

**Mal'akh's Tattoos in Dan Brown's The Lost Symbol:
Insights into Literary Elements**

"تواصلت وشم مالآخ في رواية دان براون 'الرمز المفقود': رؤى في العناصر الأدبية"



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Abstract

Tattoos played an integral role in characterization from the very beginning of literature till this day. Tattooed literary characters not only increased over the years; they took the center stage as well, becoming role models to the extent that fanatics adapt their tattoos. All genres of literature witnessed great inclusion of inked characters, giving emphases to their literary significance in building characterization. Dan Brown took tattoos to a whole new level by creating a riddle in the shape of a tattooed antagonist in his bestseller *The Lost Symbol*, the third book of the symbologist Robert Langdon Series. The problem of the research lies in the fact that although many studies and books were dedicated to analyzing Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*, very few concentrated on the symbols inked on the antagonist Mal'akh. Strange enough, Mal'akh was searching for the last symbol to tattoo on the only tattoo – free skin on the crown of his head and Brown took us through a treasure hunt composed of 669 pages to conclude this symbol. The aim of research is to decipher the symbolic tattoos burnt into Mal'akh's skin. The researcher will describe the tattoos from top to bottom, explaining them from Dan Brown's point of view through his antagonist Mal'akh, as well as analyzing how each and every tattoo plays an integral role not only in characterization but also in various ranges of literary elements. Mal'akh's tattoos as reflections of setting, atmosphere, mood, tone, point of view, motif, theme, plot, metaphor, personification, conflict, allusion, and genre are analyzed and discussed with reference to the novel as well as literary studies. The researcher concluded that Brown's gradual revelations of Mal'akh's tattoos show his creativity as a writer in using tattoos to reflect a wide range of literary elements of the novel.

Keywords: ancient mysteries, conspiracy theory, esoteric, freemasonry, King Solomon, secrete society, and sigil.

المستخلص

تلعب الوشوم دوراً أساسياً في تكوين الشخصية الأدبية منذ نشأة الأدب وإلى يومنا هذا. وذلك عبر تاريخ الأدب لم تزداد الشخصيات الأدبية الموشومة فقط، بل تقدمت وأخذت الأضواء الأمر الذي جعل وشوم هذه الشخصية نموذج يحتذى به في الواقع. جميع أنواع الأدب تضمنت شخصيات موشومة وتم التسليط على دور هذه الوشوم في وصف الشخصية وتطورها. دان براون استخدم الوشم بطريقة مختلفة، ناقلاً رمزيها إلى مستوى آخر تماماً، خالقاً خصماً مغطى بالوشوم من أعلى رأسه وإلى أخمص قدميه في روايته الرمز المفقود. تكمن مشكلة البحث في عدم وجود بحوث ودراسات تركز على رمزية وشوم شخصية ملاك على الرغم من كون أحداث الرواية تدور حول إيجاد آخر وشم يكمل به وشومه. الهدف من البحث فك شفرة وشوم ملاك وتحليلها وكيفية استنباط عناصر الرواية جميعها من هذه الوشوم. البحث يدرس جميع الوشوم الخاصة بملاك وكيف أنها تلعب دوراً أساسياً في بناء شخصيته الأدبية فضلاً عن العناصر الأخرى كالبيئة والحبكة والدلالة والمغزى والصراع والاستعارة وغيرها. استنتجت الباحثة أن الكشف التدريجي لوشوم ملاك يدل على إبداعه الأدبي الذي استطاع من خلاله عكس جميع العناصر الأدبية للرواية.

كلمات مفتاحية: الأسرار القديمة، نظرية المؤامرة، الباطنية، الماسونية، الملك سليمان، مجتمع

سري، الختم.



Introduction:

Through his novels, Dan Brown intrigues his readers with rich and encyclopedic information encoded within symbols planted in every page, and in this case on the character himself. Brown takes us again to the world of freemasonry and builds his entire symbols on their mythology and rituals. Many ventured to decipher the symbols packed in the novel, leaving the symbols inked on Mal'akh. Therefore, the researcher's contribution is deciphering the symbolism of the antagonist's tattoos and providing literary proof that all the tattoos give insights not only to characterization but to the novel's literary elements as well.

