

The Passion of Existence:
A Study of the Themes of Quest and Self-Knowledge in the Fiction of
John Fowles

by

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Table of contents

	Page
Summary	i
Opsomming	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Themes in Fowles	6
Chapter 2: <u>The Collector</u> - a study of warped sexuality	33
Chapter 3: <u>The Magus</u> - love story and quest narrative	48
Chapter 4: <u>The French Lieutenant's Woman</u> - a quest for self-knowledge in Victorian England	63
Chapter 5: <u>The Ebony Tower</u> - breaking new grounds with "Variations"	77
Chapter 6: <u>Daniel Martin</u> - quest fulfilled?	99
Chapter 7: <u>Mantissa</u> - Shavian battle of sexual insult and strategy	112
Chapter 8: <u>A Maggot</u> - novel of education	125
Conclusion	135
Bibliography	143

Summary

In this dissertation the contrasting male-female relationships in John Fowles's fiction are examined. The main aim is to establish the themes of quest and self-knowledge at the basis of a thematic hierarchy which can be used to make a thematic analysis of Fowles's fiction.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation discusses the major themes in Fowles's work as identified by Simon Loveday (1985). However, I go one step further by establishing a specific thematic hierarchy as an aid to the analysis of Fowles's fiction.

In chapters 2-8 this matrix is used in a thematic analysis of Fowles's novels and short stories. A diachronic approach is used and each novel and short story is discussed in terms of the themes of quest and self-knowledge and their relation to the other themes in Fowles's work.

The analyses of the texts in terms of the theoretical part of the dissertation lead one to come to the conclusion that the initial working hypothesis has been proven a valid one: in each of Fowles's fictions there is a definite fixed pattern (with a slight variation in The Collector, Mantissa, and A Maggot). The male protagonist sets out on a quest for an ideal woman. His contrasting relationship with this woman leads him to self-knowledge, and even if he sometimes fails to conquer this heroine, he emerges as a person with existential authenticity. The quest is always an educational process.

A number of areas for further research are indicated in the conclusion.

The themes of the male quest and self-knowledge form the nucleus around which the thematic, structural and textual elements are woven: it is without any doubt the determining factor in all of Fowles's fiction to date.

Opsomming

Die kontrasterende verhoudings tussen manlike en vroulike karakters in John Fowles se romans en kortverhale word ondersoek in hierdie verhandeling. Die hoofdoel is om die temas van 'n soeke na die vroulike beginsel en selfkennis te vestig as die basis van 'n tematiese hiërargie wat gebruik kan word om tematiese ontledings van Fowles se tekste te doen.

Hoofstuk 1 van die verhandeling gee 'n oorsig van die hooftemas in Fowles se werk soos uitgelig deur Simon Loveday. Ek gaan egter 'n stap verder deur hierdie temas te rangskik in 'n bepaalde rangorde wat 'n ontleding van Fowles se fiksie aansienlik vergemaklik.

Bogenoemde hiërargie word in hoofstukke 2-8 gebruik om al Fowles se romans en kortverhale tematies te ontleed. Met behulp van 'n diachroniese benadering word elke roman en kortverhaal bespreek in terme van die twee hooftemas - 'n soeke na die vroulike beginsel en selfkennis - sowel as die verhouding van hierdie twee hooftemas tot die ander temas in Fowles se werk.

Die ontleding van die tekste in die lig van die teoretiese gedeelte van die verhandeling, dwing 'n mens tot die gevolgtrekking dat die aanvanklike hipotese korrek was: 'n definitiewe, vaste patroon kan in al die tekste onderskei word (klein afwykings word in The Collector, Mantissa, en A Maggot aangetref). Die manlike protagonis vertrek op 'n soektog na 'n ideale vrou. Sy verhouding met hierdie vrou lei tot selfkennis, en ten spyte daarvan dat hy soms faal in sy poging om hierdie vrou te verower, slaag hy daarin om eksistensiële geloofwaardigheid te verkry. Die soektog is dus nooit

'n nuttelose ervaring nie, maar bevat altyd elemente van groei en ontwikkeling.

Moontlike toekomstige navorsingsvelde word in die gevolgtrekking aangedui.

Die temas van die soektog na die vroulike beginsel en selfkennis (die verskynsel dat die manlike karakters daarna strewe om na die vroulike karakters toe te ontwikkel en nie andersom nie) vorm die kern van Fowles se skrywe en bepaal die struktuur van al sy tekste tot op hede.

Introduction

In John Fowles's fiction, male-female relationships form the nucleus around which the thematic, structural and textual elements are woven. The aim of this study is to trace the origin and development of the relationships between male and female characters in both the novels and the short stories, to determine the function and effect of these contrasting relationships and to evaluate their importance and function in Fowles's fiction.

There is a tendency for male characters to develop towards female characters and not vice versa. The female, in her guise as Eve, leads the willing male to fall into self-awareness. This integrating experience, usually consummated in the sexual act, precipitates a reversal in which the male protagonist develops a more feminine outlook that perceives relationships rather than objects, while the female becomes an "Adam-woman", combining masculine will with female compassion. For man to progress, he must temper his tendency to be like Adam and instead become more like Eve.

All the traditional romance forms that Fowles exploits share the essential quest motif which is usually expressed in sexual terms as the hero's adventure in search of a bride. A mysteriously compelling female serves as the central catalyst in the contemporary hero's struggle to liberate himself from an imprisonment that is caused by an exaggerated conception of self as well as by a culture in which a romantic idealism informs many of its fundamental myths. By pursuing her, he may hope to achieve the ideal world in which he has placed her. Appropriately, his obsessive quest takes him away from an ordinary, conventional world to an extraordinary

world - a magical greenwood or domain which mirrors the romantic qualities of the enchanting female - and then returns him to the ordinary world again. Back in the ordinary, conventional world the hero no longer romanticizes the female. The enchanting princess emerges as an ordinary mortal, who now attracts the hero for her natural mysteries, independence, and imaginative qualities. In order to trace the development of this theme, a diachronic approach will be used and each novel will be discussed in terms of the male-female relationship and its relation to other themes.

A study of John Fowles's work seems to be justified by the fact that he is generally acclaimed as a postmodernist novelist.¹ His fiction is also considered by many as having universal appeal. Fowles is that rare combination of the serious novelist who is also an extremely popular entertainer. His characters and ideas have touched many more readers than the works of the majority of his serious novelistic compatriots. Secondly, Fowles has consistently been generating new texts and is generous, straightforward, and helpful in interviews and toward the critics who swarm around his work.²

Fowles remarked in an early interview that for him writing is always "a form of teaching", and that he would rather be "a sound

1. See the following secondary sources:

- BACHEE, S. 1982. Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Novels of John Fowles.
 COHEN, P. 1984. Postmodernist Technique in The French Lieutenant's Woman.
 CREIGHTON, Joanne V. 1982. The Reader and Modern and Postmodern Fiction.
 NOVAK, F.G. 1985. The Dialectics of Debasement in The Magus.
 OPPERMAN, S.P. 1988. John Fowles as a Postmodernist: An Analysis of Fowles's Fiction within Metafictional Theories.

2. I think of critics like William J. Palmer, Barry Olshen, Robert Huffaker, Peter Conradi, Carol Barnum, Ellen McDaniel and Simon Loveday.

philosopher" than "a good novelist" (Loveday, 1988: 2). For Olshen (1978: 33) Fowles "is a moralist" whose imagination is "densely associative and highly erotic". According to him Fowles's main themes are "the individual ... struggling to achieve a measure of self-realization amidst the undirected or misdirected masses", "the use and abuse of power", and the "freedom to choose and change". One of the most prominent aspects of Olshen's criticism is the strong stress it places upon the eroticism of Fowles's fiction and the definition of how that eroticism contributes to individual humanity: "Heterosexual love and the nature of freedom are at the thematic centre of all of Fowles's work. In fact, in the novels, the two are inextricably bound: the realization of love brings with it a sense of freedom, and the responsible assumption of one's freedom allows for the full possibilities of love. The erotic quality of the fiction is but one aspect of the broader concern" (Olshen, 1978: 63).

Fowles achieves his affirmation in contemporary man's existence by undercutting traditional romance conventions with realistic techniques to compel the hero to come to terms with an idealizing self. Wynne-Davies (1989: 531) has the following to say about John Fowles: "He is an experimental writer, interested in the nature of fiction and its interaction with history and reality, but he combines this with a skill in story-telling and an ability to create compelling characters and a vivid sense of social context. The recurrent concerns of his novels are the power of repressive conventions and social conformity, the enigmatic nature of sexual relations, the desire to manipulate and control and the problem of individual freedom".

The Collector, the story of the kidnapping of an attractive and wealthy girl by an introverted clerk, is in part a study of a pathological desire for possession, and in part a fable about social deprivation. The Magus, like The Collector, employs parallels with Shakespeare's The Tempest. It also draws on the literary archetype of the quest in its story of a young man who travels to a Greek island where he is lured by a series of magical illusions into a confrontation with existential uncertainty and freedom of choice. The French Lieutenant's Woman employs parody of 19th century novelistic style, quotations from sociological reports, from Darwin, Marx, Arnold and Tennyson, and authorial interruptions. Fowles's belief in the fundamental uncertainty of existence is reflected in his use of open endings; in The Magus the future of the main characters is "another mystery" and The French Lieutenant's Woman has a choice of endings. Daniel Martin is more realist than his earlier work, exploiting his descriptive skill in a range of settings: it has less of the element of mystery and a more clearly affirmative ending.

Fowles hopes that his novels "can push people a little bit or show them the way" towards greater freedom and authenticity in their own lives (Barnum, 1978: 192). His novels use increasingly sophisticated means toward this end. Fowles hopes that reading his novels will do for the reader what writing the novel does for him: lead toward greater self-knowledge.

To sum up: in this dissertation I will attempt a detailed analysis of Fowles's achievement as a serious writer and consider the extent to which the male-female relationships in his novels underlie the substance and form of his work. I also wish to show that Fowles's

literary principles are in accordance with his belief that "human freedom lives in human art and in human relationships" (Collins, 1972: 188). In short: I intend to establish the male-female relationship at the top of a thematic hierarchy by identifying it as the most important and prominent theme in the novels and the short stories of this prolific writer. I wish to establish the male protagonist's quest for wholeness and individuation as the central pattern in Fowles's fiction.

The first chapter of this dissertation will be devoted to establishing this thematic hierarchy: it consists of a discussion of the major themes and provides the background against which the thematical matrix will be used.

Chapters 2-8 are used to analyse Fowles's fictions in a chronological order by making use of the established thematic matrix. The reason for using a chronological approach is that it makes it easier to identify and to evaluate any developing traits in the Fowlesian oeuvre.

For purposes of reference, the following abbreviations will be used during the course of this dissertation:

C:	The Collector
TM:	The Magus
FLW:	The French Lieutenant's Woman
ET:	The Ebony Tower
DM:	Daniel Martin
M:	Mantissa
AM:	A Maggot

CHAPTER 1

Themes in Fowles

The world of John Fowles's fiction is polarized by a powerful pair of contrary forces, described by the author in The Aristos as "stasis" and "kinesis" (Fowles, 1970: 165). For Fowles, these forces of inertia and motion, usually thought of as laws of the physical world only, also govern the moral and emotional development of human beings. "Stasis" is a life-denying force characterized by passivity, conservatism, the absence of change, and sterile lifelessness. "Kinesis" governs all that moves, matures, and improves; it is a life-affirming force that drives the evolution and amelioration of the human condition. The main characters are always compelled to choose between these two alternatives. To live by the laws of "stasis" is, metaphorically, to become a Prufrock "pinned and wriggling", a hollow man without any direction and goal in life. The alternative is preferable but hardly easy. To evolve, Fowles's protagonists must demonstrate exceptional courage and responsibility.

Loveday (1985: 3) identifies four major themes in Fowles's work - the Few and the Many; the domain; the contrast between the masculine and the feminine character; and the importance of freedom - Fowles's whole fictional oeuvre is built around these four major themes and his position on each one has changed little during his writing career. Loveday states furthermore that "these four strands of Fowles's thought . . . are . . . densely interwoven" (1985:3). One cannot but agree with Loveday and I would therefore prefer to look at the themes in Fowles's work without

having to separate the themes under different sub-headings. However, I would like to go one step further by establishing a thematic hierarchy in Fowles's fiction with the male protagonist's quest for a woman, and through her for self-knowledge, forming the basis of the hierarchy.

The main emphasis will fall on the contrasting male-female relationships and this theme will be discussed in connection with the other major themes in Fowles's work. The advantage of this method is that it will enable me to look at Fowles's work in its entirety, to attempt to understand and assess it as a whole and to emphasise the dense thematic structure of Fowles's work.

The themes will be discussed in the following order: (i) the contrast between the masculine and the feminine character; the male protagonist goes on a quest in order to find his ideal woman and during the course of this quest he also gains existential meaning and self-knowledge - characterization is an essential part of any novel and short story and I consider this to be the basis of Fowles's fiction; (ii) the domain, which can also be described as the setting; (iii) the theme identified as the Few and the Many is directly related to the juxtaposed male-female relationship, but is a theme that essentially belongs to Fowlesian fiction; (iv) the importance of freedom, which can be linked to the existentialist philosophy in Fowles's work. The first two themes are obviously of primary importance in any work of fiction, while the later two themes belong to the Fowles-oeuvre (and some other existentialist fictions) and not to fiction in general. This explains why I decided to deal with the themes in this specific order.

Fowles characteristically represents the kinetic force of evolution as female and its static counterpart, fossilization, as male. The females in Fowles's fiction are pragmatic people, who as life-givers and preservers know the need for change and variation. Males, however, are Fowles's dreamers, who hesitate and only "think of doing" (ET, 299).

Loveday (1985:5) has the following to say about this issue: "Fowles's female characters reign over the private sphere, the world of intuitive knowledge, sensibility, the emotions, and what Dan in Daniel Martin calls 'right feeling'. By extension they are associated with creativity, both in their own right and as muses. Conversely men exercise dominance in the public sphere, the world of science and systematic classification, of action, violence, and war. It follows from this that Fowles associates men with orthodoxy, conformity, and repression."

According to Fowles's philosophy, Adam and his male successors have all regretted the Fall into responsibility and work. The preservation and evolution of life have become, principally, the work of Eve and her descendants (Fowles, 1970:165). However, not all of his males are like Ferdinand Clegg in The Collector, nor are all his women like Sarah Woodruff in The French Lieutenant's Woman. He grants that "there are, of course, Adam-women and Eve-men"; in fact, "few, among the world's great, progressive artists and thinkers, have not belonged to the Eve category". Fowles's male protagonists often undergo a metamorphosis that changes them from Adam-men to Eve-men. Nicholas Urfe, Charles Smithson, and Daniel Martin - well-taught by the cast of Eves and

Eve-men they encounter - come to recognize the need to create "Eve societies", which Fowles describes as those cultures or communities "in which the women and the mother, female gods, encourage innovation and experiment, and fresh definitions, aims, modes of feeling" (Fowles, 1970:166).

McDaniel (1987:71) feels that all the female principles in Fowles's novels display the courage of the original Eve in their fearless revolt against the rules of a dull paradise. Each offers to the Adam of her world fruit plucked from the trees of knowledge and life; she tempts him with her knowledge of a new life and challenges him to risk the Fall. Parnassus, in Greece, is a "Garden of Eden" and the setting for such a Fall in The Magus. In a spontaneous pastiche of the Edenic drama, Alison offers herself to Nicholas who, like Adam, tries to resist her seduction:

"Let's have a swim."

"It'll be like ice."

"Yah."

She pulled her shirt over her head, unhooked her bra, grinning at me in the flecked shadow of the arbour.

"The place is probably alive with snakes."

"Like Eden."

She stepped out of her jeans and her white pants. Then she reached up and snapped a dead cone off one of the arbour branches and held it out to me (TM, 268).

Nicholas takes the cone and yields to Alison's temptation, believing that he glimpses Eve "through ten thousand generations". The

tenderness he feels for Alison at that moment seems a fragment of the same tenderness that had inspired their mythic ancestors' first physical passion. Nicholas soon lapses into his boorish Adam-self again, but during his brief reunion with Alison, he "made love, not sex" (TM, 269). Love poses a difficult challenge for the protagonists of Fowles's novels, but each man's Eve proves to be a patient persuader who is ultimately successful in her aim.

