

DANIEL MARTIN'S MULTIPLE JOURNEYS

CORNELIA COSER

“Aurel Vlaicu” University, Arad

***Abstract:** Modern literature modifies the pattern on which most western narration was founded. The hero's adventures come to exhibit the same dependence on initial conditions as dynamical systems do. In John Fowles's novel, Daniel Martin, both character and author benefit from multiple journeys, the fractal characteristics of the novel standing in contrast with the wholeness of the vision.*

***Keywords:** the hero's journey, adaptation of the myth, fictional experiments, fragmentation, wholeness.*

1. Introduction

Western literature, as a complex, historically defined entity, has been to a great extent under the influence of the quest narrative manifesting as the story of a journey, whether physical or symbolical but serving, since the times of Odysseus and Gilgamesh, as a perfect catalyst for the presentation of a plot line that gives lavish opportunities for the unfolding of a sequence of conflicts and resolutions. Many illustrious examples validate the form through the building of a hero whom the journey has caused to leave his natural equilibrium, grow, have his moment of illumination and return to a life changed by the experience itself. Through the hardships endured, the hero achieves his spiritual journey and in Devera's words (2008), transforms “within a personal landscape of ethos and pathos, even as the character traverses the literal landscape”.

This article starts from two premises. The first is that the concept of fractality can be extrapolated to the study of literature, namely, similarities can be found between the structure of Fowles's novel *Daniel Martin* (in which the journey, seen as the dynamic component moving the plot forward, undergoes iteration) and fractal structures (which refer to natural phenomena and which signify the presence of an apparently chaotic dynamic system), since "Even the best examples of natural fractals do not possess self-similarity at all scales, but rather over a sufficiently large range..." (Addison 1997:5). The second premise is that the notion of *wholeness*, which is the philosophy encircling the novel, is both achieved and undermined by iteration and fragmentation, thus triggering cyclicity instead of a final outcome.

2. The Traveller's Journey and Its Modern Interpretations

In *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell surveys the classic formula of the rites of passage (separation – initiation – return) which he elevates to the level of the mythological adventure, passing from the "domestic, microcosmic triumph" achieved by the fairy-tale hero to the "world-historical macrocosmic triumph" of the mythical hero (Campbell 1949:35). Campbell emphasizes the fact that "the ageless initiation symbolism," which takes the form of images, is to such an extent a necessary ingredient for the psyche that, if such images "are not supplied from without, through myth and ritual," both seen as a source of knowledge, they will have to be supplied "through dream, from within," their absence resulting in a blockage of our energies (1949:11). Campbell also acknowledges the numerous possibilities on the scale of the monomyth. Elements of the cycle of adventures, to which he provides the keys, can be

enlarged, others can be connected into strings: "Differing characters or episodes can become fused, or a single element can reduplicate itself and reappear under many changes" (Campbell 1949:228). Modern literature modifies to an even greater extent the infinity of variations, with each new period and each culture refreshing the experience to harmonize the new interests and concerns. Such modifications can range from the destruction of the hero in the process of the journey, as it happens in Kerouac's *On the Road*, to a multiplication of the experience rendered in a new experimental form of the journey narrative, as is the case with John Fowles's (1997) monumental novel.

Under the guise of the conventional plot of a *Bildungsroman*, also suggested by the title of the novel, and an apparent stylistic straightforwardness of the narrative, Fowles conceals his most complex novel, one which is strikingly innovative, in spite of being the most autobiographical of all, and aggressively experimental, in spite of such remarkable previous examples as *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, written eight years before. While addressing its intricacy from either a unilateral perspective or in one article would damage the novel in its completeness, approaching *Daniel Martin* from the perspective of the *hero's journey* seems to be the choice at hand. As shown above, the novel is to a great extent autobiographical, voicing the existential problems of the "unlucky generation", "the last of the old Oxford", at a loss for significance now that "all the stabilizing moral and religious values in society, were vanishing into thin air" (Fowles 1997:261). However, while the essence of the classic *Bildungsroman* is obvious, the structure and the perspective of the novel overthrow the logical development of the narrative line, just as they do with the hero's journey.

The first two chapters of the novel already exhibit changes in the pattern of the mythic quest: the first chapter opens to a first Threshold which the hero, as an adolescent, has to cross on his way to maturity; the second ends with the Call to a second journey which will be an attempt to achieving *whole sight*, the adult's desideratum.