Tattoos

The word tattoo comes from the Tahitian word *Tatatau*, which means to strike properly. Captain Cook was the first to introduce the term, breaking it into two words; *ta*, "striking something," *tatau* "is to mark something." (Smith T. A., 2016). According to *The Tattoo Dictionary*, tattoos are "a symbol of freedom and self – expression." (Smith T. A., 2016) "They are marks of life journey, of thought, and of ideas, as well as snapshots of exact moments in time." (Smith T. A., 2016). These symbols cannot be changed easily once they are inked on the skin; therefore, it is considered a permanent body modification. In another definition, tattooing is "the process of inserting pigment into the skin to create permanent designs and patterns." (Kloß, 2020) People who choose to tattoo their body with a specific symbol should be committed to that symbol because it will be permanent. Although there are techniques for tattoo removal still it leaves a mark on the skin.

Tattoos are universal, and they have been found on all continents. A tattoo "is one of the most persistent and universal forms of body modification and body art." (Martin, 2019) Tattooing is as old as humans, and, according to the Bible, Cain is considered the first human with a mark on his skin. Archeological evidence of tattooed mummies from the second century B.C. proves how ancient tattooing is. Although tattoos are old and universal, the reasons for tattooing differ greatly according to culture and religion.

Ancient civilizations used tattooing for different reasons; during the Mesopotamian civilizations, tattooing was used for marking slaves as



well as proof of divine ownership (Ditchey, 2016), while for the Indian civilization, tattoos symbolized beatification and were used as totems. In the Indian Nagas tribes, facial tattoos symbolize identity and honor. Tattoos had negative symbolism in other civilizations; for instance, in ancient Greece, tattooing was used for slaves and criminals to mark their crimes on their foreheads (Gay & Whittington, 2002). In China, wrongdoers are punished by tattoos, marking them as societal outcasts (Gilbert & Gillbert, 2000).

In South America and South Africa, tattooing is performed by tribes to mark the individual as a member of that tribe. The Maori tribes in New Zealand are well known for their use of tattoos as symbols of courage, lineage, and social status. (Doss & Ebesu, 2009). Some tribes use magical tattoos that they believe have a magical role, so they ink them on their skin as talismans. These tattoos are a form of protection against diseases, evil spirits, and disasters. Others believe in the tattoos' ability to form a passage to the other world after death. (BM, 2017)

Religious tattoos are performed during specific rituals to prove affiliation and commitment. Most religions encourage and even require tattooing, yet in both Christianity and Islam it is rejected. (BM, 2017) In the Bible (Levites 19:28) and in the Holy Quran in Sourat El Nisaa tattoos are regarded as intentional body harm; therefore, they are forbidden. In Levites it is stated, "ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you; I am the LORD, I am the Lord." Having the two great religions against it, tattooing became against the law in Europe throughout 1900. (BM, 2017) In fact, tattooing convicts and war prisoners was compulsory, and it lasted for a long time before it was abolished. Nevertheless, abolishing compulsory tattoos did not stop tattooing, on the contrary, voluntary tattooing increased immediately. (BATRIĆEVIĆ, 2020). During the 1960s, tattoos became widespread that the public adapted them making them a vital aspect of popular culture. (BATRIĆEVIĆ, 2020)

Tattoos are symbols that tell stories of the individual; therefore, they are called tattoo narratives, that is to say, they are "biographical narratives in which the life of the narrating person is told in relation to their tattoos as documenting specific stages of life and using them as historical reference points." (Kloß, 2020)

Tattoos can be classified according to different ways; they can be



classified according to the reason for having them into traumatic tattoos, medical tattoos, and decorative tattoos. In this research, we will concentrate on decorative tattoos, which are considered the most common and widely spread form of tattoos. (BM, 2017) These tattoos are subdivided into six types, like extensive tattoos, which refer to the act of covering the entire body with tattoos, and identification tattoos that were first used in Nazi death camps where inmates tattooed with numbers and also used by soldiers in the military where they tattooed their blood group. Group or tribal tattoos are those that symbolize affiliation to a certain groups, like soldiers, sailors, or gang members, while ethnic tattoos represent tattoos specific to certain tribes. (BM, 2017).