According to Campbell (1983:46) all Fowles's principal characters can initially be seen fixing people as types, seeing them as form and substance, rather than act and potentiality. All the objects of these perceptions - Miranda, June/Julie, Sarah, Jane, Diana and Erato - escape, betray or falsify the descriptions and explanations given of them. The male protagonists have to learn to see people as people and not merely as complex things which enter and leave one's perceptual field. The obtaining of this kind of wisdom almost invariably occurs as the result of a relationship with a woman, and a failed or abandoned attempt to sustain that relationship. This is no accident. Sexual relationships are at the sharp end of our relations with others. In this area success on anything more than a physiological level depends dramatically on an increasingly sensitive and subtle awareness of the other.

In Fowles's fiction the lover wants to compel the beloved to love him of her own free will. This is impossible but it does not mean that love is impossible. It means that it is an inherently unstable relationship threatening constantly to collapse into mere possession at one pole and estrangement at the other. The difficulty lies both in keeping up the effort required to sustain the relationship and also in

knowing quite what kind of effort it requires. This difficulty and this complexity is a feature of Fowles's accounts of human sexual relationships.

Lewis and Olshen (1985:17) agree that love and the right relationship between the sexes are major themes throughout Fowles's writing, including his essays and The Aristos, which in many ways lay out the philosophical basis of his fiction. In The Aristos Fowles describes the confusion caused by "two drives that mimic each other: the drive towards sexual experience (in itself part of a deeper drive towards the hazardous and adventurous) and the drive towards love as institutionalized marriage (in itself part of the drive towards certainty and security)" (Fowles, 1970:170). Although, as he claims, most "pre-adults" are confused by these two drives it is clear, despite Fowles's prodigious talent for erotica, on which side his sympathies ultimately fall: "The noblest relationship is marriage, that is, love. Its nobility resides in its altruism, the desire to serve another beyond all the pleasures of the relationship; and in its refusal ever to regard the other as a thing, an object, a utilizability" (Fowles, 1970:175).

Again and again Fowles's fictions tell of a protagonist lured away from the routine world and its expectations by an extraordinary woman he cannot hope to marry. McDaniel (1987:72) explains this as follows: "Because creation can only begin after Adam has fallen from his false paradise, Fowles banishes his major protagonists from their comfortable indolent worlds. They land on the stony ground of their underdeveloped feelings, which they must fertilize and nurture."

In some stories, the woman deliberately entices the man only to thwart him: Lily/Julie in The Magus, Sarah in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Diana in "The Ebony Tower", and Erato in Mantissa. In others, the protagonist is united with his once unattainable woman, definitely in Daniel Martin and potentially at the end of The Magus. Fowles's first novel, The Collector, may be said to deal with a similar situation, although Miranda was unaware of Clegg's infatuation and was innocent of provoking him.

Conradi (1983:16) says the following about Fowles and his work: "He writes romances, gothic stories that exploit the ancient erotic sources and opportunities of narrative and whose designs on the reader are palpable; and through which a series of Persecuted Maidens and *princesses lointaines* are pursued and prompted, like the mystical and psychological truths they embody, to deny the text that closure they seek. In the magical enclosures in which his fictions abound, love is feudalized. He is a paradoxical figure: a didactic and coercive libertarian; an evolutionary socialist profoundly committed to the values of a Romantic individualism, which his existentialism is called upon to validate; an apologist for the female-principle much given to imagining the sexual exploitation and salvation of women; a writer of fables of erotic quest who does not present adult sexual relations, and who has been read as a bourgeois pornographer expert in the relations of frustration - but which expertise is itself put at the service of a sensorious sexual moralism."

Fowles has repeatedly drawn attention to the importance of the medieval courtly romance in his own writing and in modern fiction

generally. In his essays and translations, and even in interviews and occasional remarks, he has indicated his close familiarity with and ongoing interest in medieval stories of quest and love. In an interview with Lorna Sage in 1974 he noted that many of his own preoccupations - love and sex, problems of freedom, search and quest - are already present in the earliest of Celtic romances. Loveday (1985:7) agrees that there is one key which seems to unlock Fowles's work - one pattern which runs through it. This pattern, which underlies the whole of Fowles's work and gives shape to every product of his imagination, is the romance.

Romance is a difficult term to define, because a broad definition gives little idea of its perennial appeal. Nonetheless I shall try to give a brief account of the most prominent aspects of romance. The novel uses a story to give insight into character, to dramatise a period of history, to reflect or reform society. The romance on the other hand is story. Narrative, folktale, myth - these are its very essence. Where the novel feels obliged to apologise for its need to use narratives at all and seeks to render its plot credible and to minimise its coincidences, the romance ignores probability and glories in its use of pattern, repetition, and everything that marks its distance from the chaos of everyday life. The classic story of romance is of course the quest narrative, characteristically expressed in sexual terms as a young man's adventures in search of a bride. This narrative has immense vitality. This is the basic form of all Fowles's full-length fiction. Balance, complexity, consistency and intelligibility, are not the primary criteria of characterisation in the romance. As is the case with the novel, what the romancer is after is intensity and mystery: and in looking for them he will find himself

seeking to polarise. He will thus inevitably tend to focus on the differences between people (and notably the sexes), and of necessity play down those features that hero, heroine, and villain have in common as fellow members of the human race. The world of romance is an idealised world, still trailing the clouds of glory of its close association with myth and magic. This idealisation is evident in its treatment of character, where it focuses on the adult privilege of aristocracy (or its modern equivalent in Fowles's fiction, great inherited wealth) and the juvenile privilege of unfallen innocence; it is evident also in its treatment of place, the enchanted islands and faery palaces - in Fowles's terminology "domaines" - with which it abounds.¹

As in most medieval romances, the love affairs in Fowles's novels are secret and extramarital. The forbidden nature of the love affairs adds to the delicious pleasure-agony of the experiences, creating an emotional tension that Fowles manipulates for his contemporaries as his medieval predecessors did for theirs. The secrecy of the lone relationship is repeated with ingenious variations throughout Fowles's novels. In The Collector the idealized *princesse lointaine* is perversely imprisoned and destroyed by her maniacal worshipper. In The Magus Nicholas does not hide his infatuation with Lily/Julie from Conchis, but he wants to prevent Alison and his associates at the Lord Byron School from discovering the full truth about his encounters at Bourani. Charles in The French Lieutenant's Woman must keep his growing interest in Sarah a secret for social reasons; her damaged reputation, the class barriers between them, and his

1. I owe most of my definition/description of this narrative genre to Abrams (1988:24-5).

engagement to Ernestina are all forbidding circumstances. David's passion for Diana in "The Ebony Tower" will remain a secret from his wife. Daniel Martin and Jane guard the secret of their union. Dan, of course, married the wrong one of the "Heavenly Twins", and, in large part, his story is about the correcting of that mistake, the correcting of what his dying friend Anthony, Jane's husband, calls a "design failure".

Participation in *amour courtois* includes observing a decorum of courtship, a gracious willingness to play the game of love by its rules, its procedures of luring and withholding. Scholes (1969:1) finds that Fowles's novels follow the formal pattern of romance, "a pattern of events designed to move toward climax and resolution, balanced by a counterpart of events designed to delay this very climax and resolution". Although Nicholas is repeatedly frustrated by Lily/Julie's courting game, he usually enjoys the role-playing and is always fascinated by the mystery and stage business of the godgame. Charles and David also suffer the frustrations of love, and all three protagonists find that it has some recompense. They, and also Clegg (who represents the ironic foil to the romantic lover), become aware of the emotional and spiritual exaltation love gives to the Elect. The more traditional lovers - Nicholas, Charles, David, and the young lord in *A Maggot* - having fallen under the spell of beautiful, mysterious women, are liberated, however painfully, into a more exciting awareness of love, beauty, and adventure. Clegg, on the other hand, ceases to worship his idealized woman "with all her la-di-da ideas and clever tricks". After Miranda's death, he sets his sights considerably lower and plans to have a girl from Woolworth's as his next guest. David and Nicholas (in the original

version of The Magus) never sexually consummate their love, nor does the impotent Clegg. Their ladies remain unattained. Charles and Nicholas (in the revised version of The Magus) experience but one union with their beloved, as did young Daniel who made love to Jane only once before they married other partners (Lewis and Olshen, 1985:18-19).

The lady of courtly romance enjoys in literature a power few actual medieval women ever knew. Her scorn can destroy her lover, her whimsical request can send him off on an impossibly dangerous mission, her mercy can restore him from the edge of death. Similarly, Fowles's heroines can sometimes exert an amazing hold on their men, and they frequently test and deny them with genuine cruelty. Although Clegg feels "like a cruel king", he still dutifully serves his "mistress", a lady who rules in all ways but the essential one, that is, in terms of her freedom. Miranda, though helpless, is able to record her intimations of the cruel power of women: "I've never felt so full of mysterious power. ...We're so weak physically, so helpless with things. Still, even today. But we're stronger than they are. We can stand their cruelty. They can't stand ours" (C, 267).

Nicholas is frustrated by Lily/Julie, deceived and accused by her; the final degradation comes when he is compelled to watch her, first in a series of coy pornographic films, then, on stage, in an actual surrender to another lover. Desolate, Nicholas holds to the memory of a "dead" but sympathetic Alison. Even Alison, however, is part of the conspiracy. When she appears to him in Athens, after his ordeal, he feels completely betrayed.

Lily/Julie is a major participant in the testing of Nicholas, but she is coached by the master wizard Conchis, who stages and directs the process. Sarah, on the other hand, is her own producer and director. She has no Conchis to help her entice Charles, no Breasley to help arrange the atmosphere of the enchantment, no supernumeraries to aid in the ordeal. She is entirely on her own. Sarah has the most independent power of Fowles's unattainable women, having as her advantages only Charles' vulnerability and his readiness to serve.

Erato, the amusing if somewhat tedious goddess who pesters Miles Green throughout Mantissa, is demanding, coy, and tyrannical, as the mood suits her. She as muse and he as novelist both have the power to reward and to punish one another, to seduce or to cause the opponent to disappear or to be transformed. Fortunately for Miles, Erato is more mischievous and short term in her metamorphic revenge than Circe; the hapless Miles spends only a few uncomfortable moments as a satyr. Although the writer and his muse tease one another throughout the book about the very material of courtly love - the worship of women, their fidelity and fickleness, the excitement of interrupted love - their banter is not serious. As Erato taunts Miles about a lost opportunity for love-making ("our fused bodies in final togetherness, eternally awaiting climax"), she seems to articulate the condition of Paolo and Francesca, wrapped together for eternity in Dante's hell, but, as usual in this book, the inflated vision collapses. Miles retorts: ". . . eternally awaiting climax, it sounds more like constipation than anything else" (M, 146).

Fowles gives as one of the epigraphs to Mantissa a passage from Marivaux's Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard.² This seems to suggest that his characters' banter has its parallel in the "marivaudage" of the play, but Fowles's lovers seem more spiteful than those of Marivaux. Parts of the love debate between Miles and Erato are more reminiscent of a medieval "flyting". Their combat suggests the rich body of antimatrimonial and antifeminist literature coeval with the adulation of women in courtly love stories (Lewis & Olshen, 1985:20).

As has been pointed out by many medieval and modern commentators, the obligations of marriage were often regarded as a barrier to the willing surrender necessary to the *amour courtois* relationship. Love is supposed to venerate the lady and refine and improve the lover. tla:disserta

2. SYLVIA: We must be serious now. My stars say I shall marry a man of distinction, and I'll look at nothing less.

DORANTE: If that were me I'd feel threatened, and go in fear of proving your horoscope. I'm an atheist over astrology ... but a profound believer in your face.

SYLVIA: (*to herself*) What a pest he is! (*to ANTE*) Will you stop this? What's it matter to you that my destiny rules you out?

DORANTE: It didn't predict that I would fall in love with you.

SYLVIA: No, but it said it wouldn't do you one bit of good, and I can tell you it's right. You are capable of talking about something else besides love, I presume?

DORANTE: From the moment you are capable of not inspiring it.

SYLVIA: Really, this is outrageous, I'm going to lose my temper. Once and for all, will you stop being in love with me!

DORANTE: If you will stop being.

Fowles's protagonists, with the exception of Clegg, are transformed by their love, regardless of the outcome of the affair. Frequently, the lovers in Fowles's stories are, at the outset, over-confident young men who believe themselves immune from lovesickness, protected either by cynicism or a previous commitment to an unthreatening wife or fiancée. Like Chaucer's Troilus, their confidence is suddenly undermined. The cliché of love at first sight is appropriated by Conchis in relating his youthful love for Lily Montgomery. He sets the atmosphere for Nicholas' romance with Lily/Julie by describing, in idealized terms, their childhood meeting over a garden wall, their courtship, and especially their final meetings. When Conchis deserts from the army, he cannot tell Lily the truth. They walk in the woods, passionately in love. He "reminisces" to Nicholas:

We lay on the ground and kissed. Perhaps you smile. That we only lay on the ground and kissed. You young people can lend your bodies now, play with them, give them as we could not. But remember that you have paid a price: that of a world rich in mystery and delicate emotion. It is not only species of animal that die out, but whole species of feeling. . . . I longed to sleep with her, I longed to be joined to her. But always my dreadful secret lay between us, like the sword between Tristan and Isolde. So I had to assume, among the flowers, the innocent birds and trees, an even falser nobility (TM, 149).

When she finally learns of his desertion, she urges him to return to the Front: "It was as if we were locked in a torture chamber. Still in love, yet chained to opposite walls, facing each other for eternity and for eternity unable to touch" (TM, 152).

Conchis has never married, he tells Nicholas, because he believes the dead live on through love. The story of Conchis' unattained love and his faithfulness to Lily's memory gives way almost immediately to Nicholas' first glimpse of Lily/Julie. Nicholas recalls:

One doesn't fall in love in five seconds; but five seconds can set one dreaming of falling in love. . . The more I thought of that midnight face, the more intelligent and charming it became; and it seemed too to have had a breeding, a fastidiousness, a delicacy, that attracted me as fatally as the local fisherman's lamps attracted fish on moonlit nights (TM, 158).

Fowles's other heroes are also immediately attracted to the elusive ladies they will pursue. Even Clegg is infatuated with the idea and image of Miranda long before he conceives his ghastly plan.

Clegg remains unpunished for his crimes against life and love, but elsewhere in Fowles's novels, lovers less guilty are punished for their sins against what Lewis and Olshen (1985:21) call "the God of Love". Most obvious is Nicholas, who is tried by Conchis and his associates, not for a criminal offense but as a process of education, leading him out of his selfishness and smug, limited vision. The purpose of Nicholas' trial is to chasten, discipline, and instruct him; in a similar manner the young knight in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" is required to undertake a quest that will educate him and be his last salvation.

Charles and David, like Lancelot in Crétien's The Knight of the Cart, hesitate briefly at a crucial moment, a failure that seems to cost them the love of their ladies. After Charles has possessed Sarah, instead of rushing back to her, he allows her to "suffer one more black night". This delay, he later believes, caused Sarah to doubt him. Confronting her in Rossetti's house, he accuses her of

condemning him for having shown "a few hours' indecision" (FLW, 449). David also hesitates for a fatal moment, and Diana slips away: "His crime had been realizing too late; at the orchard gate, when she had broken away; and he had let her, fatal indecision. . . . He had failed both in the contemporary and in the medieval sense; as someone who wanted sex, as someone who renounced it" (ET, 107).

According to Lewis and Olshen (1985:22) "The Ebony Tower" is the most obviously medieval of Fowles's stories. In this short story David Williams, a painter and art critic, on a working holiday away from his wife and family, travels to Coëtminais to interview Henry Breasley, an old and celebrated English painter. Breasley is accompanied by two young women whom he compares to the "two gels in Eliduc", and they, in turn, regard David as a modern "knight errant" caught up in the spell of the ancient manoir. David is not deceptive like Eliduc, although he finds himself in a situation similar to the knight's; that is, he is a married man who falls in love with a younger woman. That she serves both as a muse and sexual orifice for another artist complicates the situation; that she is named for the goddess of both chastity and the hunt underlines the symbolism of David's adventure. David does not deceive the girl; she knows that he is married. Nor does he betray Breasley, the substitute for the father of the princess. On the contrary, Breasley encourages him to pursue Diana. Beth Williams will never have to consider making the heroic sacrifices of Eliduc's wife.

