist movement, like Albert Camus and C.G. Jung, inspired John Fowles' fiction. Albert Camus's theory presents the aspects of human nature, their search for identity, and the purpose of existence (Camus, 1991). The main characters of *The Magus* look for the absolute truth, one of the most significant postulates of Albert Camus's works. From the structure of *The Magus*, it can be concluded that John Fowles' novel subscribes to the theory of Albert Camus, which states that man has to fight for freedom by rejecting conventional thinking and creative implementation of their broadly defined free will (Salami, 1992). In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus pictures the philosophy of 'the absurd man' and his struggle. This reference is visible in John Fowles' works, for example in *The Collector*. *The Myth of Sisyphus* illustrates the way of life in which it is important to realise one's own freedom and the right to choose between different ways of life (Camus, 1989). A human being, according to Camus, must accept the absence of God and, only then, can one experience a new sense

of freedom (Camus, 1989). Existentialism posits that God does not exist and man must lead his life on his own terms. Besides the connection to the theory of man's being his own God, it is presented in *The Magus*, where Conchis is a guide to his actors, people whom he manipulates, and leader of the magic mind game, called godgame, which he plays. The aspect of actors is presented in a few of John Fowles' novels. Roland Barthes, in this book called *John Fowles' Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism* (1992), claims that "the 'I' is usually a spectator, and that it is the 'he' who is the actor. The 'he' is a typical novelistic convention; like the narrative tense, it signifies and carries through the action of the novel" (Salami, p. 17). The construction of the Conchis statue, the god of play, inspired many writers. One of them was Avrom Fleishman, who in *The Magus of the Wizard of the West* (1986) comments on Jung's philosophy used in the creation of this character. According to Fleishman, the godgame in John Fowles' novel "rest[s] on the notion that man can teach another man to be free by playing god to him and then revealing that he is not a god, that there is no god, that each man must be his own god" (p. 79). The main character of the novel *The Magus*, Urfe, consistently, during the development of the novel, negates all of his childhood upbringing, revealing his lack of principles to the value of life. The critic Bruce Bawer comments on the complex structure of the characters presented in John Fowles' novels as follows:

"Fowles's principal characters are usually confused and isolated men who are attracted to intelligent and spirited women; his novels are often constructed like Chinese boxes, with one mystery leading into another, one apparent epiphany giving way to another, and an expected sexual consummation interminably postponed; their climaxes often involve the male protagonist being forced to confront long-hidden truths, to make difficult judgments, and to alter himself in some profound manner." (Bawer, 1987, p. 21)

Bruce Bawer carefully analysed the structure of John Fowles' novels and he is right in his conclusions, as this can be clearly seen when reading these books. In his article, Bawer discusses aspects of freedom presented in John Fowles' works and connects the mystery of *The Magus* with the picture of an isolated man presented in *The Collector* (Bawer, 1987). Both protagonists are complex, ambiguous, and possessed by certain passions that do not let them up.

The ideas of John Fowles' fiction apply also to the ideas of one of the major figures of existentialism, Carl Gustav Jung. Jung's analytical psychology relies on the role of symbolic experiences in human life. This means that when someone's life story is very important for

the understanding of their current circumstances, those circumstances also contain the seeds for future growth and development (Burzyńska, 2006, p. 60). C.G. Jung claimed that “everything you touch, everything we make contact with, immediately transforms into a mental content” (Jung, 1996, p. 66). John Fowles also uses Jung’s philosophy of the importance of close siblings in life, which may influence future life and human choices. These elements can also be seen in the analysed novels. The influence of society on the individual is enormous and often influences the fates of individuals who subconsciously allow other people to guide them.

### 3. The analysis of the novels *The Collector* and *The Magus*

This part of the article gives a brief summary of the novels, which are the subject of this paper. The first analysed novel is *The Collector*, which presents the story of a lower-class man, Ferdinand Clegg; a person without a close family, who works as an official, luckily wins at the football polls and becomes rich. With his winning fortune, he buys a house in the country with a basement room where he keeps Miranda Grey, a beautiful middle-class girl whom he kidnaps after admiring her for a long time. Miranda becomes Clegg’s obsession. Ferdinand keeps her like the butterflies he collects. In the novel, she says once that, “I know what I am; a butterfly he has always wanted to catch” (Fowles, 2010, p. 1834). This obsession leads Ferdinand to destruction and develops a dangerous freedom of morality. He becomes an aggressive manipulator, who does not care about Miranda’s health as much as a man in love should. She became more of a goal for him. The imprisonment of Miranda is a cruel game for Ferdinand.