Symbolically called "The Harvest" (the cognitive apprehension of the title involving the idea of attainment and consummation), the first chapter unfolds on the background of WWII, in the quiet Thorncombe Woods, in Devon. It is 1942 and Danny, the future main character, is about fifteen. Fowles lessens his individuality by calling him "the boy", while mentioning all the other characters by their names, for at least two reasons, the first of which becomes obvious at the end of the chapter, while the second is his perceiving the whole opening scene as a Breughel painting, crowded with people, no distinctive personality, except the one of his choice – the hero who will accomplish the journey and whose destiny he will bring close to fulfilment.

Dan, as the boy would prefer to be called, already feels different from the others, ashamed of his educated language (he is the vicar's son) which he contrasts with the "phonetically condensed" regional speech of the villagers working in the field, a language he will forever associate with the landscape, "combes and bartons, leats and linhays" (Fowles 1997:6). He (or the author) is already struggling with existential problems: he is afraid of dying before the next harvest. He clings to the things he knows and likes, such as the small orchid, *Spiranthes spiralis* (a passion he shares with the author). He has learned to hide his loneliness, "his terrible Oedipal secret" (Fowles 1997:10), the father figure, the vicar, offering no support while he is on the threshold every son has to cross. If Daniel's journey is not identical

with Fowles's, the latter will surely accompany him while achieving his own adventure. There can be no misunderstanding about it when, at the end of the chapter, there is a complete overlap: the author takes Danny's penknife from his pocket, the one he has gutted the rabbits with and cleans it, while the boy carves his initials and the date on the beech-tree. This is the end of his childhood and of the dream.

Since later on Daniel does not remember either the events told in this first chapter or his parental environment, of which he tells more in "The Umbrella", with nostalgia or the heart warming feelings that are normally associated with such memories, one can conclude that the novel opens with episodes of the tests he has to undergo and during which his father fails to act as a Helper. As a mature man, Daniel speaks of "items on the bill" (Fowles 1997:79) of negative influences his father exerted on him, the chapter itself being an explanation of why he grew up to be an atheist. A different chapter, "Phillida", speaks about his early love story with Nancy Reed. With the girl as Helper and his father and aunt as Threshold Guardians, the road of his sexual initiation is started and abruptly interrupted, one more source for instability in his later relations. Ultimately, it is neither resentment nor desire of self-aggrandizement that tear him away from Thorncombe, in spite of his obvious personal discomfort, but all mythic heroes' need to look beyond the restricting walls that parents, society and ultimately his own conscience have built around him. Thus, in Daniel's case, his quests correspond to both Jungian propositions: they are a "testimony of a discontent that urges the discovery of new horizons", as well as a "search for the lost mother" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1969:269), whom he actually lost as a child and to whom he is permanently attracted, but whom he loses again by marrying Jane, the wrong sister. Daniel cannot

conclude his search without a restoration of the dislocated balance but, with no one to tell him the rules, he fails to grasp the moment of his possible perfection and, by making the wrong choice, he maintains his duality and the struggle between good and evil in his soul. Therefore, an iteration of the journey, in which a different starting point will modify the result, is necessary.

As it often happens in modern reproductions of the myth, the pattern is broken, the second chapter does not continue the journey where it was left in the first. What the reader gets instead is what Campbell (1949) would identify as the Return, which it physically is, since Daniel, as a successful career man, leaves the U.S. and returns to England. However, taking into account the circumstances of the first journey, this new experience functions better as a second journey. When dealing with fractals, Bird (2003:3) shows iteration to be a “creative process” not a simple repetition: “When a process iterates, it is performed over and over again but each time with alterations and modifications that might be slight but are nevertheless productive”. Liebovitch says the same: “As a fractal object is magnified, ever finer features are revealed” (1998:4) and “The smaller pieces are like the larger pieces but they are not the exact copies of the larger pieces” (1998:12). Therefore, it is appropriate to consider that the second chapter marks the beginning of a new journey, an iteration of the first one, in which the elements that were missing in the hero’s first endeavour are filled and the quest becomes multiple, with a much larger reward at stake, since it also becomes an attempt to achieve *whole sight*, which is inseparable from inner truth and thus, in this case, as opposed to Nietzsche’s *standards, the value of truth* appears to be decided by the “effort required to attain it” (1996:302-3).