As the characters in the story seem to realize, they are playing the roles in a familiar plot of romance and fairy story, a plot Fowles has reshaped in The Collector, The Magus, The French Lieutenant's

Woman, Daniel Martin, and A Maggot as well. A princess needs to be rescued from a monster or a wicked magician and awaits her knight errant. Lily/ Julie and Diana cast themselves in this role. Miranda, realizing that no one will rescue her, recounts a version of *Beauty and the Beast*, in which the monster is transformed into a handsome prince when he sets the princess free. Needless to say, this bit of wish fulfillment has little effect on her pitiless "Caliban". At the end of The French Lieutenant's Woman, when Charles arrives once more to rescue Sarah (or so he thinks), she does not require his services: "He had come to raise her from penury, from some crabbed post in a crabbed house. In full armour, ready to slay the dragon - and now the damsel had broken all the rules. No chains, no sobs, no beseeching hands" (FLW, 445). In Daniel Martin Dan regards Jenny, the film star, as "a twentieth-century princess, provoking very nearly the same dream as the real princess who had once languished in their walled castles and haunted another age besotted with the contempt of the unattainable" (DM, 64). Later in the novel, as Dan is reading a chapter of Jenny's story, he thinks: "a princess's message to her errant, and erring, knight" (DM, 447). It is Jane, however, not Jenny, whom he finally rescues from her prison, this time a prison of emotions, and, in doing so, both hero and heroine are transformed. Rebecca's breaking free from her past and from her deference to authority is the most obvious change in A Maggot. By the end of the novel, Rebecca is fearless in her repudiation of Ayscough's world and its values. She even criticizes the Old Testament and Moses for anti-feminine prejudice that arose, she claims, not from God but from men who did not recognize that God is both masculine and feminine. I agree with Gardner (1987:243) when he says that "in A Maggot it appears that Fowles is

again writing a novel of development, this time focussing on the feminine attainment of self-sufficiency". Rebecca's change in character is, however, more difficult to follow, and thus to experience vicariously, than is the growth of Fowles's earlier protagonists.

Lewis and Olshen (1985:23) note that Fowles always pays special attention to natural settings in his fiction. This brings me to the second recurring theme in Fowles's work: the domain. Loveday (1985:4) explains this theme as follows: "In the case of . . . the domain, we find ourselves dealing with a structural principle of the fiction. The action of Fowles's fiction typically withdraws from the opening setting to some kind of natural refuge or retreat: in the closing stages this move is reversed. The clearest form of this is seen in The Magus, which is divided into three parts corresponding to Nick's moves from London to Phraxos and back to London." This pattern recurs throughout Fowles's fiction, and where any of it is missing (Clegg's failure to return to normal life in The Collector) or obscured (as in the complex patterns of Daniel Martin) that fact is itself significant.

In "The Ebony Tower" Fowles's use of the garden and the forest is most clearly reminiscent of his medieval models. In the first paragraphs of the story, he begins the process of sending his protagonist back into a medieval setting. David has glimpsed the medieval fortress of Mont-Saint-Michel (a "spectacular spired dream"), and his route takes him through the walled town of St. Malo. In these opening paragraphs Fowles also establishes an atmosphere in which transformation and enchantment can occur. As

David drives toward Coëtminais, he feels a little guilty to be enjoying the trip without his wife, but "the day, the sense of discovery, and of course the object of the whole exercise looming formidably and yet agreeably just ahead, everything conspired to give a pleasant illusion of bachelor freedom" (ET, 9). The prose is carefully shaded to provide an atmosphere of deceptive sunshine; this will be a story of failed love. The exercise "looms", both enticing and forbidden; the circumstances "conspire"; David's bachelor freedom is a "pleasant illusion". The September weather is "splendid", but the landscape "exhales a spent fertility". At David's destination, a locked gate and warning signs discourage idle trespassers (the Garden of Love is traditionally sheltered from intruders). David, however, is not an eager youth on a May morning, an Amant seeking entrance to the garden of *Le Roman de la Rose*; he is a family man, alone by chance, on an afternoon in early autumn.

The principal setting of The Magus is Greece and appropriately, Fowles's allusions in this novel are chiefly classical rather than medieval. Nevertheless, Fowles uses the romance settings of gardens and forest glades with a clear sense of their medieval implications. Nicholas regards the Greek landscape as his new mistress. Even before he leaves England, he recalls: "I was like a medieval king, I had fallen in love with the picture long before I saw the reality". He soon realizes that he has fallen "totally and for ever in love . . . from the moment I arrived" with the landscape, and "with the love came a contradictory, almost irritating, feeling of impotence and inferiority, as if Greece were a woman so sensually provocative that I must fall physically and desperately in love with

her, and at the same time so aristocratic that I should never be able to approach her" (TM, 49).

When he first visits Bourani on the traditional May morning, Nicholas discovers an annotated poetry book providing literary clues to the mysteries of the ordeal that lies ahead. Most of his courtship of Lily/Julie will take place in Conchis' "earthly paradise", but, as the first quotation from Pound's Cantos suggests, Nicholas' ordeal will first require a descent ("First must thou go the road to hell . . .") into the underground bunkers on Conchis' estate, into the underground room where the trial is held, into the depths of his own consciousness.

Descending Parnassus the next day, Nicholas and Alison come upon a forest pond and bathe in it. Alison adorns herself as Queen of the May, becoming the heroine of love poems made flesh: "She had woven a rough crown of the oxeyes and wild pinks that grew in the grass around us. It sat lopsidedly on her uncombed hair; and she wore a smile of touching innocence. She did not know it, but it was at first for me an intensely literary moment. I could place it exactly: England's Helicon" (TM, 268-269).

This glimpse of Paradise is not a lasting reward for Nicholas, though it inspires him to confess his falsehoods to Alison and to make love to her. His spiritual education must continue; he must still endure the trial and judgment and the apparent loss of both Lily/Julie and Alison. However, the interlude in the forest glade, far from Conchis' enchanted villa, serves both as an instance when Nicholas tries to be honest with himself and Alison later, after Alison's "suicide", as a painful memory he cannot forget. Here Fowles

shows his awareness of the ambivalent nature of the Garden of Love as a Paradise both profane and sacred.

The crucial setting for Charles and Ernestina's courtship is also a wilderness bower, as is the "secret place" where young Daniel Martin and Nancy explore their adolescent passions. Ware Commons, where Sarah and Charles meet, is a place of "botanical strangeness . . . its flowers . . . bloom a month earlier than anywhere else in the district" (FLW, 67). When Charles enters this "English Garden of Eden", he is overwhelmed by "the prospect before him, the sounds, the scents, the unalloyed wildness of growth and burgeoning fertility" (FLW, 68). On his way back to Ernestina, Charles finds Sarah sleeping, her position both intensely tender and sexual.

The French Lieutenant's Woman makes use of various conventions of courtly love. In the first meeting of Charles and Sarah, for example, Charles is "lanced" by Sarah's eyes: "She turned to look at him - or as it seemed to Charles, through him. . . . He felt himself at that brief instant an unjust enemy; both pierced and deservedly diminished" (FLW, 10). Sarah's lancing look becomes a leitmotif accompanying the stages of their growing intimacy. As fatally as Amant or Troilus, Charles has been infected by the "loveres maladie", shot with the invisible love arrow from the lady's eye. Sarah herself apparently suffers acute melancholy and grief for her departed lover, Lieutenant Varguennes. "One of the main sources of Sarah's portrait is the heroine of Claire de Durfort's Ourika, a Senegalese orphan brought to France and given a genteel upbringing. The girl falls deeply in love with the grandson of her benefactress,

also called Charles, but she learns that because she is black she can marry only a man of low birth. Ourika retreats to a convent, like a latter-day Heloise saying: "Let me go, Charles, to the one place where I may still think of you day and night . . . " She becomes a nun and pines away, feverish and sleepless, her eyes large and luminous.

The French Lieutenant's Woman also traces the roots of the nineteenth century gentleman's best qualities back to the "parfit knights and *preux chevaliers* of the Middle Ages". It is these knights who form what every culture needs, maintains the narrator, "a kind of self-questioning élite . . . bound by certain rules of conduct" (FLW, 294-295). This sense of code the Elect must pursue, a kind of moral sportsmanship, Fowles believes, has firm roots in the medieval game of idealized love. In The Aristos he defines "amour courtois": "The code of 'knightly love' that dominated educated Europe in the early Middle Ages had as its central principle the idea that truly noble love is never consummated. It was, so to speak, a game without a prize - and whose only purpose could therefore be the continuance of the game" (Fowles, 1970:221). Describing his dilemma in composing The French Lieutenant's Woman, Fowles once said the following: "I was torn intolerably between wishing to reward the male protagonist (my surrogate) with the woman he loved and wishing to deprive him of her. . . " He continued by pointing out the imaginative importance of unattained ladies: "They are a prime source of fantasy and guidance. . . . Because they were never truly possessed, they remain eternally malleable. . . . The repeated use to which they can be put may even finally suggest a fuller possession of them than any mere real or

carnal knowledge could ever have allowed. And this is why a creator of fiction . . . is unlikely to grant her [his heroine] even imaginary happiness. . . . Lost, denying and denied, she lives and remains his; given away, consummated, she dies (St John Butler, 1977:35)."

Loveday (1985:3) further identifies the so-called "the Few and the Many" as another major recurring theme in Fowles's work. "Heraclitus saw mankind divided into a moral and intellectual *elite* (the 'aristoi', the good ones . . .) and an unthinking, conforming mass - 'hoi polloi', the many", writes Fowles in The Aristos. "One cannot deny", he goes on, "that Heraclitus has . . . been used by reactionaries: but it seems to me that his basic contention is *biologically irrefutable*" (Fowles, 1970:9). This statement is essential to an understanding of Fowles's work because it is the key to a three-fold structure (old man, hero, heroine) which in one guise or another recurs in every one of his full-length fictions. In this pattern the wise old man (respectively G.P., Conchis, Dr. Grogan, Breasley, and to a certain extent Professor Kirnberger) represents the Few. Round about are ranged a number of characters intermediate between "aristoi" and "polloi", Few and Many, one of whom (Clegg, Nicholas, Charles, David, Dan, or Bartholomew) will undergo an ordeal to decide whether or not he is eligible for full membership of the elite. In every case the agent of change, the physical object of the hero's symbolic quest for "election", is a woman - Miranda, Alison, Sarah, Diana, Jane, or Rebecca.

Loveday (1985:3) feels that though Fowles describes this pursuit of excellence as the "principal theme" of The Aristos (Fowles, 1970:9), its workings in the book is mostly submerged. Much more of the

iceberg shows in The Magus, but its treatment is not entirely typical either there or in Daniel Martin where the issue is complicated by the fact that Dan, the seeker, is himself acting as mentor for the much younger Jenny. For a full exposition of this theory we must look at The French Lieutenant's Woman. Here Fowles writes that "every culture . . . needs a kind of *self-questioning, ethical elite* . . . that is bound by certain rules of conduct, some of which may be very unethical . . . though their hidden purpose is good: to brace or act as structure for the better effects of their function in history" (FLW, 256-257).

This account of the few can be taken as definitive, but we might pause briefly to bring out one or two of its implications. In the first place, words such as "self-questioning" and "unethical" point to the essentially detached nature of such an elite: that is, it stands sufficiently far back from immediate social concerns to see things in a larger framework and a longer perspective than those of mere political expediency. Secondly, its allegiance (as we see from the phrase "function in history") is to evolution - a concept borrowed from biology which Fowles throughout his work applies to the social sphere. Finally, this elite is closely linked to two other concerns of Fowles's work: collecting (its members "all . . . reject the notion of possession as the purpose of life" [FLW, 257]) and freedom (since for Fowles freedom is the measure of social evolution).

Contained within Fowles's treatment of the masculine mentality is a topic which almost merits discussion on its own, namely the question of categorising, classifying, and above all *collecting*. Dreadful warnings about the dangers of collecting run through Fowles's work:

Conchis remarks in The Magus that "collecting . . . extinguishes the moral instinct. The object finally possesses the possessor" (TM, 178). In each case we find the vice exclusively associated with men. De Deukans, a melancholic and finally suicidal figure despite his enormous wealth, will have no women about him except the vengeful Mirabelle; Charles, until he falls in love with the unclassifiable Sarah, enjoys collecting and classifying fossils; in Daniel Martin Anthony, ultimately like De Deukans a suicide, hunts orchids as botanical specimens, not as things of beauty. Science, for Fowles, is an extension of the same vice: by classifying things under headings we possess them, yet we miss what is most valuable in them, their individual essence. This feeds back into the fiction in the form of a recurrent masculine tendency to "reduce women to the status of objects" (TM, 413). The classic treatment of this is to be found in Fowles's first published novel, appropriately titled The Collector, in which a man captures and holds prisoner the girl he loves. The story makes the point more eloquently than any analysis could: the male captor Clegg stands for having, Miranda for the opposing principle of being.

The fourth and final theme mentioned by Loveday (1985:7) is that of freedom. Once again the theme is consistently embodied in the working of the fiction. Freedom is at the very core of The Collector: deprivation of freedom proves fatal. The endings of The Magus and The French Lieutenant's Woman show the hero released from dependence into freedom. Moreover the open structure and fictional play which form such a striking feature of all Fowles's fictions spring from his desire to give freedom, not only to his characters - "When Charles left Sarah on her cliff-edge, I ordered

him to walk straight back to Lyme Regis. But he did not; he gratuitously turned and went down to the Dairy" (FLW, 86) - but also to his readers, in order that they may become involved actively and of their own free will in the creative process. Fowles (1978:101) is very clear about this issue in *Islands* when he says the following: "the power to affect . . . by imaginative means is strictly dependent on precisely that same *active* energy of imagination in the audience [as that which] lay behind the creation." Freedom in Fowles's work is not the only voice: strong claims are also made for its apparent antithesis, responsibility. It is nevertheless Loveday's contention (1985:7) that "at the deepest level Fowles's fictional practice bears out his early philosophical assertion that 'Freedom of will is the highest human good'" (Fowles, 1970:25) - I have to agree with him.

It will be clear by now that the four main strands of Fowles's thought are very densely interwoven with each other. Take the theme of freedom, for example. Freedom forms part of the substance of Fowles's treatment of the Few and the Many, since freedom is the evolutionary goal towards which the Few are striving; it is an essential part of the domain, where everything is permitted; and it runs through Fowles's fictional handling of sexual relations, since his male characters are typically faced with a choice between two women, one representing law and the other freedom. More important for the present discussion is the fact that the male-female relationship lies at the very core of the other primary themes in Fowles's fiction. It is without any doubt the most prominent theme in Fowles's work.

Having analysed the major themes in Fowles's work, I wish to establish the following thematic hierarchy as an aid to analysis: (i) The male protagonist's quest for an ideal woman and for self-knowledge; (ii) Freedom; (iii) The Few and the Many; (iv) The domain. I will use this matrix to make a thematic analysis of all Fowles's novels and short stories.

CHAPTER 2

The Collector - a study of warped sexuality

The title of this novel immediately gives an indication that it deals with a quest of some kind: a collector has to set out on a quest in order to collect his "prey". This also involves the theme of freedom: if the collector collects living subjects, these subjects will lose their freedom as soon as they become part of the collection. Furthermore, the collector selects his "prey" very carefully: this introduces the theme of the Few and the Many. One can safely assume that these three major themes will feature in The Collector.

"A young man captures a pretty girl and holds her captive in his underground cellar. She dies. He prepares to catch another." These are the "bare bones" of The Collector as described by Friedman (1978:40). The grip these events come to have upon the imagination inheres in the psychological dynamics of the man's fantasy and in its expression in external reality; and in the girl's response to the extraordinary circumstances which divert her life from its normal course.

Even such a bold summary of the plot reveals The Collector to be an extremely rich novel. The most conspicuous feature for a reader familiar with Fowles's work is the way in which in structural terms it reverses the traditional pattern of romance and fairy tale whereby the hero releases the heroine from captivity: in this book hero is captor, and his castle her prison.

The narrative works on other levels too. In emotional terms it offers us the pathos of a doomed and innocent heroine, and the tragic irony of a lover who kills the thing he loves. In philosophical or political terms it offers a bitter commentary on the theme of the wish come true; and in terms of detective fiction and thrillers, it gives us the perfect crime.

The relationship between Ferdinand Clegg and Miranda Grey forms the moral core of the novel. The Collector tells not of a relationship that has collapsed into possession, but of a relationship that is conceived by Clegg in those terms from the beginning. The story of Miranda's imprisonment is told in four parts, with Clegg's narrative both opening and closing the novel, while Miranda's account is presented in the form of a diary kept during her imprisonment. Not only does she record her captivity in this way, but she also uses the diary to explore the values of her society and her personal relationships (notably that with the charismatic artist George Paston) prior to her meeting with Clegg.

The fact that Clegg's narrative encloses Miranda's is of course highly appropriate to a novel of imprisonment, and there is indeed an increasingly claustrophobic direction to the plot: from suburbia to a single isolated house, from the house to a bolted room, and from the room, finally, to a coffin. Clegg himself picks this up: "It was like a joke mousetrap I once saw, the mouse just went on and things moved, it couldn't ever turn back, but just on and on into cleverer and cleverer traps until the end" (C, 281-282). Miranda's first moments as Clegg's prisoner (half-conscious and unable to breathe)

resemble her last, a circular pattern that makes the thematic point that their life together is a closed circle.