The second analysed novel is *The Magus*, which is a story full of symbols and hidden truths. The main male protagonist, Nicholas Urfe, is a young English man who accepts a job on the Greek island of Phraxos as an English teacher. In Phraxos, Nicolas meets Conchis, a Greek millionaire, who tells Urfe his life story and involves him in a magic godgame which is full of masques and mystery. Urfe is fascinated by Conchis, and he is going into a world he does not really understand. The story of the life of Conchis pictured in the novel is absorbing, fascinating, and in the world which he creates, where nothing and nobody is what they seem to be, Nicholas finds his own way to develop. The main protagonist starts to question everything he thinks is true about himself and the world. He becomes embroiled in Conchis’ psychological illusions and finds himself in a situation which turns into a very dark and serious “mind game”. Nicholas is losing his ability to tell the difference

between what is real and what is a ruse. Urfe, against his will and knowledge, becomes an actor in a godgame. Finally, he discovers that the whole masque is a psychological experiment in which all the stories Conchis is telling are caricatures of Nicholas' life. The characters in *The Magus*, Conchis and Urfe, find freedom in the mystical godgame, but their visions of freedom differ greatly. Nicholas feels his freedom more intensely when limited by the rules of the mind game. Conchis's freedom is unlimited; he believes that as a god he can do everything. Conchis, the creator of the godgame, is driven by a huge hunger for power, which changes the vision of the world in Urfe's eyes. Both of them learn much about their existence through the evil game.

The main concern in John Fowles' fiction is the protection of the right to individual freedom against those who restrict human rights and minimize their needs. Fowles often said that the major theme of his work is freedom, but not just in the simple dictionary sense of the word, but its various aspects (Onega, 2010). Susana Onega in *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles* (2010) pictures the complexity of the main characters in all John Fowles' works and their search for freedom in an elaborate way:

“From the thematic point of view, every novel deals in one way or another with Fowles's major concern, human freedom, focused on two major perspectives. From the point of view of man in isolation, freedom is presented as a process of individualization of the self; from the man with society, as a power-bondage relationship.” (Onega, 1989, p. 165)

In the above words, Onega has very effectively summarised the two different types of freedom present in Fowles' writing. One could assume that the former, concerning a man in isolation, perfectly applies to Miranda and her imprisonment by the main character in the novel *The Collector*, while the latter perspective fits into the book *The Magus*, where power plays an extremely important role in the creation of individual freedom.

The next part of this article focuses on the concept of freedom taking into account a few very different aspects that can be seen in John Fowles' novels.

#### **4. The motif of freedom as a choice**

This part of the analysis deals with the motif of freedom as a choice. The characters in these two novels struggle to make their own choices. *The Magus* pictures a struggle to make the most unbelievable decision in revenge for the consequences of a magic godgame, presenting the situation

of Urfe when he is choosing the type of punishment for one of the actors. The novel shows a difficult fight inside the actors' minds, which is injected by the desire to control their own and others' destiny. *The Magus* is imbued with an existentialist theory of letting man be his own God:

“You (Urfe) see the scapegoat and you see the instrument of punishment. You are now both judge and executioner. We are all here hates of unnecessary suffering; as you must try to understand when you come to think over these events. But we are all agreed that there must be a point in our experiment when you, the subject, have absolute freedom to choose whether to inflict pain on us – and a pain abhorrent to all of us – in your turn. [...] You will equally be free if you choose to punish, which will also demonstrate the satisfactory completion of your disintoxication. Now I ask one last thing of you: that you think carefully before you choose.” (Fowles, 2010, p. 7919)

Urfe is aware of the fact that all the events on the island of Phraxos are a game and not necessarily a friendly one. During the final execution of the game, Conchis says the words mentioned above. Urfe gets a chance to punish one of the actors who was closest to him. However, after all the events on the island, Urfe does not regret the free decision, which he made at the beginning of the experiment, to play in Conchis's game. He explains this fact to himself as a result of the practical implementation of the philosophical existentialist postulate, the right to freedom and the right to make a free choice.