The Role of Tattoos in English and American Novel :

Tattooed characters are not new in the world of literature, for many authors have, over the years, presented tattooed characters for many reasons. Basically, tattoos symbolize evil, dark, magical, and dangerous characters, like, for example, Thomas Harris portrayal of the infamous red dragon tattooed serial killer Hannibal lecture in *The Red Dragon* (1981). On the other hand, portraying a tattooed literary character may serve many themes, like identity in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011), in which characters tattoo their personal aspirations, identities, and rebellion like Lisbeth Salander's tattoos in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2018), or masculinity in Chuck Palahniuk's *The Fight Club* (1996). They can also represent cultural significance like Isabel Allede's *House of Spirits* (1982), mark transformation like Elizabeth Gilber's *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006), reflect emotional significance like Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2006), or trauma like Heather Morris's *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (2018). Some novelists portray tattoo artists themselves, like Sarah Hall's *The Electric Michelangelo* (2004). Yet there are novelists who took tattoos to the next level, transcending characterization and theme, serving as literary devices as well as representing literary elements, and one of the most classic examples is Queequeg in Herman Melville's *Moby – Dick* (1956). Queequeg's tattoos not only became the main interest for other characters to decipher, they intrigued the readers as well.



The Problem of the research:

The problem of the research lies in the fact that although many studies and books were dedicated to analyzing Dan Brown's The Lost Symbol, very few concentrated on the symbols inked on the antagonist, Mal'akh. Strange enough, Mal'akh was searching for the last symbol to tattoo on the only tattoo – free skin on the crown of his head and Brown took us through a treasure hunt composed of 669 pages to conclude this symbolic tattoo.

The aims of the research:

Deciphering the symbolic tattoos burnt onto Mal'akh skin.

Analyzing how each and every tattoo plays an integral role in various ranges of literary elements other than characterization. Mal'akh's tattoos are insights into the genre of the novel, its setting, atmosphere, mood, tone, motif, plot, point of view, conflict, allusion, metaphor, and themes.

The Lost Symbol (2009):

The Lost Symbol is the third novel of Dan Brown's bestselling Langdon series. It follows Professor Robert Langdon's pursuit of a lost symbol to save his thirty-three-degree freemason mentor Peter Solomon with the help of the latter's sister, a Noetic scientist, Kathrin Solomon. Professor Solomon is kidnapped by a tattooed antagonist who calls himself Mal'akh, who cuts off Solomon's right hand and sends it to Langdon as an invitation to solve the last symbol for him. Brown, through Mal'akh, introduces tattoos from a new point of view rich with historical overviews and cultural implications. He also used a great range of tattoos, all symbolic to the antagonist's journey. Mal'akh's tattoos, in fact, are the driving force of the entire novel, and all literary elements are derived from them.

2.1. The Masterpiece:

It seems that Mal'akh is one of Dan Brown's favorite villains, for he preserves him with awe and describes him with admiration. Mal'akh is a six foot tall, muscular, handsome, entirely tattooed man. The first time Brown introduces Mal'akh in the novel, we are inside his head, hearing his thoughts. "The secret is how to die," (Brown, 2009) said the thirty – four year old initiate, drinking bloodred wine from a human skull, swearing in his heart that he will make all those who trust him lose



everything they hold dear. The second time we can literally see him through the description tattooing his shaved head, “sighing with pleasure as the sharp tool plunged in and out of his flesh. The soft hum of the electric device was addictive.” (Brown, 2009) Two separate situations yet powerful enough to build characterization, and Brown prepares his reader for his masterpiece, unwrapping him as a ‘priceless gift.’