The beginning of this novel is its end; Miranda is doomed from the moment Clegg decides to make her his "guest". No action that she takes can produce any result. Every encounter between her and Clegg ends the same way: with her seeking freedom and him locking the door. The series of nonproductive events in the novel are so many flutterings against the glass of the killing jar. Tarbox (1988:41) describes the structure of The Collector as follows: "The movement of the book is circular rather than linear. The same things happen repeatedly until the situation runs out of energy. The plot, then, is not progressive, but entropic."

Clegg's narrative may be circular, but it is not static. The narrative makes a decisive change of direction on two occasions. The first of these turning points is the celebration supper after a month's captivity, after which Clegg requires as a precondition for release that Miranda should marry him. When she refuses - and rashly gives her reasons - he withdraws his offer of release: she tries to dash away, but he intercepts and overpowers her and takes her, chloroformed, down to her cell. There, as she lies unconscious, he partially undresses her and takes a number of photographs.

Clegg's interest in photography stems from two equally complex subconscious motives. He takes up photography as a hobby, first, to satisfy a stunted and misguided desire to be artistic, and second, to satisfy a much more complex, and more deranged, sexual desire. From the very beginning, Clegg's interest in collecting and in photography is linked to his interest in pornography: Clegg is a

voyeur. Unable to function sexually himself, he is temporarily satisfied with thumbing through "books of stark women". Then he graduates his voyeurism into photography. "The main idea," he writes of his taking up photography, "was to take butterflies living . . . but also often before I used to come on things out collecting, you'd be surprised the things couples get up to in places you think they know better than to do it in, so I had that too" (C, 13).

As a pornographer Clegg desires to deprive Miranda of her humanity and turn her into an inanimate object that he can use for the fulfilment of his unnatural fantasies.¹ After developing and printing the pictures he has taken of Miranda, Clegg reflects that the "best ones were with her face cut off" (C, 106). By means of pornographic photography, Clegg succeeds in destroying Miranda's identity. In his pictures, faceless and deprived of her individual personality, Miranda has become a collection of anonymous organs as divorced from humanness as the cast-iron bed the organs are tied to. In headless pictures Miranda can't talk back to him; she can no longer make him feel inferior.

In this scene, Clegg in fact "rapes" Miranda, but because of his impotence, he does so with his camera - this is even more unnatural than your "normal, everyday" rape. Rape is the most dehumanizing kind of sexual intention because it deprives the victim of all freedom of choice. It is clear from what each writes that both perceive this to be a turning point in their relationship - Clegg writes that "Things

1. Marcus (1966:280) has noted that "pornography is opposed to literature" because literature deals "with the relations of human beings among themselves" while pornography "is not interested in persons but in organs [and] emotions are an embarrassment to it." This description of pornography is also a summary of the character of Fred Clegg.

were never the same again, in spite of all that happened" (C, 95), and Miranda that "There is a great rift between us now. It can never be bridged" (C, 232).

This pornographic photographic session is, of course, the first important sexual scene in The Collector. It might seem from this that there is no room for a second substantial turning point in the novel, but this will be a wrong assumption. Lever (1979:90) remarks that "the Fowles protagonist . . . suffers from that infamous Victorian problem, the madonna/whore complex. He separates love and sex, dividing women into two types to match". Clegg represents this tendency in its most extreme form. On the one hand there is Miranda, "elusive and sporadic and very refined - not like the other ones" (C, 6); on the other hand there are "vulgar women such as Crutchley's girl from Sanitation" (C, 6) or the prostitute he visits in London, both of whom are "all Miranda wasn't" (C, 9). There is no middle term for Clegg, and consequently every woman he is attracted to must eventually gravitate towards one or other pole. As a collector he is capable only of seeing people as specimens for his collection.² Clegg regards his single encounter with the whore as "filthy" and "horrible"; he describes the whore herself as "a specimen you'd turn away from collecting" (C, 12). Clegg collects because he is unable to love or create; the drive for possession is a substitute for his impotency and his lack of imagination. Etter (1985:28) agrees that with Clegg, "Fowles creates a character who

2. Fowles himself, as we have seen in Chapter 1, regards the collector mentality as a major evil. By making Clegg a collector of butterflies, Fowles brings out the special paradox of collecting. The collector seeks to possess (and in the case of the butterfly- collector to kill) things of value; yet the value of what he seeks resides precisely in the fact that it was free and alive. In the things the collector covets, what can be

regards a woman sharply and simplistically as whore or princesse lointaine, as common specimen or rare find."

Miranda is the main (if not the only) occupant of the madonna (princess) slot. Clegg fails to individualize and humanize her. He says, "The truth was she couldn't do ugly things. She was too beautiful" (C, 66). Fact is, however, that Miranda does many ugly things during the course of the story: she vomits, she menstruates, she gets dirty, she fills her "buckets" every day. She is full of animal life, but Clegg sees only the glow of the facade, the dream girl. This is a very dangerous and unstable position for her to be in; partly because of her outspoken (if not entirely spontaneous) views about sex and her occasional readiness to use most unladylike language, but chiefly because Clegg does have a sexual drive, albeit of a rather unusual kind, and it is likely to be only a matter of time before he decides that if the madonna in question inspires that kind of temptation in him, she is probably a whore like all the rest.

The second major turning point in the ever precarious Clegg-Miranda relationship occurs when Miranda unwittingly but finally shatters the romanticized fantasy that Clegg has tried to impose upon external reality. Miranda decides to give him what she thinks he must want: her body. She succeeds in undressing him, but he proves to be both unresponsive and impotent, and she makes matters worse, first by offering sympathy - to which Clegg's reaction is, "You'd think she had all the experience in the world to have heard her" (C, 110); and then by insisting that "sex is just an activity It's not dirty" (C, 111). The result, as both realise, is dismal, in

possessed is not what is valuable: what is valuable cannot be possessed (Loveday, 1985:24).

Miranda's words: "We've been naked in front of each other . . . we can't be further apart" (C, 112). Miranda thus destroys the romance and Clegg can never forgive her for her "betrayal". Paradoxically Clegg and Miranda can never come together again. Their physical nakedness has exposed a much deeper emotional vulnerability. The scene reveals Fred Clegg hurt and desperate to flee from that knowledge. He is nowhere portrayed more intensely as a quivering individual. The scene sums up all Clegg's inadequacies as a human being - socially, at work, and finally sexually. His retreat from himself leads him away from living interaction to dead "collector" activities.

Only by "collecting" Miranda as he collects butterflies can he pin down and control his world. And when this too proves intractable, he retreats from the living relationship to the photographs he has taken of her: "I could take my time with them. They didn't talk back at me" (C, 113). Clegg must have Miranda, and his having her is contingent upon her remaining unchanged: "What she never understood was that with me it was having. Having her was enough. Nothing needed doing. I just wanted to have her . . ." (C, 101).

The contrasts Fowles effects between these two characters define their attitudes toward life: Clegg is given to destruction, Miranda to creation. His sexual impotence mirrors his death-like relationship with life; and her movement towards sexual emancipation reflects her potential for growth and development. In this way, Fowles has created in Clegg and Miranda a polarity not between opposites, but between opposing tendencies in a common human nature.

Clegg is immediately recognisable as a member of the Many, or the hoi polloi. His conformity, though perverted, epitomises the need for stasis amongst his class; essentially reactionary, the hoi polloi resist any change which may require individual thought and thus threaten the collective, rigidly maintained value system. His lack of growth and commitment leads Miranda to describe him as "an empty space disguised as a human being" (C, 234) and "a sea of cotton wool"(C, 145), the latter image suggesting his smothering predictability. Clegg, then, is the antithesis of the aristos, of the outstanding individual, not because of his materially deprived background, but because he succumbs to the pressures to conform. His one passion - collecting butterflies - identifies his membership of his affinity to the Many most clearly: he seeks fulfilment in the collection of carefully labelled, identified creatures. Miranda recognises this aspect of Clegg's personality: "I could scream abuse at him all day long; he wouldn't mind at all. It's me he wants, my look, my outside; not my emotions or my mind or my soul or even my body. Not anything human. He's a collector. That's the great dead thing in him" (C, 171-172).

One can agree with Campbell (1983:49) when he says that "Clegg is morally blind, not because he couldn't see or because he couldn't evaluate what he does see, but because he denies Miranda a moral right. He won't, refuses to see her as a conscious subject who is constituted as a subject of her world; instead she is, for him, only an object in his". Clegg's problem - Anthony has the same problem in Daniel Martin - is that he looks at Miranda, and not for her. This may be appropriate for orchids and butterflies, but not for people. People are never there when you look at them, you have to

discover them.³ Olshen (1978:17) puts it this way: "The voyeur observes her as he would a butterfly, reducing her free and vital nature in his mind's eye to the status of an object, a 'specimen' in a collection. This life-destroying power of the collector, this objectification of another human being, is manifest from the beginning in the language of Clegg's narrative."

The accumulated imagery of collecting (indicating a quest of some kind) serves to define Clegg's attitude towards life, and to infuse the narrative events with philosophical significance. By trying to pin down and label reality, be it overtly in his butterfly collection, or more subtly in attempting to live out a preconceived fantasy, Clegg belies the living quality of that which is contained in the label.

In contrast to Clegg, Miranda represents the principle of what Fowles has called the aristos - she belongs to that group of individuals who are highly gifted in an artistic, moral, or intellectual sense:

[T]his is what I feel these days. That I belong to a sort of people who have to stand against all the rest. I don't know who they are - famous men, dead and living, who've fought for the right things and created and painted in the right way, and unfamous people I don't know who lie about things, who try not to be lazy, who try to be human and intelligent They're not even good people. They have weak moments. Sex moments and drink moments. They have holidays in the Ivory Tower. But part of them is one with the band. The Few (C, 219-220).

"When Miranda talks about the Few," Fowles has said, "these are the kind of people I mean her to mean; pre-eminently creators, not simply highly intelligent or well-informed people; nor people who

3. "We have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and not what it is" (Sartre, 1969:58).

are skilled with words" (Huffaker, 1980:90). With creativity being the primary quality of the aristos, it is significant that Fowles has created artists as representatives of the Few, for "increasingly art has to express what the nonscientific intellectual elite of the world think and feel; it is for the top of the pyramid, the literate few" (Fowles, 1970:187). Miranda has almost attained the top of the pyramid when she dies, for while her imprisonment is a traumatic, bruising experience, her knowledge of herself and her world increases considerably.

It is with her growing self-knowledge that Miranda realises her bond of common humanity with Clegg: "I had a feeling I've had once or twice before, of the most peculiar closeness to him - not love or sympathy in any way. But linked destiny. Like being shipwrecked on an island - a raft - together. In every way not wanting to be together. But together" (C, 199). Miranda and Clegg may indeed be part of a common humanity, "fellow members of the human race; not rivals" (Fowles, 1970: 121), but as representatives of the Few and the Many respectively, they are separated by much more than mere class distinction. Much of the tragedy of The Collector lies in the lack of communication between the two central characters and their two opposing worlds. This is mirrored in Fowles's choice of divided narratives.

One can agree with Tarbox (1988:43) when she gives a possible explanation for this bond between Miranda and Clegg: "[Miranda's] intense need for companionship and humanity drives her into a relationship with Clegg that she neither welcomes nor understands":

It's weird. Uncanny. But there is a sort of relationship between us It can't be friendship, I loathe him . . .

Perhaps it's just knowledge. Just knowing a lot about him. And knowing someone automatically makes you feel close to him (C, 148).

Deprivation teaches her that she has a linked destiny with all humans. Etter (1985:32) describes The Collector as "an existential parable" which [delineates] "Clegg's being and Miranda's becoming". In contrast to Clegg, then, Miranda represents life: "I love honesty and freedom and giving. I love making. I love doing. I love being to the full, I love everything which is not sitting and watching and copying and dead at heart" (C, 218). While Clegg enjoys a state of perfect stagnation, Miranda is determined to use her life creatively. She is all urgency about her future. She wants to live as normal a life as possible in her prison, and she insists on having the outward forms of life such as exercising and bathing. Miranda's optimism indicates the expectation of a change in fortune. She describes her growth during her captivity using images of vitality and regeneration in nature:

Everything's changing. I keep on thinking of him: of things he said and I said, and how we neither of us really understood what the other meant. No, he understood, I think. He counts possibilities so much faster than I can. I'm growing up so quickly down here. Like a mushroom (C, 166).

Miranda's mental development is reflected in her personal grappling with ideas about life, and in her relationship (through memory) with G.P. The extraordinary situation she finds herself in taxes her ingenuity and emotions. She is forced to re-assess values, principles, and her own nature, by herself and without guidance. In this sense she gropes towards finding her own authenticity.⁴ There is

4. Fowles has said of Miranda: "The girl in The Collector is an existentialist heroine although she doesn't know it. She is groping for her own authenticity" (Newquist, 1964:225).

a new determination, openness, and recognition of her own feelings. There is also a new humility in her perception that she can no longer be sure she has all the answers simply because she has been told she is bright for her age. Her yearning for George Paston (G.P.) is expressed in one of the last reminiscences she has of him:

But I so need to be walking up the stairs and pushing open the studio door, and seeing him over his bench, looking over his shoulder at me, as if he's not in the least interested to see who it is standing there, with his faint, faint smile and eyes that understand things so quickly (C, 249).

The abundance of present participles ("walking", "pushing", "seeing", "looking", "standing") creates the sense of her lingering over each moment, keeping each detail as long as possible in her imagination. The emphasis in this description falls on Miranda's final memory of her mentor: a man of depth and understanding. In light of the fact that she views him as a creator, she remembers him in his familiar pose at his workbench.

It must be clear by now that G.P. is explicitly identified as one of the Few, as a member of the aristos. He is characterized (through Miranda's eyes) by his unconventional, individualistic approach to life, manifest particularly in his free sexual and love relationships with women. If Clegg sees her as anima, Miranda, with no less intensity, sees G.P. as animus. She has for him a kind of veneration that stems more from his being a famous painter than from genuine love. His looks - his ugliness - prevent Miranda from relating to the real man, just as Miranda's looks - her beauty - distract Clegg from her individuality. Of G.P.'s appearance she complains, "Short and broad and broad-faced with a hook nose; even a bit Turkish. Not

really English-looking at all. I have this silly notion about English good looks. Advertisement men" (C, 181).

His age is also a "cruel wall fate has built". When G.P. finally tells her to go, it is because he knows what game she is playing. He says, "You don't love me". She responds, "I can't explain it. There isn't a word for it". He: "Precisely" (C, 231). He shoves her out of the door, and she savours the drama of it, the playing-at-experience aspect of the situation: "Of course I looked sad. But I didn't really feel sad. Or it was a sadness that didn't hurt I rather enjoyed it The romance of it, the mystery of it" (C, 233). As she sits in her cell she tries unsuccessfully to draw G.P. from memory; she finds she cannot draw an idea. Her playing with the idea of G.P. is so complete that one must suspect her final realization that she loves him; one must question whether it is motivated by love or simple loneliness and deprivation.

G.P. can be seen as the fulcrum against which both Miranda and Fred are counterbalanced. Fred moves ever further away from G.P.'s kind of life; Miranda strives towards it. Her eager adoption of G.P.'s values and attitudes during the course of her recollection of him has, however, led some critics to see her simply as a more subtle collector than Fred Clegg.⁵

While Miranda does display many "collector" impulses, by the end of her account she has been forced to question personally the rather smug assumptions and values she began with. She is certainly in no

5. "Miranda is another collector, not of objects but of ideas . . . a sad, deluded parody of the existential being, mouthing its clichés" (Rackham, 1972:92).

position to write out a list of rules by which to conduct her life, as she had done near the outset of her captivity (C, 153). She has, however, only begun the process of freeing herself from "collected" attitudes and values.

The many subjects Fowles brings up in The Collector - free uninhibited sex versus commitment; the question of what constitutes real teaching; the responsibility of the moral to the degenerate; the value of art; the effects of money on human beings - circle without ever coming to rest. Fowles uses his position and his authority only to indicate that his characters are unfree. In a sense, this novel, like The French Lieutenant's Woman, has two endings: Miranda's utter ending and Clegg's ending, which is not an ending at all, but an ongoingness. Both endings are too painful, but Fowles uses his reader's despair to press his one clear position: to abuse freedom is the worst crime of all.