Thirty years later, in the early 70s, Daniel Martin is a middle-aged hotshot Hollywood screenwriter, who admits functioning like a computer and being able to write a script even in his sleep. As it often happens, success has its toll and this time it is twofold. On the one hand, he has changed into a rather infatuated, narcissistic person:

He divides conversation into two categories: when you speak, and when you listen to yourself speak. Of late, his has been too much the second. Narcissism: when one grows too old to believe in one's uniqueness, one falls in love with one's complexity – as if layers of lies could replace the green illusion; or the sophistries of failure, the stench of success. (Fowles 1997:13)

On the other hand, the same quote makes it obvious that the adult experiences the same feeling of exile that tormented the adolescent, which he assimilates with something that was due to him but had been taken away, “the betrayal of myths,” he calls it. At some point during his first journey he seems to “have been taken over by someone else,” “some kind of fink” (Fowles 1997:15) and thus the first journey appears to be spiritually unaccomplished. His much younger but quite observant Scottish girlfriend, Jenny, notices that Daniel is burned out and suggests writing a novel. But Daniel is aware of the risks, the worst of them being that of losing his common sense, “the thing cobblers are meant to stick to.” He once “gutted” his friends for the sake of a good play and is not willing to repeat the experience. He ran away then and, as he tells Jenny, once you run away, “you can't find your way back” (Fowles 1997:16). He left London for Hollywood and thus the first quest degenerated into a running from his own self. But such a flight never reaches its target, therefore it must necessarily be followed by a search into one's self, which Chevalier and Gheerbrant

(1969:270) consider to be the only real journey. The first quest is unrewarded. Through the incapacity of recognizing the Mentors on the way, no enlightenment has been reached, the situation in which the hero was thrust did not provide the way out and the obstacles did not reach the core issue. But Daniel left the door open: he bought Thorncombe for his daughter Caro (or was it rather for himself?). Discovering what is truly important will involve major changes in the character's life and multiple moments of transcendence will lead him to his final epiphany.

Nietzsche (1996:305) links man's desire for freedom of will with the moment when he is "most strongly fettered". And it is exactly at this moment of end of road and confinement that the new Call arrives, in this case a literal phone call from Jane, his former sister-in-law. In between the first two chapters, the first journey has taken place and the way Fowles structured his novel makes obvious his desire to minimize it when set against his major quest.

Daniel has come a long way from his native village and the status of the local vicar's son. He has certainly achieved what for most people would be the end of the journey, the primary goal of life – worldly success. Whether it is his "inflated ego" which "threatens to block all vital knowledge from the unconscious to become known to his conscious self" and thus triggers his psychological transformation, as Jovanovic (2008:301) suggests, or it is the self's own necessity to get its own supply of the ageless process through which it is provided with primary initiatory images, is not really important. The second quest will bestow upon the hero's self its real purpose and will endow him with the spiritual energy to achieve the physical journey that would ultimately allow it to perform to its best within its own microcosm, in conformity with the rules of a much bigger historical

macrocosm. For Daniel Martin once the process starts there is no return. In the process of growing (since all stages of the mythological journey work towards the transfiguration of the hero), he overcomes several Thresholds and, in the process, he clears the path and does his mental cleaning of memories which hinder his passage. It is interesting to notice that he does not try to re-adjust his old roles with his new capacities; there is no Atonement with the father, which Campbell (1949:135) perceives as the necessary stage for transcending the blind spot of life. In the Occidental culture, materialism (the flesh) often replaces spirituality (the soul), and the hero is often forced to self-justification while struggling in the world of darkness in search for the light. The modern man is in a permanent search for the reasons – already there in his subconscious mind – that would explain his behaviour. The chapters of the novel that involve flashbacks to the hero's childhood and adolescence are illustrations of this search.

To Daniel the meeting with Anthony on his death bed is a decisive moment. To Anthony, who willingly lived his whole existence within the strict confinements of the Catholic dogmas, the Devil is “not seeing whole” (Fowles 1997:181). The approach of his death allows him whole sight and he wants to correct one of Life's “major design faults” (Fowles 1997:183). Anthony asks Daniel to “disinter the person Jane might have been from beneath the person she is now” (Fowles 1997:177). Again, Daniel does not know the rules and therefore he improvises (in inviting Jane to Egypt he acts on a whim), but the understanding he gained during his first journey gets him through the Road of Trials this time and, therefore, the arbitrariness of the situation leads to the accomplishment of the most significant attempt at *wholeness* in the novel – the union of Daniel and Jane, which was not

allowed thirty years before by circumstance and the characters' mixed up sense of responsibility.