We are introduced to him through the eyes of his creator from toe to top, as if taking us through a summary of his novel through the tattoos of his antagonist:

Mal’akh has a massive shaved smooth body his feet were tattooed with scales and talons of a hawk while his muscular legs were tattooed as carved pillars the left leg spiraled and his right vertically striated. Boaz and Jachin. His groin and abdomen formed a decorated archway, above which his powerful chest was emblazoned with double – headed phoenix...each head in profile with its visible eye formed by one of his nipples. His shoulders, neck and face as well as his shaved head were completely covered with an intricate tapestry of ancient symbols and sigils. (Brown, 2009)

Brown does finish describing his tattooed antagonist simply because the remaining tattoos are literary elements that should be revealed at specific times during certain events. He introduces Mal’akh’s hand tattoos in the climax of the novel, not only describing the tattoos but also how he is following an occult ritual in tattooing them on his skin. The reader gets the front seat in watching the antagonist tattoo his hands as the hand of mysteries: the index finger bore a crown, the thumb has the star, the middle finger the sun, the ring finger a lantern, and the little finger a key.

Mal’akh’s back tattoos are revealed at the end shocking Peter Solomon and all characters who behold his physique. An elegant spiral staircase ascended the middle of his muscular back; each step of the staircase was positioned on a different vertebra.

The last tattoo is in fact the lost tattoo that Mal’akh was looking for to ink on the crown of his head. Mal’akh kept the tip of his head empty; it has the ouroboros, the mystical snake devouring its tail, leaving an empty untattooed skin in the center. At the end of the novel, he



mistakenly tattooed a circumpunct inside the ouroboros believing it was the lost symbol.

Insights into the novel's Literary Elements :

The Lost Symbol is a thriller as well as a conspiracy novel. The genre of the novel is easily inferred from Mal'akh's thrilling, mysterious tattoos. The first tattoos that Brown reveals in the novel are the Boas and Jachin pillars, the double – headed phoenix, and the sigils, taking the reader immediately to the secret society of freemasonry; therefore, it is a conspiracy novel as well.

The setting of the novel is literally set on Mal'akh's tattoos, where the modern conspiracy theory of freemasonry in Washington D.C. and the modern art of American full – body tattooing trend meet the symbols of ancient mysteries.

The atmosphere of the novel is created through Mal'akh's mystical, magical, foreboding tattoos. Brown sets the tone of the novel through his fascination with his masterpiece of a villain. Brown introduces Mal'akh to the reader with awe and admiration, portraying in details how the reader should imagine Mal'akh and how other characters react once they see him. He is tall, muscular, handsome, and highly attractive that he is able to charm his way through all characters. Like a chameleon, he convinced Langdon to come to a fake conference and charmed his way as psychiatrist Dr. Christopher Abaddon, fooling Peter Solomon, Kathrine, and her assistant with his fatal attraction, knowledge, and intellect. He is always regarded with awe and bewilderment, creating a powerful mood in the reader. The readers' mood is also captivated not only by his many tattoos but also by his tattooing rituals. Brown takes his readers to Mal'akh's private room showing them the pleasure that he gets from tattooing, "sighing with pleasure as the sharp tool plunged in and out of his flesh. The soft hum of the electric device was addictive...as was the bite of the needle sliding deep into his dermis and depositing its dye." (Brown, 2009)

Therefore, the motif in the novel is tattoos and tattooing rituals. In fact, tattoos are the beginning, the end, as well as the means for the antagonist. With each tattooing motif, one of the themes of the novel is pointed out. Every single tattoo motif introduces a distinguished theme; transformation, power, control, identity, sacrifice, and rebellion.



The plot of the novel is set through the tattoos as well. The tattooed hand of mysteries invites professor Langdon to search for the last symbol so that Mal'akh could tattoo it on his head to gain absolute godlike power and control.

The most challenging literary element in the novel is deciding which point of view to follow: Langdon's the protagonist or Mal'akh's the antagonist. Mal'akh's point of view is the driving force of the novel, he activated the plot and gave roles to all the other characters to achieve his aims. Therefore, the main conflict in the novel lies inside Mal'akh while the other characters are only responding and reacting to his actions. Literary conflict is the struggle between two forces, and it could be internal or external. (Wijayanti, 2020) In this case, the antagonist is struggling on two levels; the internal conflict is his struggle between his own opposing desires and beliefs, while the external conflict is mainly between him and his father.