An understanding of protagonism in Fowles's work begins with an examination of the deadening and irresponsible stasis that he meticulously characterizes. As has been explained in chapter 1, Fowles's protagonists eventually leave this condition behind to pursue a quest initiative, usually defined by a woman. However, Fowles also portrays characters who are hopelessly grafted to stasis and unable to evolve and Ferdinand Clegg is such a character. Clegg gains from his quest a woman, but he never gains real self-knowledge. At the end of the novel he sets out on a new quest after a new "ideal woman". The quest-theme and the freedom-theme therefore has to be considered the most prominent in The Collector.

The themes identified as the Few and the Many, and the domain also feature in the novel, but are of secondary importance.

CHAPTER 3

The Magus - love story and quest narrative

John Fowles's interest in the evolutionary struggles and competitions of men and women has led him to investigate in both his essays and his fiction many of the competitive activities in which men and women participate, from childlike play to adult contests for high stakes.

His claim in The Aristos is that "Games are far more important to us, in far deeper ways, than we like to admit" (Fowles, 1970:158). The society to which Nicholas Urfe first belongs in this novel, is ends-orientated. In this society the "style" of the man is the man; transient conquests of wealth, women, and prestige are the rule and requirement. Fowles's "godgames", however, encourage a moral and emotional athleticism that can sustain the individual in all of his human occupations, especially in his practice of what modern existentialists have called responsible freedom. The godgame functions as a training ground for the inexperienced protagonist, who learns and practices skills that will be useful when the "godgame" is over. The protagonist proceeds through both frivolous and sacred games on his way toward the most vital competition of all: the moral struggle between what one is and what one ought to be. It is a mythic, symbolic, yet still personalised quest for self-awareness and understanding.

Nicholas' ordeal begins when, after abandoning his girlfriend, Alison Kelly, he accepts a teaching position on the Greek Island of

Phraxos. There he meets with the magus, Maurice Conchis, who involves Nicholas in an extraordinary "godgame" designed to teach the irresponsible young man about the consequences of his dissolute past. Conchis disorients his pupil by entangling him in a real-life masque and manipulating his affections with twin sisters. After Nicholas succumbs completely to the game the magus abruptly abandons him, leaving him to put his own life back together. When Nicholas slaps Alison at the end of The Magus the masque is finally over. Nicholas has been changed from what Tarbox (1988:13) calls the "débâuché de profession" to a man on his knees, enjoying the possibility that tomorrow he may (and probably will) know love.

The plot of The Magus seems at first immensely complex, but despite its length and its constant changes of direction, it rests upon two very simple patterns. The first is the love story - boy meets girl; boy leaves girl; boy returns to girl. The second pattern is the quest narrative, in which the hero undertakes a magical journey whose true but more or less sublimated goal is a fuller understanding of himself.¹

The love story of The Magus is the tale of Nicholas and Alison, who meet, love, and part in Part 1; who seem definitely separated by Alison's suicide in Part 2; and who are reunited in Part 3 after the suicide has been proven a fake. The quest narrative is confined to the "fenced" island of Phraxos, in which Nicholas goes through a series of ordeals in his attempt to free an "imprisoned maiden" (Julie/Lily) from the grasp of her evil captor (Conchis). However, both love story and quest myth come down ultimately to aspects of

1. This may even be seen as two levels of the same pattern - it is an open field for possible further study.

the same search for self-knowledge, the same attempt to become the person Nicholas wants to be:

I was born in 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English, and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow, which they never rose sufficiently above history to leave, of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria. I was sent to a public school, I wasted two years doing my national service, I went to Oxford; and there I began to discover I was not the person I wanted to be (TM, 15).

The Magus can thus be described as a novel of learning: in Fowlesian terms, the individual must learn about himself before he can begin to achieve existential authenticity. Like Miranda in The Collector, Nicholas Urfe undergoes a unique learning experience, and achieves some measure of self-knowledge. Unlike Miranda, however, he is given the opportunity to act on that knowledge, and to make certain choices based on his newly-acquired moral sensibility.

One has to agree with Etter (1985:76) that the central pivot of this novel is the "concrete, specific relationship" between Nicholas and Alison, who has to form a strong link of trust together when all else is uncertainty, lies and deception. The relationship begins in a low key, in the familiar setting of quotidian England. The matter-of-fact realism of Part 1 thus establishes the dimension in which ordinary life is to be negotiated and lived. Nicholas' character has been firmly established by the time he first meets Alison. As narrator, he presents a damning picture of his younger self as an Oxford dandy:

We formed a small club called Les Hommes Revoltés, drank very dry sherry, and (as a protest against those shabby duffel-coated last years of the 'forties) wore dark-grey suits and black ties for our meetings. There we argued about being and nothingness, and called a certain kind of inconsequential behaviour 'existentialist'. Less enlightened people would have called it capricious

or just plain selfish I acquired expensive habits and affected manners. I got a third-class degree and a first-class illusion: that I was a poet (TM, 17).

McDaniel (1980-81:247) describes the old Nicholas as follows: "poetically pseudo-suicidal, monstrously manipulative of women, void of both human knowledge and introspective vision". When he is appointed to teach English at the Lord Byron School on the Greek island of Phraxos, he leaves Alison - the latest in a string of casual affairs - behind him. Greece increases Nicholas' "escapist tendency of forsaking the moral for the aesthetic sphere" (TM, 89). His increasing involvement with the wealthy Conchis and the extraordinary events which take place at Bourani² further estranges him from Alison, until not even her reported suicide can affect his obsession with Bourani and its mysterious guests.

In pursuit of a fashionable life-style and a glamorous image, Nicholas has developed an infallible technique for ensnaring young women - if not physically, as Fred Clegg does in The Collector, yet just as powerfully, emotionally: "My 'technique' was to make a show of unpredictability, cynicism, and indifference. Then, like a conjurer with his white rabbit, I produced the solitary heart" (TM, 21). Like Clegg, Nicholas' concentration on technique is a cover for his own vulnerability: "I suddenly had the feeling that we were one body, one person, even there; that if she [Alison] had disappeared it would have been as if I had lost half of myself I thought it was desire. I drove her straight home and tore her clothes off" (TM, 35). Nicholas is emotionally as impotent as Fred is physically. He

2. Since Bourani means "skull", Nicholas' journey is indeed a journey into the depths of self-consciousness, an attempt "to lift the veil of illusion". He must discover the island of the Self, with Conchis as the navigator of this inward voyage (Friedman, 1978:51-2).

protects himself from experiencing the substance of human relationships by never exposing his innermost self. True anguish is replaced by the "right anguishes" (TM, 17) of imitation.

Nicholas always has difficulty understanding the complex relationship between sex and love. Sexual prowess is divorced from emotional substance - from love. As Nicholas comments wryly: "In our age it is not sex that raises its ugly head, but love" (TM, 34). Nicholas and Alison can achieve sexual union instantaneously, but not love. Nicholas tries to insulate himself from emotional involvement by hiding behind technique, playing the game of love. This separation of sex from love further leads to Nicholas dividing women into two classes: Those who are meant to be loved and those who are meant to be used. He sees a women to be either pure, innocent and virtuous (virgin) or sensual, sexually indiscriminate and untrustworthy (whore). He further objectifies females by making them conform to his own rationally conceived program for gratification of sexual need, but also by seeing his sexual encounters as a "criminal" violation of the terms of such relationships: "I contrived most of my affairs in the vacations, away from Oxford, since the new term meant that I could conveniently leave the scene of the crime" (TM, 21).

Nicholas sees Alison as the kind of woman you abandon to go to Greece (a casual fling); and you leave her £50 to smooth things over (prostitution?). He insists on this separation between her body and her self throughout. When she asks him to meet him in Athens he says, "I began to think erotically of Alison again; of the dirty week-

end pleasures of having her in some Athens hotel bedroom; of birds in the hand being worth more than birds in the bush" (TM, 159).

Alison has a more intuitively holistic response to life than Nicholas. While she is adept at the technique of love - Nicholas describes her as "an expert coxer, a handler of men" (TM, 27) - she has an honesty and blunt directness which make her open to life and involvement. Etter (1985:83) makes the observation that Alison's "frank recognition of herself is expressed in language so simple and unobtrusive" that it can easily be missed:

Don't you begin to feel things about yourself that you know are you? Are you going to be you for ever? That's what I feel. I'm going to be an Australian slut for ever (TM, 29).

She goes on to say: "I'm unhappy when I stop and think. When I wake up and see what I am" (TM, 30). Because this honesty and self-recognition are qualities Nicholas has sealed off from himself, he cannot understand Alison except in the most literal sense - she is unhappy at waking up in bed to find she has lost her virginity.³

Most of all Alison has piercing insight into Nicholas' poses and pretences, brushing aside his "technique" of emotional blackmail: "You say you're isolated boyo, but you really think you're different" (TM, 35). In her non-intellectual, instinctive fashion, Alison reveals an understanding of man's precarious position in relation to the uncertainty of the universe and man's real enemy - death; hence the importance of the human relationship, the only part of the process that man has some measure of control over, if he assumes it. At one

3. Roberta Rubenstein makes a valid observation when she says that Nicholas' connection with reality is primarily sexual (1975:329).

stage she says to Nicholas, "You try and try to be happy and then something chance happens and it's all gone . . . Every time I have you, I think this is one in the eye for death" (TM, 34).

The presence of Alison is a touchstone in more ways than one. She does not set foot in Phraxos, but when she does visit Greece, a crucial sequence between her and Nicholas takes place on Mount Parnassus, "Where the muses dash about" (TM, 251). The Parnassus episode develops three key aspects of the novel. The first, obviously, is the fact that it is Alison, and not Julie, who is Nicholas' true partner. Her authenticity, her courage, her enthusiasm and her generosity shine forth from these pages. Significantly she is associated more than once with children (TM, 253-4 and 274), reminding us that it is "a nauseatingly happy 'average' family" (TM, 643) which Nicholas comes to recognise as his destiny in Part 3. Alison's association with children also reminds the reader of the suggestion in Part 1, that it is the abortion she had in Australia which lies at the root of her self-destructiveness.

Secondly, the treatment of sexuality illuminates the contrasting attitudes of the pair. For Alison sex is an aspect of her affection for Nicholas: if she can't have a full sexual relationship with him because of his supposed syphilis - Conchis has arranged for Nicholas to be diagnosed as syphilitic so that Nicholas might be forced to evaluate the injustice of the double standard; it is now he who is the whore - she will do the best she can; she accepts him, disease and all. For Nicholas sex with Alison provides a means of deferring the deeper questions of their relationship and of concealing his lack of affection. Boccia (1980-81:243) senses that one of Nicholas' main

problems is his ambivalent attitude towards sex: "Although he likens sex to games, he is influenced rather strongly by Victorian notions of morality and correctness." He is shocked when he sees the statue of the naked Apollo with its blatantly obvious phallus, and there is a disapproving tone in his voice when he looks over the pornography which Conchis lends him (yet he examines it *twice*):

I opened *The Beauties of Nature*. The nature was all female, and the beauty al pectoral. There were long shots of breasts, shots of breasts of every material from every angle, and against all sorts of background, closer and closer, until the final picture was nothing but breast, with one dark and much larger-than-usual nipple staring from the centre of the glossy page. It was much too obsessive to be erotic (TM, 101).

Nicholas interprets his sexual union with Alison on Parnassus - a testimony of her self-abandoning love for him - as a sign of her humiliation and defilement. The act, which is of necessity incomplete and culminates in Nicholas ejaculating upon her breasts, seems to him "like being with a prostitute" and makes him think of Alison as "my mistress and my slave" (TM, 263-4). The mystery Nicholas longs for is clearly present before him - it is affection and love. However, when he finds these emotions stirring within him, he resolves to exorcise them in the most cauterising way he can, by telling Alison that she has been supplanted, and that he has been lying to her all along.

Simultaneously he hankers after sex with Julie/Lily as some kind of mysterious experience radically different from the sweaty reality of intercourse with Alison which he refers to elsewhere with unlovable matter-of-factness as "spilt semen" (TM, 387). Tarbox (1988:23) mentions that *The Magus* "contains a most masterful sex tease", and of all the waiting that goes on in this novel, the waiting for sex

seems to Nicholas the most interminable. At every encounter with Julie/Lily all Nicholas gets is reluctance and pulling away. Her behaviour is meant to signal that her role is symbolic, and therefore impersonal, but every time she pulls away Nicholas interprets her reticence in a way that is consistent with his idealization of her: "I sensed ... a delicious ghost of innocence, perhaps even of virginity; a ghost I felt peculiarly well equipped to exorcise, just as soon as time allowed" (TM, 210). Julie/Lily tries to train his thoughts onto his real love by mentioning Alison in the middle of an embrace: "She ran her fingers through my shirt. 'Was she nice in bed? Your Australian friend?'" (TM, 455). During their final love scene, she asks Nicholas: "Tell me what you liked her doing to you best" (TM, 485) - she gives him every chance to feel guilty, but he tosses her indelicacy off with a cliché: "girls possess sexual tact in inverse proportion to their standard of education" (TM, 485).

In two erotic encounters with her, Nicholas is given what he considers to be indubitable proof of Julie/Lily's real feelings far beyond any role she may be playing. On one of the rare days when Julie/Lily and June/Rose are allowed to be together with Nicholas, they entice him into sunbathing. June/Rose is nearly naked (her bikini shocks him) and Julie/Lily is dressed in her white one-piece bathing suit. One cannot but agree with Tarbox (1988:23) that the twin sisters are in this case "employed to personify Nicholas' schizophrenic attitude towards women" - that is, that there are only virgins and whores. June/Rose teases him unmercifully, allowing him to see her breasts and adopting seductive poses, while Julie/Rose remains prim. Nicholas becomes furiously excited and

Julie/Rose manages to take him to a chapel alone, where they are fortuitously interrupted:

Her arms slipped round my neck and we kissed again, crushing each other. I slid a hand down her back, slipped the fingers inside the edge of the costume, applied a curved cheek, pulled her closer still, against the hardness in my loins, made sure she could feel it and know she was wanted. Our mouths twisted, our tongues explored wildly, she began to rock against me and I could sense she was losing control, that this nakedness, darkness, pent-up emotion, repressed need . . . There was a sound . . . (TM, 351-2).

It is Rose who arouses him but Lily to whom he turns for relief. Thus his lust has nothing to do with Lily or his love for her. His lust is bound up purely in himself, disconnected from the object, and hence masturbatory.

This episode in the chapel leads to a secret midnight meeting on the beach between Nicholas and Julie/Lily. In the erotic scene that takes place underwater, Nicholas is excited to orgasm by a practised evasion (Julie intimates that she cannot have intercourse because of "the wretched calender"):

There was nothing but her tongue, her pressed nakedness, the wet hair, the gentle rhythm of the underwater hand. I would have had it go on all night, this being seduced that was also a seduction . . . All night; but it was too erotic. She seemed to know by instinct that I no longer wanted her gentle; clung tighter still, began to show herself less of a novice; and as I racked quietly beneath the water, she bent her head and bit into the side of my armpit, as if she too had her orgasm, though only in mind (TM, 369-370).

The openness of the sexual description conveys the physical and psychological nakedness with which Nicholas enters into the experience. He is seduced, totally involved in the experience, which is shared only nominally by Julie. Julie/Lily's masturbation of him at Moutsa serves then as the logical conclusion of this scene.

That Nicholas' involvement with Julie/Rose is an expression of his own fantasies is evident in his subsequent vision of their future together:

Julie entranced me. It was as if I had stumbled on a sleeping princess and found her, once woken, not merely in love with me, but erotically starved, deliciously eager... I saw nothing in the present, only the endless seduction and surrender of that willing body: nights in the village house, indolent naked siestas on some village bed ... and when we were satiated, that other golden, lapping presence, June, implicit two for the price of one. Of course it was Julie I loved, but all love needs a teasing, testing dry relief (TM, 371).

In the fairytale image of a "sleeping princess" who has "entranced" him, who is furthermore "erotically starved", nothing could be more enticing - nor more unrealistic. Nicholas sees love in terms of self-gratification, slipping easily in imagination from Julie to June, both of whom have no other function in life than to await his satisfaction, minister to his sexual narcissism.

The second erotic encounter between Nicholas and Julie/Rose takes place in Conchis' house in the village. The ensuing sexual scene is a concrete realization of the fantasy quoted above of "endless seduction and surrender of that willing body: nights in the village house, indolent siestas on some shadowed bed" Afterwards, she says something to Nicholas which is of the utmost importance:

"Nicholas, will you always remember something about tonight?"
 I grinned. "What?"
 "That it's also how, not why."
 Still I smiled. "How was beautiful."
 "As I wanted it to be" (TM, 487).

Lily/Julie is telling Nicholas that sex and love are different things. She is able to "make" beautiful sex with him while not loving him - this is the "how". The "why" is to educate him.