In *The Collector*, the aspect of freedom of choice is not as clear as it is in *The Magus*. Miranda, the kidnapped girl, has very limited freedom. She can only choose what Ferdinand can buy for her, but apart from that, she cannot live like everyone else. She is imprisoned in the basement of Clegg's village house. The female protagonist of *The Collector* writes in her diary:

“He [Ferdinand] bought me [Miranda] a record-player and records and all the things on the huge shopping-list I gave him. He wants to buy things for me, I could ask for anything. Except for my freedom.” (Fowles, 2010, p. 1917)

Miranda knows that she will probably never be free again, so she uses her limited freedom to make free choices in small cases. She can ask Ferdinand to buy her material things, but she is not able to make a free choice about her freedom.

Urfe, the protagonist of *The Magus*, as well as Miranda, the protagonist of *The Collector*, strongly believe in the right to make a free choice in their lives. In John Fowles' novel *The Collector*, the unfulfilled dreams of freedom are pictured. In *The Magus*, the motif of freedom as a choice is key

to the development of the male protagonist, who reviles his hidden nature and aspirations.

## 5. The motif of freedom as an obsession

This section of the analysis consists of the motif of freedom as an obsession presented in John Fowles' novels. *The Magus* presents Conchis's obsession with creating people's lives and limiting their freedom. Conchis appears as a man who treats people around him like actors as he plays with their freedom, emotions, and bodies. The actors of Conchis's manipulations do not entirely understand the situation in which they find themselves, but they think that they have control over their lives. Jung's theories can be found in the fulfilment of Conchis's character construction in *The Magus*. Conchis creates a secret place where magical spiritual processes are pictured, so therefore Jung's vision of a place where a person can develop themselves and become more authentic is achieved within this novel:

"I [Urfe] remembered something Julie had said: He [Conchis] wants us to be mysteries to him as well. But it was obviously very limited freedom and mystery he wanted in us; however large an aviary the fancier builds, the aviary's purpose is still to imprison." (Fowles, 2010, p. 6223)

Conchis limited the freedom of his actors, often without their knowledge. Magic realism in this book appears in Conchis's actions, which are not easy to understand by the people around him, which makes him mysterious, unpredictable, and unusual, thus placing him higher in the social hierarchy. He is obsessed with his freedom and he does not care how much his actions imprison his actors:

"What this man [Conchis] said was something far less sympathetic, far less pitiful, even far less human, but far more profound. He spoke out of a world the very opposite of mine. In mine, life had no price. It was so valuable that it was literally priceless. In his, only one thing had that quality of pricelessness. It was eleutheria: freedom. He was the unmalleable, the essence, the beyond reason, beyond logic, beyond civilization, beyond history. He was not God, because there is no God we can know. But he was proof that there is a God that we can never know. He was the final right to deny. To be free to choose [...] I mean he was something that passed beyond morality but sprang out of the very essence of things – that comprehended all, the freedom to do all, and stood against only one thing – the prohibition not to do all." (Fowles, 2010, p. 6709)

The above quotation describes Conchis as a person obsessed with freedom, not only his own but also that related to the people who surround him. He is telling his actors what they should think and do. After Urfe's first visit to Conchis's residence, he tells Nicolas exactly when he can come for the next visit and what he should think about the island and the people living there. Conchis values his own freedom more than anything else, even his 'actor's' life.

The situation is similar to that of the protagonist of *The Collector*, where Miranda is also obsessed with freedom, but she is interested in her own freedom. She wants to break free from the confinement, to be able to start her life again. She feels like she has to do everything to fight for herself. Miranda said once that:

"I must act... I must fight with my weapons. Not his. Not selfishness and brutality and shame and resentment. Therefore with generosity (I give myself) and gentleness (I kiss the beast) and no-shame (I do what I do of my own free will) and forgiveness (he can't help himself). Even a baby. His baby. Anything. For freedom. The more I think about it the more I feel sure that this is the way." (Fowles, 2010, p. 3438-43)