In the novel there are many types of allusions: historical, cultural, religious, literary, and mythical. Typical of Dan Brown, he provides his reader with detailed information about the history of tattoos narrated by Mal'akh along with an explanation of why people choose to tattoo then gives reasons for his own tattoos. Brown shows us his antagonist tattooing while stating all the historical references of tattoos in the world, the same the researcher has mentioned in the introduction: he refers to the Nubian priests, the Cybele cult in ancient Rome, and the Moko scars of the modern Maori and concludes that the goal for tattooing was to change and control their bodies: "they sacrifice their bodies enduring the pain to prove that they are changed." (Brown, 2009) Then he immediately states the Bible forbids marking one's flesh, showing that the antagonist knows this yet deliberately proceeds with his act foreshadowing his darker beliefs.

His same tattoos are cultural allusions to freemasonry, portraying through them the history, religion, and myth of this secret society. Mal'akh tattooed the famous Boaz and Jachin pillars and the archway of King Solomon's Temple, the freemasonry double-headed phoenix, the sigils that are found in the Lesser Book of Solomon, the ouroboros, the circumpunct, the hand of mysteries, and finally the masonic staircase on his back. All these tattoos share one main theme:



freemasonry and the belief in the ancient knowledge that is said to be given to King Solomon, granting him absolute power and knowledge over everything.

Freemasonry is one of the oldest well known secret societies in the world. Its history goes back to the stone builders of King Solomon's Temple. They are believed to have knowledge of architecture along with ancient mysteries given to them by King Solomon; therefore, they were able to transform their blue prints (trestle – boards) into great artifices that defied time. They kept this knowledge secret and became the guardians of ancient mysteries. The ancient freemasons became a secret society of builders called Operative Freemasons. (Stavish, 2007) In 1717, modern freemasonry was born, and the freemasons came to be called Speculative masons because they produced numerous writings about esoteric and philosophical subjects relating to ancient mysteries. They enriched the fraternity with philosophical symbolism, rituals, rules, guidelines, and secrecy. Not anyone can join the fraternity; therefore, they relayed on secret handshakes, symbols, and codes for communication; they are often described as being “veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” (Mackey A. G., 2013) (De Biasi, 2010)

According to Freemasons mythology, the Jewish masons at Jerusalem participated in the construction of an earthly house, a temple, to serve and worship God and through which God will send his oracles to guide his chosen people. This temple is their grand achievement and the center of their belief; therefore, all their symbolism is based on it or derived from it. It is described in details in the Old Testament as the first house for worshipping God and at the entrance there are two pillars called the Boaz and Jachin. These two legendary pillars have two significant meanings, one found in the Bible and the other in masonry. Jachin and Boaz are erected at the entrance of the temple to symbolize cloud by day and fire by night, which guided the Israelites in the forty years of wondering in the wilderness. (Cox, 2009) The pillars stand for the divine guidance to establish their goal. Jachin means “strength,” Boaz means “to establish.” (Mackey A. G., 2020) In modern architecture, they symbolize the wisdom and justice of King Solomon. All masonic lodges are designed according to that Temple: a circle that consists of an altar, two pillars called Boaz and Jachin, and a windy staircase. In order to join the brotherhood, the initiate should go



through three levels of education, reaching the highest level of Freemasonry, Master Mason. This process of learning is not easy nor straight forward, hence the windy staircase symbol. Each step of the staircase represents a different portion of art and sciences that should be learned to reach enlightenment. (Hoddap, 2010)

The double – headed phoenix is one of the most famous symbols of the secret order, representing rebirth and resurrection. (Weber, 2009) The Phoenix is a mythical bird well known for living as long as five hundred years, yet when it becomes really old, the bird makes a nest of aromas and boughs, then sets his nest and himself on fire burning to ashes only to rise again from his own ashes resurrected a young bird. This symbol is adopted from Egyptian mythology as a symbol of immortality and resurrection. (Abella, 2024)