All the tantalizing, all the teasing of the previous meetings are consummated in sexual union - only to be rudely shattered. Julie/Rose slips out of bed and tells Nicholas: "My name isn't Julie, Nicholas. And I'm sorry we can't provide the customary flames" (TM, 488).⁴ Three figures in black invade the room and, smarting with humiliation, Nicholas is bound, gagged and drugged to make him sleep. His fantasy has been transfigured into hellish nightmare. The stripping of his illusions about himself, his vanities and fantasies is crystallized in the physical nakedness of this consummate betrayal. Sexual titillation divorced from love and trust proves to be treacherous and humiliating. That this has a lasting impression on Nicholas can be seen when he is talking to Lily de Seitas and he thinks, "I recalled Lily's last words to me on that bed" (TM, 627). He has come to learn the distinction between sex and love, but more importantly he understands that the process was necessary and that Julie/Lily meant to please him as much as she could in the situation. Selfishness - Nicholas' prime motivating factor - was totally lacking in her actions.

Nicholas' emotional betrayal is followed by a "trial" scenario: he suffers cruel psychological torture in his "Hell", the underground courtroom, as his torturers, garbed in bizarre costumes as crocodiles, wolves, horned goats, witches and vampires, disclose the embarrassing secrets of his past life. He is also "crucified" (TM, 530) before a movie screen and forced to watch the humiliating "blue film" (TM, 523) in which anonymous detached organs - naked

4. The comment serves to parody Nicholas' association of female sexuality with sin and lends emphasis to the larger point, later made by Mrs. De Seitas, that the Julie/Lily Nicholas claims to love is not an individuated

breasts, legs, backs, hands and sexual organs - are flashed before him representing the way in which Nicholas has severed sex from its union with love in all his past "love" affairs with women in general and with Alison in particular.⁵ The Victorian ambiance of the film also suggests Nicholas' love for having "dirty things" kept behind closed doors. This fantasy sex is then followed by the real copulation of Julie/Lily and Joe before his eyes. Conchis is doing his best to make Nicholas see that sex should be regarded as "two people . . . in love making love" (TM, 529).

Alison's re-entry into Nicholas' life is quietly dramatic:

The noise, the mess, the cheap food, the queue to the counter . . . In the outer seat opposite diagonally from me. So quietly, so simply . . . She said nothing. Waited. All the time I had expected some spectacular re-entry, some mysterious call . . . (TM, 647)

Her name is not mentioned, she is simply there, seated opposite him as if she had never not been there, quite naturally and unassumingly. Nothing could be further from the flamboyance of the scenes of Phraxos, but precisely as a result of that experience, the banality of the scene, the normality of Alison's being has a heightened effect. For the first time, Nicholas can appreciate the simplicity of her being. Her role in his life is that of reality⁶: plain and unmysterious perhaps, but wholesome and reliable. Nicholas has moved from

human being, but rather a reflection of his conception of the female (TM, 601).

5. At Bourani, Conchis also leaves pornographic material about to suggest to Nicholas the sordid consequences of dislocating love and sex, e.g. the book he leaves on Nicholas' bedside table shows breasts disconnected from bodies.
6. Whereas Alison is "reality" in Urfe's psychodrama, Lily "represents ical beauty - an unattainable ideal" (TM, 5-6). Lily's treacherous duplicity finally makes Urfe long for Alison, 'her normality, her reality, her predictability, her attachment to all that Lily was not' (TM, 553).

"wanting sex . . . to wanting love" (TM, 242), and as Conchis has told him, "Love is the mystery between two people, not the identity" (TM, 152). Nicholas now looks at Alison with different eyes: "She was mysterious, almost a new woman; one had to go back several steps, and start again; *and know the place for the first time*" (TM, 650).

Loveday sums it up when he says that "Alison is Nicholas' *anima*": they are "aspects of a single personality, with Nicholas its freedom-loving male element, and Alison its affectionate female component, both being essential for wholeness" (1985:43). There is nothing in this last interaction between Nicholas and Alison that suggests that he views her as a sexual object. His proposal of marriage is an honest appraisal of the prospect of living with him in a relationship without any of the trappings of romantic idealism.

Love is particularly associated in The Magus with Alison and Lily/Julie, and it is not accidental that both these characters are women. Just as freedom in this novel cannot be discussed without reference to Greece, love cannot be properly understood without reference to the women involved with the protagonist, Nicholas Urfe. The Magus is a work which celebrates women and women's influence; it is entirely open and unashamed in its proclamation of the superiority of women over men - Conchis defines "a man's world" as "a world governed by brute force, humourless arrogance, illusory prestige and primeval stupidity" (TM, 413). The superiority of women lies precisely in their association with love, and what Mrs. De Seitas calls "a . . . capacity for attachment and devotion" which

is " the one great quality [her] sex has to contribute to life" (TM, 601).

The quest-theme features very prominently in The Magus. The whole novel is based on Nicholas' quest for his ideal woman and for self-knowledge: he has to gain some measure of self-knowledge before he can begin to achieve existential authenticity. After his learning experience, Nicholas can at last see "fragments of freedom" (TM, 656). Now, for the first time, he can make the right decisions. He has found his true identity by realising that Alison is everything he needs: love, honesty, and reality. He has reached existential meaning. He has become a member of the "aristoi".

CHAPTER 4

The French Lieutenant's Woman - a quest for self-knowledge in Victorian England

Fowles uses The French Lieutenant's Woman to present characters who try to create, as new artists do, new existences out of the chaos of their lives. Through characterization, metaphor, and overt authorial comment, Fowles develops what Palmer (1974:31) calls "his life-art theme". Charles Smithson sets out on a quest in order to attain his ideal woman. The novel shows how this ideal woman leads Charles to self-definition, moral action, and finally existential life. Sarah leads him to an awareness of the "priority of existence over death, of the individual over the species, of ecology over classification" (FLW, 192).

Set in 1867, exactly one hundred years before its contemporary date of creation, The French Lieutenant's Woman develops in theme and technique the central motifs of both The Collector and The Magus. As in these works, the philosophical motifs are explored through the personal, erotic relationships of the main protagonists; but for the first time, the contemporary setting is abandoned for an excursion into historicity. The historicity is, however, integral to the philosophical meaning of the novel.

By using the Victorian period as the framework of the novel, Fowles establishes an initial distance between his fictional world and the contemporary reader, so that we can investigate the tenets, philosophical and social, of the society which has evolved into our present social reality, especially those pertaining to sexual

behaviour. The Victorian period, in general, represents an ethos dedicated to the maintenance of stability, of an order almost divinely enshrined for the benefit of the human species in general, and for aristocratic man in particular. The preservation of order, social hierarchy and privilege demanded a concomitant conformity to conventions governing conduct, emotion and thought. For security and stability to be maintained on the one hand, rigidity and imprisoning conformity become inevitable corollaries.¹ By the latter half of the period (the time-span of the novel), these structures were beginning to totter, to be challenged by the implications of new knowledge and development.

As with The Collector and The Magus, Fowles has titled The French Lieutenant's Woman after the character manifesting the most power in the novel. However, this time it is a woman. Sarah is as much the mover of the action here as Clegg is in The Collector and Conchis in The Magus. The French Lieutenant's Woman is about Sarah Woodruff, and what she represents in a confined society. She assails the rigid collector-consciousness of Victorian society and stimulates growth and self-definition in the person of Charles Smithson. As Fowles tells it, the vision of Sarah Woodruff came to him early one morning as he lay half asleep. He saw her as she first appeared to Charles Smithson: at the end of the Cobb, looking accusingly into the sea. He fell in love with that face. The vision was so intrusive that he was forced to lay aside his other work and follow the mysterious Sarah wherever she might lead. So into

1. Fowles has said of the Victorians that "By the 1860's the great iron structures of their philosophies, religions and social stratifications were already beginning to look dangerously corroded to the more perspicacious" (McCormack, 1959:166).

Fowles's life she came, in much the same way she came into Smithson's: commanding undivided interest and attention, and pushing rivals aside with a look (Fowles, 1968:88-97). The reader thus comes to realise that both the author and the male protagonist are engrossed by with the heroine.

The French Lieutenant's Woman is the story of how Charles Smithson is taught by his mentor, Sarah, to rebel against the classifying and fossilizing impulse of the Victorian age in order to gain self-knowledge and existential meaning. Fowles makes use of the eternal love-triangle to get his message across: Charles is increasingly torn between Ernestina, his betrothed, and the unknown Sarah - which is to say, given the uncompromising typology of the male imagination, between Mary and Eve, between a respectable rich virgin and a woman with an alleged past, the woman who is the super-symbol of the story and a classic type of the threat to social normalcy and psychic stability. The development of sexual attraction between Fowles's characters never proceeds smoothly, and it provides the main source of tension and conflict in his plots. This pattern is repeated in The French Lieutenant's Woman. Numerous barriers keep Charles and Sarah apart. Class distinction is one: Charles is an aspiring baronet, Sarah a governess. Furthermore, Sarah is a social outcast - De Klerk (1987:76) describes her as "the femme fatale figure representing the 'dark' side of Victorian life"- whereas Charles (before his betrothal to Ernestina) is sought after by many parents as an ideal partner for their daughters. Finally there is the betrothal itself, an irrevocable contract in the dutybound society. These are the elements Fowles reacts against in The French Lieutenant's Woman.

Fowles's heroines conform to the traditional romance pattern of contrast, not only in colouring - Sarah dark of hair and dress, Ernestina pale-skinned and clothed in brilliant colours - but in other ways too: Sarah is far-sighted - "her stare . . . like a rifle at the farthest horizon" (FLW, 13) - Ernestina the reverse; Sarah is inscrutable, Ernestina transparent; Sarah associated with wilderness and nature, Ernestina with culture and civilisation; Sarah forbidden, sexual, even faintly incestuous, Ernestina lawful and chaste. Charles has to choose between these two extremes: two sides of the same coin. It is not surprising that in the end he is drawn towards the dark, forbidden and independent Sarah with her peculiar and unique personality.

Charles is by birth a member of the group with traditionally vested interests in the preservation of order and stability - the landed aristocracy. Conradi (1985:43) describes him as "the conventional hero, a somewhat passive and futile leisured gentleman, an amateur palaeontologist who lives with no larger ambition than inheriting a baronetcy from his uncle and marrying the daughter of a very rich draper".

Ernestina is the daughter of the new wealthy class of businessman, and despite her superficial modernity of costume, she would pull Charles into an unquestioning assumption of the age. Sarah, by contrast, is an outcast with no fixed position in the social hierarchy, and known derogatively as "the French Lieutenant's Woman". She is thus a mysterious, ambiguous force, capable of luring Charles into unknown situations. She teaches Charles that human relationships cannot always be neatly classified and then be filed away for future

reference like the fossils in his collection. Sarah is this novel's magus who will lead Charles out of the collector-consciousness of the Victorian age and into a timeless world of selfhood. She has attained selfhood: "in her own freedom she knows how to encourage the grasping of freedom by others" (Palmer, 1975:75). Sarah offers Charles "the pure essence of cruel but necessary . . . freedom" from his Victorian society (FLW, 287).

Sarah Woodruff is probably Fowles's most enigmatic character: the lonely figure at the end of the quay who turns her back on the hypocrisies of the Victorian world. The view of the female character which underlies The French Lieutenant's Woman cannot be discussed in isolation from the character of Sarah herself.

As we have seen, Fowles believes that women think intuitively and emotively rather than intellectually, and that they are in touch with a deeper and warmer level of thought and feeling that men ever penetrate to. A male writer creating female characters is faced with a logical problem if he tries to carry out this belief: his characters will have depths he himself cannot plumb. One aspect of the narration of The French Lieutenant's Woman can be seen as an ingenious solution to this problem - the famous or notorious refusal to enter into Sarah's consciousness and tell us what she is thinking. Sarah may be seen as a passive victim, a trapped animal fighting for her life, a mad woman, or a coldly calculating manipulator. The reader, entrapped by his desire for explanation as well as by his expectations of the novel form, falls for the bait time and time again, always feeling that *this* time he has been shown the real Sarah. The catch, though, is that the narrator himself does not know the truth to

tell us. Women like Sarah, he gravely explains, have always baffled him (FLW, 80). This refusal on the part of what Fowles thinks of as the intuitive female to open her mind to the intellectual probings of the male becomes in the closing pages a refusal on Sarah's part to submit her actions to any kind of analysis at all: "I am not to be understood even by myself" (FLW, 386). Whoever she is, she intuits that she is the result of muddled motives, of ambiguous circumstances, and of the very inadequacy of language itself to express desire. In fact, she tells Charles that she believes her happiness "depends" upon her not fully "understanding" herself (FLW, 452).²

In many ways, Sarah is the archetypal Fowlesian woman; in The Aristos, Fowles describes cultures in terms of the male or female principle to which they conform:

Adam societies are ones in which the man and the father, male gods, exact strict obedience to established institutions and norms of behaviour, as during a majority of the periods of history in our era. The Victorian is a typical such period. Eve societies are those in which the woman and the mother, female gods, encourage innovation and experiment, and fresh definitions, aims, modes of feeling (Fowles, 1970:157).

Sarah represents very clearly the innovatory and the experimental. She epitomises the mystery of women-mystery, and is, according to Fowles, "the ultimate tension between what we know and what we

2. Sarah's indeterminate identity has elicited much critical controversy. Most critics (like Charles himself) try to identify and explain her rather to see her in what I believe is her proper role: as a mirror for Charles. John Hagopian (1982:102) feels that there are three ways of regarding Sarah: (1) "The narrator tells the truth when he says, 'modern women like Sarah exist and I have never understood them'. . . . (2) She is, as Dr. Grogan diagnoses her, a psychopathic personality. (3) She is . . . an intelligent woman who uses whatever tactics she feels necessary to liberate herself from a society and a culture that oppress, constrain, and stifle her."

know we will never know" (Fowles, 1970:95). She can therefore be seen as the ultimate object of the eternal quest: Sarah will never be captured.

She is a remarkable woman, an outcast from society who has to bear the stigma of the adulteress. Her face is "unforgettable". Its "intensity" betrays a "suppressed sensuality" while her bearing reveals "an intelligence, an independence of spirit ... a determination to be what she was" (FLW, 99). Jones (1987:70) notes that she does not "find marriage a viable outlet for the expression of her passion and personality" and that she "finds freedom only in isolation and loneliness". As a social outcast, she is free from society's intellectual framework.

Friedman (1978:80) describes Sarah as "a Victorian anomaly - a woman motivated by her sex". She embarks deliberately on a journey, a performance, in order to live freely in a society which she has analysed and understood. She is an embodiment of life. Brown (1985:127) calls Sarah "a freedom fighter". Fowles's narrator calls her his protagonist (FLW, 317), describing her as "a female soldier", although a part of that "unfortunate army of females wounded in the battle for universal masculine purity" (FLW, 217) who take refuge in cities such as Exeter and London. However, while others seek to hide their wounds, to accept their lot and become invisible, she uses society's weapons against society: her very ignominy becomes her badge of freedom. She uses courage and intelligence to escape the net that society has woven around her, including the real threat of imprisonment for "madness" when she defies its strictures. She is a person in her own right who is acting

out of her own needs and seeking her own individuation. This action of freeing herself may appear selfish, but this same action frees Charles as well.

Male intellect, the counterpart to female intuition, is represented in the novel by the scientific pursuits of Charles and Grogan. At the beginning of the novel Charles is poised on an existential fulcrum.³ Superficially, he leads a comfortable life and seems to be at home in high Victorian society, but inside he is torn by doubt and self-reproach. On one hand, he is content to see his life as a story, a familiar plot, a neat Victorian novel, in fact. He decides to choose a wife, not because he has any of the higher yearnings associated with marriage, but because "it is time to 'plug' a wife into his plot" (Tarbox, 1988:61). The woman he chooses is certain to play out the rest of the drama neatly. Yet even as he seeks comfort in this safe predictability, he experiences deep longings for a life that is based more on contingency: "His future had always seemed to him of vast potential; and now suddenly it was a fixed voyage to a known place" (FLW, 130).

The conflict between duty and love is at the heart of The French Lieutenant's Woman. Charles's relationship with Ernestina is conducted in terms of duty, and through the engaged couple's interaction, the Victorian ethos is dramatised. Loveday (1985:63) states that The French Lieutenant's Woman is in one sense "a book obsessed with duty". He further states that duty is for some time "the cement that holds together [Charles's] crumbling relationship

3. "The picturing of life as a closed room that man must furnish and then open to the outside world is present in each Fowles novel" (Palmer, 1975:93).

with Ernestina, and curiously it is the governing idiom of his first post-coital conversation with Sarah". Duty is even the lever Sarah uses to split Charles off from her: "I know she must love you She is worthy of you. I am not" (FLW, 306). Charles's disastrous decision to sort things out with Ernestina before he returns to claim Sarah is similarly based on duty. The quotation from George Eliot is exceedingly apt: "God is inconceivable, immortality is unbelievable, but duty is peremptory and absolute" (FLW, 45-46).