Miranda becomes obsessed with her lack of liberty. She is ready to do anything to gain it. She is losing her dignity and begins to feel that if her plan does not work, she will kill the executioner. She wants to live again; breathe again and be able to do anything she can think of. Miranda is discovering her needs and she begins to understand herself through her imprisonment. In the novel, the female protagonist exemplifies the motif of the obsession with freedom. She wants to be able to create her own life. She dreams of what her life could look like if she were a free person. Miranda realises that she never knew how much she valued life and how much she wanted to live until the option of freedom was taken away from her. In turn, the main male character in *The Collector* experiences unfulfilled love, which cannot make him feel entirely free. Clegg tries his best to make Miranda happy, but he struggles with expressing his emotions and needs. He does not understand that he cannot force Miranda to love him in the way he wants. The addiction to the kidnapped girl is making him buy her everything she wants just to make her fall in love with him. Clegg knows that Miranda is obsessed with her lack of freedom, so he thinks that he can spoil her to gain her love. Clegg is an absurd man from Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, who appears as a man led by his desire for a reason (Camus, 1991). In *The Collector*, Miranda often writes in her diary what Ferdinand buys for her. She could ask for anything, except her freedom. He buys her French perfume, books, and a music player. He tries to spoil

Miranda, but she cannot have the one thing she really wants. Ferdinand has liberty, but he is not free from his feelings for Miranda Grey. He finds his kind of freedom in his love interest. The girl becomes the priority in his life.

*The Collector* and *The Magus* present the motif of freedom as an obsession which leads the characters of the novels towards destruction. Miranda finally dies because she did not get the help she needed. Ferdinand relives his psychopath features, while Conchis becomes a God for his actors.

## 6. The social aspect of freedom

The social aspect of freedom is also presented in the analysed novels. Dianne L. Vipond in *Conversations with John Fowles* (1999) shows that “every one of his [John Fowles’] novels lays bare the prison of social class and reveals its devastating effects on the lives of his characters” (Vipond, p. 14). Existentialism pictures the fight of a man in an encounter with society and John Fowles uses this idea in *The Collector*, where the main female protagonist, Miranda, represents the middle-class, while Ferdinand represents the lower class. What is more, the male protagonist says that “there was always a class between us” (Fowles, 2010, p. 570). The gap between social statuses is shown many times in the novels. The characters talk differently and they like different things. Even their education and the way they see the world around them are different. They are members of dissimilar social classes, and despite Ferdinand’s effort to make a connection with Miranda, it is impossible for them to become friends. This aspect of freedom is related to social conventions. Miranda’s values contrast with the values that Clegg represents. She sees him as a man who collects things, classifies them, names them, and then forgets about them. Miranda suggests that Clegg reminds her of Caliban, the subhuman creature from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Caliban, a wild, deformed man, represents, in Miranda’s opinion, all of Clegg’s features. Clegg and Caliban have a similar trait because both of them are seen by others as ignorant. Another feature which is transferred intertextually from Shakespeare’s plays is that they always mention class differences as an obstacle. Clegg and Caliban are always at the bottom of the social classes, even though they try their best to impress others. But those two characters are led by their principles, which makes them completely innocent. Ferdinand does not feel guilty about his actions. He acts according to his own rules, which makes him innocent compared to Miranda’s friends and some people from her social class. *The Collector* presents

conflicting characters because of their social classes and because they are not free from social conventions.

*The Magus* represents a different point of view on this subject. Urfe is bored with ruling conventions. This is a reason why he leaves England and moves abroad to become free from all social classes. On the Greek island, he meets Conchis and tries to become someone who means something, someone respectable in society (Head, 2002, p. 5, 11). Urfe wants to create his own fate and be a true creator of his life.

Those two novels present freedom in terms of social convention, which puts a lot of attention on the conflict between the effective classes and the ruling conveniences. The characters pictured in Fowles' novels can become more than they really think they can. The existentialist belief in the power of the entity is explored and illustrated in *The Collector* and *The Magus*. Individualization of the entity results in a more authentic and unique person. Clegg and Urfe change their views on social class and become free of those ruling conventions.

## 7. The motive of freedom in terms of sexuality

In *The Collector*, Miranda tries to seduce Ferdinand, hoping to regain her freedom. The reader quickly notices that the result is completely opposite. Clegg does not understand sexual passion, so after Miranda's desperate act, he becomes disgusted with her. Miranda Grey, by showing her sexual freedom, which even means giving her body to someone she could never love, pushes Ferdinand away. In fact, at this point, she completely loses her freedom as well as her dignity, with the feeling of absolute humiliation. Fowles snuck Jung's psychology in archetypal terms. Clegg never felt a mother's love because she despaired after his father died when Ferdinand was two years old. He has no idea how to act around a woman because he grew up without role models, so he has an unhealthy attitude towards women.