The Sigils tattoos take us into a rather dark allusion to the Lesser keys of King Solomon. A sigil is a term that refers to “a magical symbol that is supposed to represent the signature of a demon or entity.” (Smith T. A., 2016) Although the term sigil is a Latin word meaning “seal,” it is originally related to the Hebrew word “segula” meaning “a word, item, or action of spiritual effect.” (Smith T. A., 2016) The Lesser Keys of King Solomon is a grimoire attributed to King Solomon anonymously compiled and completed in the 17th century containing detailed instructions for creating magical objects, performing spells, and invoking demons. In fact, the book states in detail seventy two demons, their numbers, ranks, abilities, the rituals that invoke them as well as their sigils. (Brewer, 2020)

The ouroboros is one of the oldest universal symbols in history, consisting of two old mystical symbols, the circle and the serpent. The universal meaning of this symbol is the continuity of life and the completion of time. (Cirlot, 2006) For the ancient Egyptians, it symbolized the completion of time cycles. (Dailey, 2022) For the Greek, it means self – devourer and stands for continuity, motion, and self – fertilization, while in Norse mythology it is as big as earth circling the entire planet. In Hindu myth, the serpent is the goddess Nahusha, who created the world. In general, it symbolizes not only the cycle of time but rebirth as well. For the Gnostics, it symbolizes



eternity and "aspiration for a higher state of being." In alchemy, it represents purity, wholeness, and infinity. (Nozedar, 2024)

The circumpunct, in other words, the point within the circle, is a symbol of a circle with a dot in the center found all over the world throughout history, and it is one of the important masonic symbols. (Smith T. A., 2016) The symbol stands for completeness, harmony, the philosopher's stone, the all Seeing Eye, control of emotions. (Daniels, 2014) It is a symbol of gold, the color of the sun, having the ability to create. The dot stands for earth being the center of universe. (Cox, 2009) For the Egyptians, the dot stands for the sun god Ra being the center of the universe, and all other creatures revolve around him.

The hand of mysteries is a typical symbol for freemasonry simply because the hand symbolizes the builders. In general, the hand is a powerful symbol in all religions, symbolizing worship, control, authority, and power. (Mackey A. G., 2016) In Freemasonry, the Hand of Mysteries is presented by Master Mason to a specific member of the brotherhood, inviting him to take a test of knowledge. When the member passes the test through deciphering the symbols, he will receive divine insight and enter the Temple of Wisdom. The hand of mysteries includes five symbols, one on each finger: a key on the little finger representing oath, promise, and knowledge, a lantern in the ring finger representing guidance and salvation, a sun in the middle finger symbol for absolute power, knowledge and consciousness, a star on the index finger represent divinity, and the five senses, a crown on the thumb representing power, victory, and wealth, and finally, the sixth symbol is either a fish or an eye in the center of the palm. (Mackey A. G., 2016)

All these allusions are metaphors to Mal'akh's characterization and the themes of the novel.

All these tattoos are metaphors through which Brown invites his reader to look upon Mal'akh's personality. The tattoo of hawk's scales and talons on his feet is a metaphor that he is a bird of prey. Like the hawk, he is insightful about the other characters, treating them like his prey yet acting as if he is higher than them flying above his prey. His legs are strong, and through them he can establish his temple because he is a living incarnation of not only one phoenix but two. Presumed dead twice: Zakary Solomon presumed killed in Turkish jail and a



masked burglar shot by his father. Like a phoenix, he rises from ashes becoming stronger, wiser, and revengeful. Therefore, the sigils of many demons are carved on his face, neck, and shoulders so that no one would mistake his intentions nor his source of power. His aim is to achieve absolute power believing if he perfected his body like freemasons perfected their temple, he would receive power parallel to that of King Solomon. This body temple of his was achieved through gradual knowledge of all sciences, hence the windy staircase tattoo on his back leading to the top of the human pyramid, his head. Through this staircase, he aspires to reach divinity eager to become a god among the demons.