At this point one has to pay attention to the question of the balance between freedom and responsibility. Fowles splits the apparently monolithic concept of duty into two parts: duty to others, and duty to oneself. As far as Charles is concerned, duty to others takes a number of forms in the novel: duty to Ernestina in the form of the obligations of engagement, duty to Winsyatt in the form of the obligations of inheritance, duty to the economic process in the form of the proposal to exchange the comfortable idleness of a rentier existence for productive work in the Freeman emporium. In the novel, all these duties are resoundingly rejected as forms of responsibility. What is approved of is duty to oneself, symbolised in personal terms by Charles's relationship with Sarah. Protocol plays an important part in his life, but when it comes to handling Sarah, he is at a loss. Shortly after Charles meets Sarah, she begins to haunt him. At first he does not acknowledge the sexual undertone of his feelings for her, but the need to see her soon begins to drive him into situations which he feels obliged to hide from Ernestina:

He had even recontemplated revealing what had passed between himself and Miss Woodruff to Ernestina; but alas, he foresaw only too vividly that she might put foolish female questions, questions he could not truthfully answer without moving into dangerous

waters. . . . [he] thus very conveniently side-stepped that other less attractive aspect of duty (FLW, 144).

Charles's desire for Sarah steadily increases until his imagination drives him into a frenzied state at the possibility of possessing her. Charles, however, tries to avoid feeling the desire his society does not "allow" him to feel by going through various evasive actions. To purge himself of guilt he even conspires with Grogan to send Sarah to an asylum. At this point he pretends that Sarah is merely an object of scientific interest to him. However, he cannot go through with the charade and helps her to "escape" before the doctor appears on the scene. After committing the "heinous crime" of kissing Sarah and almost being caught in the act by Sam and Mary, he sends her away to Exeter and insists that they should never see each other again. His torment is still not over, for Sarah sends him her address and

It tormented him, it obsessed him, it confused him. The more he thought about it the more Sarah . . . appeared. It was perfectly in key with all her other behaviour, and to be described only by oxymoron; luring-receding, subtle-simple, proud-begging, defending-accusing (FLW, 296).

This letter results in an explosive sexual encounter between Charles and Sarah. One has to agree with Tarbox (1985:72) that Charles's demise becomes inevitable when he succumbs to Sarah's "clever machinations". The edict of both Sarah and her metaphorical French Lieutenant is: you must come to me of your own free will; you must choose to cut yourself off with your own will. She makes certain that she is helpless (she feigns a sprained ankle for this reason), that she can take no active part in this sexual encounter, because it must be all his doing. He must take command completely, become existential action personified - and he does

indeed become action! Their passionate intercourse crystallizes the breakdown of all the restrictions and bounds imposed by the Victorian ethos:

He strained that body into his, straining his mouth upon hers, with all the hunger of a long frustration - not merely sexual, for a whole ungovernable torrent of things banned, romance, adventure, sin, madness, animality, all these coursed wildly through him (FLW, 274).

The honesty of the encounter, as opposed to the conventionality of the imagined scene with Ernestina in which true feelings are suppressed and disguised, is reflected in the ensuing wealth of minutely observed details:

His waistcoat was torn off, his boots, his socks, his trousers and undertrousers . . . he drew up her nightgown. Her legs parted. With a frantic brutality, as he felt his ejaculation about to burst, he found the place and thrust (FLW, 274).

Immediately after this Charles discovers that despite having played the role of the fallen woman, Sarah was in fact a virgin. She thus combines both halves of the Victorian typology: at exactly the point when she ceases to be a virgin, she begins for the first time to appear to have been one, and Charles, having magically survived the pollution of each taboo, now falls seriously in love. It is now obvious that Sarah is very much in control of her own "downfall". The amount of free will that she displays in her deliberate seduction of Charles indicates that her sexual rebellion against the sexual morality of male dominance is fully calculated. Her ability to face sexuality in direct thought and language is a measure of her liberation from constraining conditions, of her freedom from a rigid society. This emphasizes the fact that Sarah is a new species of woman: she is far ahead of her time.

According to Loveday (1985:79), Fowles would like the message of The French Lieutenant's Woman on this subject to be the following: "sex is a fundamental aspect of love, and should not be thought of as dirty; it is only dirty when it is debased (performed for itself, without love) or commercialised (prostitution); above all it should not be associated with guilt." This in turn is part of a larger message that we should not split off the soul from the body, the spiritual from the physical, but should treat these as unified.

The rest of the book heightens the mood of erotic quest as Sarah disappears and Charles sets out on a quest to find her. Having already had his future title and rents put in jeopardy, Charles now jilts and hurts Ernestina, losing his future wife, his good name and social position, and loses also his servant Sam, a defector to exactly that commercial bourgeoisie from which Charles is escaping. Charles becomes what Conradi (1985:45) refers to as a "déraciné", searching for Sarah in America, home of the New Woman whose style Sarah is to portend - where, indeed, even the fossils are new - but he finds her in Bohemian Chelsea, in the house of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

The Fowlesian narrator, invasive, omniscient, pontifical and self-gratulatory, appears decisively in chapter 55, studying Charles in the train and then announcing his intention of showing his neutrality and good faith by presenting the book with two (or three) endings. Since Fowles is concerned with the question of choice, and since Sarah epitomises the existential dilemma, it is only fitting that the novel presents the reader with his own choice of endings. In the first Charles and Sarah find some sort of future together. The narrator now reappears - as Charles's fortunes decline his creator's

appearances become conversely more ambiguous, flashy and glib - and puts back his expensive watch one quarter of an hour. In the second ending Charles and Sarah part and Charles faces, in the book's closing words, Matthew Arnold's "unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea", that sublime and multiform romantic world which continually promises and withholds an end to human loneliness and alienation.⁴ We have been given both a happy and an unhappy ending, and we are challenged not to choose between them.⁵

When we come to set The French Lieutenant's Woman against Fowles's previous work we can see that it represents something of a blend of the new and the familiar. By comparison with The Magus, it is new in the importance it allots to its heroine; in its explicit stress on freedom rather than on responsibility; and in its historical setting. However, if we step a little further back we can see these innovations as modulations of relatively familiar concerns of the author. The extended treatment of Sarah leaves us in the end knowing no more about her than we did at the beginning; and the stress on freedom arises from Fowles's conception of the Victorian

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4. The critics tend to prefer the final ending. Frederick M. Holmes's remark regarding the endings is representative of a general attitude: "... the final ending is both a logical resolution of the novel's themes and the only one not vitiated by the narrator's irony" (1981:190). Wolfe (1976:165), Huffaker (1980:113), Olshen (1978:88), Conradi (1983:66) and Rankin (1973:205) have all voiced their disapproval of the other ending[s].
 5. Fowles has acknowledged the fact that he was "torn intolerably between wishing to reward the male protagonist (my surrogate) with the woman he loved and wishing to deprive him of her - that is, I wished to pander to both the adult and the child in myself. I had experienced a very similar predicament in my two previous novels. Yet I am now very clear that I am happier, where I gave two, with the unhappy ending, and not in any way for objective critical reasons, but simply because it has seemed more fertile and onward to my whole being as a writer" (St John Butler, 1977:35).

age, which he sees as dominated by duty and guilt. Thus the nineteenth-century setting of the novel is in part a means whereby its author is able to come to terms with the twentieth century, and the remedies prescribed for the ills are not those which Fowles sees as appropriate for the present age. In the last analysis The French Lieutenant's Woman covers much new ground, but it does not venture beyond the limits of the territory Fowles has already mapped out as his own.

The four main themes can all be found in The French Lieutenant's Woman, with the quest forming the basis of the thematic structure of the novel. For Fowles the existential journey to selfhood is a traveling out of the enclosures of isolation, a passage through the thick walls of loneliness. The quester traverses a landscape of inner and outer spaces that symbolically oppose each other. Charles Smithson is trapped in a claustrophobic room; he is left in isolation in order to force him to look at himself. He is given the opportunity to exercise the lessons learned and the selfhood found on his quest, in an outdoor world of human relationships. He gains self-knowledge on his quest, even if he may not conquer his ideal woman.

CHAPTER 5

The Ebony Tower - breaking new grounds with "Variations"

John Fowles's fourth work of fiction, The Ebony Tower, is a collection of short stories containing the title story (a novella), followed by "A Personal Note", Fowles's translation of the Celtic romance Eliduc, and three short stories. The working title for the collection was Variations, Fowles's intent being to connect the stories to his other fiction as variation on previous themes and techniques and to connect them to the medieval romance, which Fowles sees as "seminal in the history of fiction" (ET, 117). By including the medieval romance, Eliduc, and writing a corresponding contemporary piece in the title story, Fowles strengthens the connection between the two genres. Even though the collection's original title was abandoned when professional readers thought it too obscure, Variations is nonetheless an appropriate and illuminating title in that the stories do reflect the overall pattern of Fowles's fiction: modern man's quest for wholeness or individuation.

Each one of the stories is concerned in some way with the relationship between art and life, and the function of the creative individual. In Robert Huffaker's words, "Like man's life, his art can be, among other things, a refuge, a mask, an obsession, a delusion, a profession, a social barrier, a selfish device, a reflection of thought, a style of civilization, an enlightenment, and a fulfilling act of natural creativity" (1980:116). The relationship that exists between "aesthetic sensibility" and "human behaviour" is

thematically central to Fowles's fiction; as Huffaker (1980:116) suggests, this relationship is explored in The Ebony Tower "in several variations".

An understanding of protagonism in Fowles's work begins with an examination of the deadening and irresponsible human stasis that he meticulously characterizes. In the novels, his protagonists eventually leave this condition behind to pursue a quest initiative, usually defined by a woman. However, Fowles also draws character portraits of people who are hopelessly grafted to stasis and unable to evolve. These portraits he has collected in The Ebony Tower: David Williams in the title story, Marcus Fielding in "The Enigma", the scholar in "Poor Koko", and Catherine, the Adam-woman of "The Cloud". These characters have removed themselves from life's evolutionary current and withdrawn into shadows, corners, and "ebony towers" where life can be waited out. Fowles blackens the familiar ivory tower because he perceives an individual's withdrawal from the lifestream as anything but an ascension into lofty white heights. Such a retreat is a black death-like removal that cuts the individual off from the life-source of human community.

Although none of the protagonists in The Ebony Tower successfully evolves into what Fowles calls the aristoi, the plot of each story turns upon the small progress they do make. However, their advances are made only within the province of knowledge, not action. In the Fowlesian world, to see and know are not enough; the individual must also act and change.

The title story, which I feel to be the most successful of the collection, returns to the themes of The Magus. Fowles said the

following about this issue: "In a way I wanted to demystify The Magus which I think was altogether too full of mystery. This is a kind of realistic version of The Magus" (Robinson, 1974:584). Like The Magus, the story concerns an initiation through sexual loss; unlike Nicholas Urfe, whose philandering life-mood is the symptom of an inner decay in The Magus, David Williams is what Conradi (1983:79) calls "a crypto-husband" even before he is contentedly married: if Urfe is coerced into imagining sexual loyalty for the first time, it is sexual disloyalty that is presented as Williams's redemption in "The Ebony Tower". Where The Magus is persistently concerned at a subtextual level with art, it is of the first importance that Williams and Breasley, the postulant and magus of "The Ebony Tower", are practitioners: Breasley an artist of high repute, Williams wedded to safety and the second-rate in his art as, by implication, his marriage. It is an immensely concentrated story which distils an existential ordeal and love-triangle.

David Williams is the typical Fowlesian protagonist: well born and bred, self-assured, and representative of his age and class. Driving through the forests of Brittany, the landscape of the Celtic romance and home of Eliduc, he does not suspect the mythic encounter awaiting him, as the expressed purpose of his journey is to interview the Grand Master painter Henry Breasley. In contrast to Breasley, who has "discovered who he really was" (ET, 13), David does not know who he is, but wears a persona of self-assurance and competence. He has spent his life avoiding challenges, living comfortably but superficially. When he turns off the main road into the forest lane, David comes to the "promised sign" announcing Manoir de Coëtminais: "coët-" meaning "wood" or "forest" and "-

minais" meaning "of the monks" (ET, 39) - the sacred wood of the mythic quest.

Because his and Breasley's life-styles are completely different, David is not particularly surprised to come upon two naked girls sunbathing when he first arrives at Breasley's manor. The girls - Anne, dubbed "the Freak", and Diana dubbed "the Mouse" - correspond in certain respects to the twins Lily-Julie/Rose-June in The Magus. Like their predecessors, the girls in this story serve as mirror images, two halves that complement one another as two aspects of womankind. Diana, the Mouse, is described as ethereal, distant, feminine, and almost always dressed in white. The mystery inherent in the quintessential Fowlesian woman is clearly present in Diana, the direct successor to Sarah Woodruff: "There was something preternaturally grave about her, almost Victorian, despite the galabiya" (ET, 14). Like all of Fowles's temptresses, she represents timelessness, mystery, the unknowable. She combines the functions of Sarah (The French Lieutenant's Woman) and Lily (The Magus): a lost yet serious girl whose special quality is carefully distinguished from the more extravagant and evident appeal of her vamp-like friend, the Freak, with her complementary dyed head and pubic hair. Anne, the Freak, is described as aboriginal, sexual, coarse, and almost always dressed in black.

Not surprisingly, David is attracted to the Mouse, finding the Freak somewhat offensive. Breasley has proposed marriage to her and, hurt by her relationships with younger men, she is tempted by both his compassion and his authority, and also divided by her desire as an artist herself to be out in the world and subject to its fearful anarchy. David is deeply stirred by Diana and finds himself

assigned the role of possible knight-errant, rescuing her from her predicament. His later failure to meet the challenge of the quest stems partly from the fact that he cannot accept the "freak" in the Mouse - that is, her sexuality - and respond positively to it. Diana and Anne, Anne's name contained within Diana's¹, compose the archetype of the anima for David, the feminine or feeling side of himself which he seeks for wholeness. At first he sees Diana as positive, Anne as negative; it is not until much later that he begins to appreciate Anne as well. His experience in the mythic domain is that of the awakening anima within him, projected in the person of the Mouse. Breasley's secret about the significance of the Mouse's name - "muse" with the feminine "o" drawn in the shape of a vulva - strengthens her role as an anima figure.

Within the mythic domain, David feels at first "like a visitor, peripheral, not really wanted" (ET, 30), and wishes his wife were with him to help with practical matters and to protect him from the dangers of "so many ripening apples" (ET, 29), a reference to the temptation of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. At the same time, David thinks of his wife as "poor old Beth" (ET, 10) and "predictable Beth" (ET, 29), characteristics which reveal the unfruitful nature of their relationship. In his desire to be protected by her, he seeks her support of his persona, or mask, which she reflects and strengthens. Since David knows how to meet only in masks, he feels uncomfortable in a situation he recognizes as different from the start. To handle the confusing situation, he ascribes rational explanations to the things he sees. His desire to

1. In mythology, Diana is, of course, a fertility goddess and is related to the woods.

"demystify" mystery is typical of Fowles's protagonists and highlights one of the reasons why they need to take the mythic journey: to enable them to accept mystery in the sacred sense without reducing it to rational deduction.

What happens between David and Diana, on the second night of his stay, forms the crux of the story. The isolation and natural beauty of the setting (the Edenic garden with its apple trees), and the growing mutual absorption of the two characters, allow Fowles to exercise his genius for creating an isolated and heightened reality. The scene falls into three parts. The first, in Diana's room, consists very much of a kind of sounding-out process in which, like "hidden birds . . . secretly shifting position between utterances" (ET, 93), each is trying to establish the other's position without revealing his or her own. The second takes place out in the garden; and the third, a winding-down from the high tension of the second, recounts the return of the couple to separate rooms in the manoir.

What is very striking in this scene is the way in which both within and between the parts, the decisive character is not David but Diana. She is the one who puts her own case forward for David to analyse; she suggests the idea of the nightwalk; she, saying the unsayable, makes it clear that David is the knight errant who in another world would have been destined to rescue her (ET, 98); it is her unspoken offer ("she said nothing - or everything. No strings now. If you want") that gives rise to their embrace, and "She was the one who brought it to an end" (ET, 99). In the remainder of that part of the scene she is firm and lucid, able to perceive and describe the force

that keeps her and David apart, and to act in a way that preserves her integrity.