As for the second book analysed in this article, *The Magus*, the main protagonist becomes a reluctant witness of a sexual game created by Conchis. Nicolas is forced to see the brutal rape scene, which disgusts him and turns him into emotional pieces. The play, called godgame, changes every person involved and leaves a mark on Urfe's life. He starts to see life differently. He loses his faith in absolute freedom. Nothing is pure for him anymore. Religion, conventions, and his beliefs are tarnished by Conchis's manipulations:

“They were the ones who had been finally humiliated – and I [Urfe] saw that perhaps that astounding last performance had been intended to be a mutual humiliation. While it happened it had seemed like a vicious twisting of the dagger in an already sufficient wound; but now I saw it might also be kind of revenge given me for their spying; their voyeurism, on Alison and myself. I had this: being obscurely victorious. Being free again, but in new freedom... purged in some way.” (Fowles, 2010, p. 8195)

The quotation above pictures a scene which involves Urfe, his beloved actress Lily, and a brutal actor playing the monster. Urfe is forced to be in this place at this time, and this scene changes him. His new vision of freedom is purged by the godgame. Conchis’s absolute sexual freedom exceeds the limit of Urfe’s tolerance. The power of sexual freedom and the consequences of existentialist free will are expressed by motifs of magic. Sexual freedom awakens the most hidden passions in the actors in Conchis’s manipulations.

The analysis of freedom in terms of sexuality shown in the analysed novels is powerful because of its effect on the characters. In both novels, the sexual freedom of the protagonist changes the thread of the story. Clegg becomes more brutal and cruel over time, while Urfe becomes fearless. This experience opens them up to a different vision of sexual freedom and passion.

## **8. The moral aspect of freedom**

Characters in the novels also present a moral aspect of freedom, which makes them act ambiguously. In 1966, John Fowles wrote a letter to one of his fans in which he said the following about the male character in his book called *The Magus*:

“He [Urfe] suggests that the one valid reality or principle for us lies in freedom. Accept that a man has the possibility of limited freedom and that if this is so, he must be responsible for his action. To be free (which means rejecting all the gods and political creeds and the rest) leaves one no choice but to act according to reason: that is, humanely to all humans.” (Goosmann)

All of Fowles’ characters depict the aspect of moral freedom. Conchis is convinced that he can do everything he wants. He is devoid of morality and for him, his manipulations mean more than his actors’ lives. John Fowles’ fiction once more relates to the theory of the absurd man, who is led by his desire for clarity and search for the absolute truth of the world.

*The Collector* presents Ferdinand as a man who is not entirely aware that he is doing the wrong thing. In the novel, the author tries to explain Ferdinand's action by making the reader think that Clegg does not have control over his instinct. He represents a typical sociopath's behavior. Ferdinand shows a lack of morality, and he is powerless to see the differences between right and wrong. Søren Kierkegaard, the first existentialist, proposed that "each individual—not society or religion—is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately and sincerely (authentically)" (Watts, 2014, p. 4-6). Fowles was also inspired by the existentialists when he wrote *The Collector*, so he gained some inspiration from the work of Albert Camus (Goosman). The French Nobel Prize-winning author Albert Camus, in a few of his books, presents the pattern of the absurd man, whose influence is clearly seen in *The Collector*. The absurd man is presented in the character of Clegg, an isolated (anti-)hero who fights with his passions in the absurd world he is living. In his works, Albert Camus explains his vision of the absurd man:

"What in fact is an absurd man? He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. [...] Life first teaches him to get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits. Assured of his temporally limited freedom, of his revolt devoid of future, and of his mortal consciousness, he lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime." (Camus, 1991, p. 66)

In *The Collector*, the male protagonist develops his individualism by seeking his own needs, which obsesses him to the point of becoming a serial killer. After Miranda's death, he starts searching for another victim. At the end of the novel, Ferdinand says:

"I have not made up my mind about Marian (another M! I heard the supervisor call her name), this time it won't be love, it would just be for the interest of the thing and to compare them and also the other thing, which as I say I would like to go into in more detail and I could teach her how. And the clothes would fit. Of course, I would make it clear from the start who's boss and what I expect." (Fowles, 2010, p. 3969)

Clegg is free of all moral principles. He is not scared of being caught in the sense of absolute freedom that pushes him to destruction. He does not care that Miranda died some time ago; he finds another victim so nothing can disrupt his plan.