The hand of mysteries that he tattooed on his right hand symbolizes different things for him; the crown represents the king he will be, the star represents his belief in divine destiny given to him, the sun is a metaphor for the illumination of his soul, the lantern is a metaphor for the feeble light of human understanding, and finally the key is the last tattoo and the lost symbol he is so eager to gain. The Ouroboros tattoo is a metaphor for his aspiration to become a god, then comes the wrong tattoo of the circumpunct that he inked on his head believing he is the center of the universe; he is the dot within the circle.

In freemasonry Solomon's Temple is a metaphor for the human body. Mal'akh considered his body raw material for constructing a temple for the god he wants to become. He takes the blue prints of his tattoos to a parlor after carefully studying the divine structure he wants to establish. Then he seeks knowledge first through the Masonic Lodge growing through the three levels of masonry, and second by developing his own knowledge of alchemy. According to alchemical traditions, King Solomon was able to transform basic structures like the Temple into a divine place for God to dwell, and lead into gold; therefore, through alchemy, a man like Mal'akh can be transformed from a basic human into a powerful being. He derived his power from the sigils on his face, evoking the seal of Solomon, giving him power to control demons, spirits and other supernatural forces. He constructed himself as a temple both physically through his tattoos and spiritually through his rituals of fasting, blood drinking, and sacrifice to achieve apotheosis.



Finally, the themes of the novel can also be inferred from Mal'akh's tattoos, symbolizing identity, transformation, power and knowledge, and apotheosis.

The theme of identity is incarnated in Mal'akh's tattoos; he literally wears his identification card on his skin. He wants to be an angel, a fallen angel, just like the one in John Milton's "Paradise Lost" thus, he became Mal'akh, tattooing all sigils that summon demons to aid him in his quest. He changed his identity from Zackary to Mal'akh by changing his skin so that even his father did not recognize him. He enjoyed being unidentified like a chameleon; he was able to change his identity by putting on make – up to hide his tattoos fooling all other characters.

Transformation was his first goal for tattooing; he wanted to change his identity, along with it he changed his personality, beliefs, and aspirations. He transformed into a different person, yet he was not satisfied. He wanted to transform into a greater human being, therefore he planned his transformation on a canvas, his body. He transformed into a Mal'akh of darkness, performing dark rituals and offering sacrifices, as well as tattooing sigils to evoke demons to help him in his transformation. He transformed into a human with great energy both mentally and physically.

Absolute power is a gift bestowed by God on King Solomon with the warning not to abuse this power. This power is the most sought after like elixir of life; therefore, it is said to be hidden to prevent corruption and chaos if fallen in the wrong hands. In this case, Mal'akh's demonic hands. His only aim is not only to gain absolute power; he wants to achieve apotheosis. He wants to be a god on demons, therefore, he sacrificed his tattooed body to achieve this status. He believed his mastery of ancient symbols and tattooing them on his body would grant him this divine status.

Secrecy is another theme reflected through Mal'akh's tattoos. Freemasonry is a secret society that rejects tattoos, for they can, through their symbolism, reveal secrets they are famous for guarding. Mal'akh cares only for himself, thus has no consideration to protect the brotherhood, their secrets, or his own secrets. He desires to expose all these secrets, believing that knowledge should be shared, ignoring the fact that dangerous powers of knowledge in the wrong hands could lead



to destruction and chaos.

4. Conclusion

Symbolism is a perfect approach to analyzing the antagonist's tattoos. Through Mal'akh's tattoos, Brown opens a portal to other deeper layers of literary uses. Beyond the surface meaning of the tattoos, the reader dives into ancient hidden knowledge, goes through a secret portal to other worlds, and witnesses the transformation of a human not into a god – like statues, but into a demon – like status. Mal'akh's tattoos successfully incarnated his emotional turmoil and spiritual aspirations. His body art communicates his entire journey, summarizing the entire novel, reflecting the essence of all the literary elements through the symbolism of his tattoos and inviting the reader to decipher them. Brown's creativity in the gradual revelation of Mal'akh's tattoos ending with the great final symbol takes his reader through a roller – coaster ride of historical allusions, mythical metaphors, inner conflicts, and great themes.

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