Daniel and Jane illustrate two different types of isolation. Totally distinct in their approach to life, Jane, suffocated by Anthony's expectations, first withdrawing into the dogmatism of the Catholic Church then into Marxism, and Daniel superficial in his relations and refusing to see his real self in the turmoil of his social life, they both have a partial sight and need each other. Consequently, they will act as Helpers to each other so as to get the whole picture. During the journey to the mythic and timeless land of Egypt and in the name of a long forbidden love, they readjust their conflicts. Nietzsche (1996:304) points out that "to quieten the heart it is absolutely not necessary to have solved the ultimate and outermost theoretical questions" and this is exactly the process the two of them go through, at the end of which Daniel finally finds the long-sought for mother figure, while Jane's burying her wedding-ring in the Palmyra desert is a symbol of the liberation of her own soul and a sealing of their reunion.

Thus stands Daniel Martin at the end of the novel "reborn to the future" (Campbell 1949:14), which he had not chosen thirty years before but chooses now, having gone through the rites of passage that enabled him "to die to the past" (14) and changed his whole environment in order to assimilate his return to his normal world, the one which he originally belonged to but was not prepared for and could not find without the proper feelings.

3. Wholeness versus Fragmentation and Cyclicity

The psyche has many secrets in store and, just as Fowles chooses to impersonate himself through different means in all his novels, Daniel

chooses the role that will allow him to perform a new adventure: the writing of his own novel. Fowles as character pretends that Daniel's novel will forever remain a project, but Fowles as author does not, actually he has already written it.

One aspect of wholeness involves the framing of the novel within one and the same sentence: "Whole-sight; or all the rest is desolation" (Fowles 1997:3). Both author and alter ego have "ripened" during the experience and, within the landscape of their own creation, both have accepted the initiatory images, produced their own symbolic interpretation of the world and accepted the return. But Daniel's decision of writing his novel, coming at the end of the already written one, creates a cyclic movement; therefore, it seems only natural that the sentence he confesses to have found for the end of his yet unwritten novel will act as an overture for Fowles's actual novel.

Wholeness is disrupted at several levels. Fowles, as always, experiments with innovation all through the novel. This time he plays along with shifting perspectives, Daniel's first person account of his life often alternating with the author's third person narration of the events. Author, narrator and character overlap in the present and in the past, in an attempt to have multiple projections from the inside and outside of their unique self. Sometimes this happens in the middle of paragraphs and it culminates in "Breaking Silence" where there are no less than eighteen such shifts. Thus, in spite of the structural integrity of the novel, the very concept of wholeness of vision is obtained through fractality.

The self-similarity characteristic of fractals is manifested in space and time. The great number of locations and time references between which the novel evolves in an oscillatory movement have the role of both shifting

the action forward and fragmenting it. While an autobiographical novel involves the idea of discontinuity, the structure of this novel exhibits careful planning when it comes to the physical and temporal journeys that accompany the spiritual one. If the five chapters connected with the first part of the quest are considered to have Hollywood as an anchor and the ten chapters referring to the second part (the exact double number of chapters being a mark of importance) are located in London and Oxford, then there are exactly ten chapters describing temporal journeys into Daniel's childhood, youth, or student years, and other ten spatial journeys with Jane, to Egypt and Libya. The rest of the chapters, again ten in number, refer to: one general discussion about Englishness and cinematography; Jenny's three "contributions", which add to the fragmentation of the structure; two temporal and four spatial travels (again, the number is doubled when reference is made to the second journey) but, unlike the previous ones, this time they are approached from the perspective of the present.