This part of the paper describes the motif of moral freedom, which can become dangerous for those who truly believe in their rights. By using the pattern of absurd man, John Fowles connects the characters

of *The Collector* and *The Magus*. Urfe changes into a strong, callous man, who believes that he took the lessons of his life on the Greek islands. While Clegg's attitude towards women becomes more aggressive and manipulative.

## 9. Conclusion

Both novels analysed in this paper present various aspects of freedom and the fight to gain it. All of the characters are placed in difficult situations without an easy or possible way out. John Fowles' fiction gives the reader a clue about how determined a human being can become when one fights for freedom. The issue of freedom is still widely used in discussions and is still as important as it was in the past. People value freedom as one of the key needs of existence. *The Collector* and *The Magus* are not only novels in which the author pictures the many aspects of freedom, but also novels full of postmodernism motifs such as intertextuality. All of the aspects of freedom, as also presented in this essay, have changed the way of expression in future literature, inspiring many writers, such as S. Onega, D.L. Vipond and others.

The theory of Camus's absurd man as well as Jung's archetypes are clearly present in both of the analysed novels. The various aspects of freedom banded together by the main protagonist presented the reader with the complexity in the John Fowles' novels. In *The Collector* and *The Magus*, John Fowles presents a similar pattern in the created plots. The main character is a man who is fascinated by a woman he cannot understand and is driven by the desire to become someone better. Freedom connects those features, making John Fowles' novels inspirational for readers.

What is also important to highlight is the fact that the theme of freedom as such can involve as many aspects as presented in the books. Freedom is not just limited to imprisonment, as it can have many sides and each of them is equally important and equally influential on the subsequent fate of the individual as well as the society in which it appears. Through the various concepts of freedom presented in this paper, it is worth starting a dialogue on their relevance and whether they have changed over the years, as it seems that Fowles' novels are still as influential as ever and have not lost their relevance.

## REFERENCES

- Bawer, B. (1987). John Fowles and his big ideas. *The New Criterion*, 5, No. 21. (1987), 21-36.
- Burzyńska, A. & Markowski, M. P. (2006). *Teorie Literatary XX wieku*. Kraków: Znak.
- Butler, L.S.J. (1991). *John Fowles and the Fiction of Freedom*. In: Acheson, J. (eds) *The British and Irish Novel Since 1960*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21522-5\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21522-5_5)
- Camus, A. (1989). *The Stranger*. Vintage Books, 1st Vintage International edition.
- Camus, A. (1991). *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Kindle Edition. Vintage.
- Eagleton, T. (1998). *The Illusion of Postmodernism*. Kindle Edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Fowles, J. (2010). *The Collector*. Kindle Edition. Vintage Digital; New Ed edition.
- Fowles, J. (2010). *The Magus*. Kindle Edition. Vintage Digital; New Ed edition.
- Goosmann, B. (n.d.). *Biography of John Fowles*. <http://www.fowlesbooks.com/biography-of-john-fowles/>
- Goosmann, B. (n.d.) *1966 Fowles Letter to High School Student Sheds Light on The Magus*. <http://www.fowlesbooks.com/1966-fowles-letter-to-high-school-student-sheds-light-on-the-magus>
- Head, D. (2002). *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1976). *Psychological types*. The collected works of CG Jung. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Onega, S. (1989). *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*. London: UMI Research Press.
- Salami, M. (1992). *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses.
- Shakespeare, W. (1994). *The Complete work of William Shakespeare*. The Tempest. London: Barnes and Noble, Inc.
- Soanes, C. (2010). *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2nd Edition. Kindle Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sutherland, J. (2011). *Lives of the Novelists: A History of Fiction in 294 Lives*. Kindle Edition. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Watts, M. (2014). *Kierkegaard: An Essential Introduction*. Kindle Edition. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Vipond, D. L. (1999). *Conversations with John Fowles*. Mississippi: University Press by Mississippi.