One such journey describes Daniel's repeated visits to a Native American *pueblo*, Tsankawi, in New Mexico. Both times when he undertakes the visit in the company of friends, Daniel is disappointed since he initiated them as tests, but the others seem unable to perceive the magnificence of the scenery the way Daniel does and thus fail to live up to his expectations as to their reaction to it. Moreover, Jenny makes the gross mistake of collecting pottery fragments in view of transforming them into necklaces (fragments into whole). This approach of the modern tourist shatters to pieces, similar to the fragments of pottery, Dan's older civilisation and more mature approach. Petrified at Jenny's gesture of using vestiges of ancient civilizations as cheap gifts, he decides that she failed the test. In this relationship, in which each of them uses the other, Jenny is the

one endowed with more acuity of perception: she understands much sooner that Daniel will not return, either to her or to his previous existence, while the latter, as consequence of a long habit of observing himself from the outside instead of acting as a responsible participant in his own life, and being more involved in physical relationships than in spiritual experiences, is very late in acknowledging the fact. Actually, Jenny's contributions, interspersed among the chapters, have the same role as the authorial shifts of perspective, or the mirrors in Daniel's Oxford room: they both reflect Daniel, but with Jenny they reflect what he has become at the end of his first journey.

The perception of a fluctuating space and time moves the novel forward and covers a host of fields of knowledge. A recurrence of images and experiences creates cyclicity. When Daniel finally has all the jig-saw pieces of his personal landscape fallen into place, he recovers the people whom he mistakenly believed he had to abandon in order to find his true self. Such a person is Caro, his daughter, whom he finds struggling to make heads or tails of her own existence: her involvement with Barney, Daniel's former Oxford colleague and friend, is her replacement of the father figure, as a Mentor. At a different level, Jenny McNeil herself may have undergone the same process, thus balancing Daniel's search for the mother figure.

Two other examples are worth considering, whose significance becomes obvious if the number three itself is seen, as it happens in some mythologies, as a symbol of completion, of the unity between body, mind and spirit. The image/symbol of death appears in three major scenes in the novel. In the first chapter, the pastoral quality of the scene is compromised by the rabbits killed by a mower and the reapers themselves. In the second chapter, Dan and Jane discover a corpse in the reeds while they are on a

boat ride. Both these moments are connected with opportunities missed by the hero: in the first case, his fears result in the fragmentation of his self and lead to his becoming a third person observer of himself; in the second case, he passively accepts Jane's decision as to their future, which will completely distort their destinies since they were both in love with each other. It is this decision that Anthony resolved to annihilate before committing suicide, his final gesture thus correcting the implications of death in the first two scenes.

In two of the above situations references to paintings are made. The Breughel painting adds to the pastoral quality of the scene reverted by the symbol of death. A reproduction of Mantegna's *St. Sebastian* that hangs above Anthony's hospital bed, while being a display of his inner self, also acts as a shield against the two major decisions he is going to make: entrusting his wife to a friend and committing suicide. In the final chapter, having parted with Jenny, Daniel contemplates Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* in Kenwood Gallery (mentioned by name only in the first edition). The moment itself is important for two reasons. Firstly, it coincides with Daniel's final transcendent experience, which will conclude with his finding "a last sentence for the novel he was never going to write" (Fowles 1997:629), a novel that could only be a self-portrait just like the already written one. But most importantly, of Rembrandt's more than thirty self-portraits, this is the only one exhibiting two unfinished circles, left and right, in the background. The choice of this painting can be taken as an admission of incompleteness.

Thus the symbolic significance of the number three is undermined by the possibility of iteration, the qualitatively new apprehension of the experience, which in itself creates cyclicity. The repetition of the number

three would thus point to the necessity of a third journey, the same way the title of the last chapter, “Future Past”, and the uncertain but latent novel do.

4. Conclusion

In *Daniel Martin* multiple journeys take place on multiple levels. While the hero’s micro-journey reaches an end, the author’s macro-journey will continue. Therefore, *whole sight* can be achieved as an aesthetic principle but not as a natural one. The encyclopaedic character of the novel becomes obvious at a first encounter and is not minimized by subsequent readings. As Weston (1920:65) points out, the modern scholars’ tendency to specialize deprives them of seeing the object of study “as a whole” and thus “induces them to minimize, or ignore, those elements which lie outside their particular range”. But, as already mentioned, addressing the novel in all its complexity would be an unreasonable endeavour. Even in this case wholeness is impossible and is reduced to fragmentation resulting in isolation and a narrow apprehension of the work’s enormous multiplicity. This article makes no exception and the only excuse that can be brought to its defence is Siddhartha’s noble idealism in Hesse’s novel:

When someone is searching, then it might easily happen that the only thing his eyes still see is that what he searches for ... Searching means: having a goal. But finding means: being free, being open, having no goal. (2002:51)

And thus the search itself will be iterated.

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