Poor David, on the other hand, is almost entirely passive. In her room he responds to her requests for advice: in the garden he reacts first to her physical encouragement to kiss her, and then to her breaking off the kiss; back in the house his three attempts to persuade her to go to bed with him read much more like belated responses to her earlier initiative than like independent actions on his own part. It is hardly to his credit that he manages to remain faithful to his wife Beth: indeed he seems even to contradict the advice that he himself had earlier given to Diana: "Surely what you ought to do is what you feel you need. And to hell with everyone" (ET, 92). David demonstrates that he is bound to the conventions of morality and art.

In the final analysis Mouse can thus be seen as Eve offering herself and a "new existence" (ET, 112) to this Adam (David) who is too afraid to accept. "It was here, the unsaid. He knew it in every nerve and premonitory fibre. His move: he withdrew back into speech" (ET, 99). So David speaks, and the delay, the choosing not to act, damns him. Torn between duty to his absent wife and desire for Diana, he - like Charles Smithson in The French Lieutenant's Woman - hesitates at the moment of choice, and is lost. Possession and security are the authorities in his life. Sex with Mouse would have to be a quick "sinking, knowing, possessing, release" (ET, 102) so that the "crypto-husband" could get back home and make certain that his wife had no other man in bed with her: "His real fear was of losing that certainty" (ET, 97). David's final failure is

not sexual, but existential. The individual must choose in order to be authentic, and David fails to make a conscious choice.

Human facts and feeling must be in art, in speech, and in sexual relations. "We're not brutes," Mouse tells David (ET, 101), but David does not understand until Mouse turns away from him and he is expelled from Coëtminais that his brutality lies in the violation of love, not law. "The Middle Ages fathered the belief that mutual trust should underpin all male-female relationships; but the same period also spawned a bastard in believing that chastity could insure this trust. David's practice of fidelity is a spurious destroyer of real love. It metaphorically castrates him and makes him unable to respond when love is offered" (McDaniel, 1987:76). David is the "eunuch" in the garden at Coëtminais, forsaking human needs for conventional morality. He "surrenders . . . to abstraction" (ET, 115) in the form of his marriage with Beth.

Fowles's "Personal Note" to the reader of The Ebony Tower contributes some additional observations that help to explain the place of "Eliduc" in this collection. Fowles claims to have inserted the medieval tale into the collection to remind the reader of three "real-life systems": feudalism, Christianity and amour courtois. All were supported by codes of trust that insisted that humans keep their promises to each other. In fostering greater honesty and trust among people, these institutions helped to civilize human relations. Feudalism "laid a vital importance on promises sworn between vassal and lord" (ET, 122); all civilized life depended on "a man being as good as his word" (ET, 122). Christianity placed responsibility for the immortal soul on the human heart and human

actions. And courtly love stressed keeping faith in love and was an attempt "to bring more civilization (more female intelligence) into a brutal society. "Eliduc" is anachronistically told in The Ebony Tower to remind the reader of the defilement or loss of trust in most aspects of contemporary human intercourse - from love and sex to language and art.

The parallels between "Eliduc" and "The Ebony Tower" are clear. Both David and Eliduc leave their wives at home; both men are attracted to other women. However, whereas Eliduc is unable to leave Guilliadun behind when he returns home, David departs from Diana, never (presumably) to see her again. Heatt (1977:357) summarizes the parallels between the two stories as follows: "Like Eliduc, David is a married man temporarily away from a pleasant, loving and undoubtedly faithful wife; like Guilliadun, Diana is clearly attracted to the male visitor, and presents an obvious temptation. David, like his predecessor struggles between his desire for the girl and his duty towards his wife." In each tale the test of fidelity is originally the same. A man who would be true to his marriage vows finds himself passionately attracted to a woman other than his wife. In each tale, it should also be noted, the test is technically passed. When Guildelüec recognizes her husband's love for another, "she asked his formal permission for a separation" and even insisted that as soon as he was free to do so "he must [as was both 'decent' and 'proper'] marry the girl he loved so much" (ET, 132). There is no adultery, for Eliduc's love of Guiliadun is not consummated until he is married to her. Neither do David and Diana pursue their brief incipient affair to the point of actual intercourse. Nevertheless, in both cases the wife is still betrayed,

and faithfulness is thereby shown to be something more than simply refraining from extramarital sexual adventures. So each protagonist's limited success in a test of faithfulness also marks his failure, but "Eliduc" coming after "The Ebony Tower", shows that one can fail well and not just fail badly.

The weasel which appears in each story, too, suggests that while Eliduc's emotional betrayal of his wife may be atoned for, David's indecisiveness and inaction may not: the weasel revives its mate in the former story, while the weasel which David kills, with the "trickle of blood, like a red flower" (ET, 108) from its mouth, is a sad travesty of its ancestor. Eliduc surrenders to emotion; David to abstraction.

"The putative common origin [of the two] is in courtly romance, with its twin pulls of sexual passion and social duty" (Conradi, 1983:84). Davidson (1984:34) describes "Eliduc" and "The Ebony Tower" as "two closely related versions of the traditional love triangle plot. A character of one sex, the protagonist, must choose between two characters of the opposite sex. One of those latter two, wed (or about to be wed) to the protagonist, necessarily embodies the responsibilities of matrimony, the restrictions of society - and the claims of the superego. The other, the present or prospective lover, promises immediate pleasure, radical freedom - and the indulgence of the id. The resolution of the plot typically affirms either passion or propriety". Yet neither "Eliduc" nor "The Ebony Tower" is a typical example of the romantic form around which they are both structured. It should be noted that in both stories the central male character does not resolve for himself the issue that he confronts. It

is the woman who ostensibly serves to embody one of "his" options who decides what his decision will be. In each case, he also accedes to that decision. Still more intriguing is the decision that "she" makes, for in each case the woman decides in favour of the other woman.

The ostensibly closed and codified twelfth-century text is allowed to serve as an ironic commentary that undercuts the ostensible openness and in- determinateness (the hallmarks of modernity) of the twentieth-century text. Carol Barnum in her "The Quest Motif in John Fowles's The Ebony Tower" argues that "the medieval romance serves as a foil" to the modern one and contrasts Eliduc's "success achieved through his acceptance of the challenge of love" with David's failure to "rise" to that same "challenge" (1981:138). "Eliduc", as Fowles presents it, speaks for the magical reconciliation of love in its passionate, divine and social guises.

The remaining stories in the collection are connected to the title story by the theme of lost opportunities. The sense of gloom that the ebony tower introduces becomes more pervasive, ending with the image of the dark cloud which overtakes the sun in the last story.

In "Poor Koko" the narrator's "ordeal", as he calls his encounter with the young thief who burns his writing, brings him, of all the protagonists of the last three stories, closest to an understanding of his personal failure, but it leaves him helpless to do anything more than explain it. His quest for self-knowledge is not voluntarily sought, but forced upon him by the unusual circumstance of the robbery and his desire to understand it.

The details of the experience that characterize the writer's journey are these: the narrator, an elderly and rather puny writer, goes to a country cottage to work on his long-planned biography of Thomas Love Peacock. There he is surprised by a young, urban, sophisticated, and would-be politically conscious burglar, who to his amazement and horror ends his search of the house by systematically burning all the notes, files and texts which the narrator has assembled for his book. Afterwards the narrator reflects on the experience and suggests a possible motive for the young man's actions.

The isolated setting, the physical detention of a weaker person by a stronger, their unbridgeable differences of class, culture and speech: all these features of "Poor Koko" point to the unquestionable conclusion that the story is meant to be seen as a variation on the theme and the presentation vehicle of The Collector which Fowles describes as a "parable" of the unnecessarily brutal conflict of the Few and the Many. "Poor Koko" is, however, a lighter, less involving and more cerebral fiction than The Collector. No inside view of the representative of the Many is offered, and the reader's attitudes to both the representatives are manipulated in different and more equivocal ways than in the novel.

On the surface "Poor Koko" seems to have little to do with the other stories in this volume. There are trivial cross-references: "my ordeal" (ET, 147) points us back to the medieval world; the narrator's rather deliberately given age of 66 reminds us that Breasley is 77; the West Country setting and Cornish epigraph link the story geographically with Brittany and the Celts. More substantially, the story resembles the one that follows it in that both

deal with an "enigma"²; but the main concern of "Poor Koko", one which binds it very closely into the book and into Fowles's work as a whole, is failure of communication. As the epigraph (translated on page 184 as "Too long a tongue, too short a hand; But tongueless man has lost his land") implies, this is firstly a failure of language. The young burglar, with his reliance on slang, his quick-fix political theories, his preference for gesture over speech, cannot express himself effectively; this is emphasised by his fondness for Conrad, whose work constantly stresses the inability of language to encompass reality.³ Indeed the narrator comes to the conclusion that the "enigma", the young man's destruction of the Peacock biography, was an act of jealousy, the rage that those deprived of words feel for those with a mastery of words.

However, underneath the failure of language there is a yet sadder failure of communication. The failure to listen (ET, 170) and the "refusal" to hand down a kind of magic" (ET, 183) are symptoms of something deeper still. As the title implies - "Koko . . . is a Japanese word and means correct filial behaviour, the proper attitude of son to father" (ET, 184) - the story really concerns a breakdown of relations between the generations (a relationship of great importance throughout Fowles's work).

The next story, "The Enigma", deals once again with an initially inexplicable event - in this case the disappearance of Marcus Fielding, a prosperous rural MP. The story begins in impersonal documentary style; later the point of view shifts to that of Michael

2. The word itself occurs on page 178 of the text.

3. I owe this point to Huffaker (1980:124-5).

Jennings, the young detective investigating the case. When Jennings comes to interviewing his last witness, Isobel Dodgson⁴, he falls instantly in love with her, and the centre of interest shifts from a past enigma (the disappearance of the MP) to a present mystery (the developing relationship between lovers-to-be).

Since the disappearance has no apparent criminal motivation, the question is raised as to why a man who seemed to have everything would want to abscond from life. The answer, as it is pieced together by hypothesis and conjecture, is that a life that seemed to offer a man everything, in actuality provided him with an incurable feeling of emptiness; therefore, he sets out to create his own mystery through his disappearance. Unable to admire the man whose career decorated the pages of his carefully assembled scrapbooks, Fielding chooses to save the face the scrapbooks never revealed. Therefore, he walks out of his life, as he walks out of Isobel's story of him as well (for although much of Isobel's fiction rings true, there is no evidence that her speculations are true). Fielding is pure mystery, unique and provocative for the first time in his life.

Loveday (1985:95) feels that "'The Enigma' contains all five of the 'Enigma' motifs [themes according to my evaluation], though in varying degrees of importance." He then mentions the following five "motifs": (i) The pattern of one man in pursuit of two women occurs in reversed form - both Fielding and Jennings, in different ways, have an interest in the heroine of the story; (ii) The conflicts

4. The implied allusion to Lewis Carroll can be linked with the mention of Alice in Wonderland in "Poor Ko'ko": "... I gave up playing Alice to this Wonderland of nonsequiturs" (ET, 159).

and contradictions inherent in male roles surface in the form of a clash between being a public figure and "being you own man" (ET, 227); (iii) The fact that Isobel's sister is married to a French film director, and that she has just come back from a visit to Paris, provides a discreet nod in the direction of the Breton setting; (iv) "Creative withdrawal": the driving force behind the entire action is Fielding's disappearance; (v) Failed communication.

The developing relationship between Michael Jennings and Isobel Dodgson is the catalyst of "The Enigma": when Michael meets Isobel, Fielding's son's ex-girlfriend, he is struck by "an immediate impression of someone alive, where everyone else had been dead, or playing dead; of someone who lived in the present, not the past" (ET, 217), recognizing, subconsciously, Isobel's potential as an anima figure. Like Charles on the Cobb who sees "no artifice . . . no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask" (FLW, 13) in Sarah's face, this moment of recognition is typically Fowlesian. It is at this point in the story that the focus shifts from the investigation of Fielding's disappearance to the developing relationship between Jennings and Isobel, the enigma now including the young couple and the question of their future relationship. Whereas Michael's interviews with the other characters have been conducted inside buildings, he and Isobel walk on the heath, a symbolic return to the Ware Commons-like freedom of nature. Friedman (1978:100) also mentions that "there is an echo of Sarah in Isobel". Both women represent reality, while embodying ineffable mystery.

At the same time that Jennings is listening to Isobel's plausible hypothesis to what could have happened to Fielding, he finds

himself growing more and more sexually attracted to her. This is hardly surprising, for of course the lovely young Isobel is one of those frail, mysterious and imaginative Fowlesian heroines who carries the seeds of existential growth. She awakens in Jennings a feeling that he wants to experience, but does not know how to attain or sustain because he has lost the means of communication; he therefore falls back on sexual communication as the only avenue he knows, despite the fact that

Something about her possessed something that he lacked: a potential that lay like unsound ground, waiting for just this unlikely corn-goddess; a direction he could follow, if she would only show it. An honesty, in one word. He had not wanted a girl so fast and so intensely for a long time (ET, 228-9).

The allusion to Isobel as a corn-goddess connects her with the vegetative myths and regeneration cycle. Barnum (1981:151) feels that "Without knowing it, Jennings seeks rebirth through the experiencing of the archetypes, here expressed as union with the anima." If Isobel were serving in her capacity as anima, she might provide the direction he seeks, leading him to experience the archetypes and to approach the wholeness; but she is not the anima - she only possesses the unrealized potential, as deeply locked inside her as is Jennings.

Isobel concludes her "fiction" open-endedly with Fielding's walking out. This enigma is not resolved, the message being the following: life without mystery cannot be endured. Isobel and Jennings now create their own mystery in their budding relationship: they now face the solution to the mystery between them.

The language that Fowles employs to describe their "first tomorrow" has a distinctly criminal cast when the sergeant (Fielding) "deprive[s]" Isobel of her clothes, finding her "defenceless underneath, though hardly an innocent victim in what followed" (ET, 239). Since they are both consenting adults desirous of the anticipated sexual encounter, the criminal language Fowles employs is humorously ironic. Isobel and the sergeant create their own mystery on the sensual level, and while it does not lead to the archetypal encounter, it is not unpleasurable and provides some respite from the sterility of the wasteland. As the concluding sentence of the story attests: "The tender pragmatisms of the flesh have poetries no enigma, human or divine, can diminish or demean - indeed it can only cause them, and then walk out" (ET, 239).

The setting of "The Cloud", the volume's closing story, is a warm, brilliant day in Central France in late May. The story recounts in detail the country picnic of eight English people: the hosts Paul and Bel, an expatriate, best-selling novelist and his wife; their two young daughters; Bel's younger sister Catherine, recently widowed and deeply disturbed; Peter, a BBC producer on a working visit; his trendy girlfriend Sally; and Peter's young son. The relationships between the characters are never fully explained; only through the shifting filter of consciousness in the narrative are the characters revealed in any depth - the narrator of "The Cloud" slips in and out of the minds of several of the characters.

As the story develops, it gradually becomes clear that Catherine is the focal point of the story. She has apparently lost her husband (perhaps by suicide?), and is in a state of deep depression and

withdrawal. During the course of the day Catherine makes various attempts - imaginative, discursive, and ultimately sexual - to break out of her isolation and depression. The unexpected and sinister cloud that looms suddenly out of a clear sky, a kind of "ebony tower" in nature, according to Huffaker (1980:130), suggests that she has failed.

Like Sarah Woodruff in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Catherine is set apart by her sensitivity, her grief, her perception of reality beyond any of the other characters. Her mixture of passion, imagination, and exacerbated sensibilities has led to a pathological depression that has brought her to the brink of self-destruction. As such, she is strikingly reminiscent of Sarah, and there can be little doubt that Fowles deliberately intended her to be a contemporary version of Sarah. While the day is filtered largely through her consciousness, she remains coolly remote, from both the reader and the other characters.

Like Fowles's other protagonists, Catherine is weakened by the flaws of pride, insecurity, and arrogance. She is a talented and intelligent woman, but is consumed by a despairing pessimism that fights against her attempts to break with the past. To Catherine, the world seems a hopeless wasteland. Its mediocrity and ugliness make her unwilling to build anything new in it. This brings up the question of existentialism once again: we are again in the land where no one ever goes beneath the level of the persona, where people meet only in masks. In this existence, actions have no meaning because man is going nowhere, having lost his sense of a past and finding himself without a hope for the future. Even the

narrative structure of "The Cloud", islands of thought breaking from present into past tense and back again, moving from person to person without continuity, echoes this theme in the story: the wasteland existence of man, unable to take the mythic journey because he has nothing to believe in.

The "sort of true" (ET, 275) story Catherine tells her niece Emma is an example of the kind of fantasy that Catherine has erected between herself and the ugly but true tragedy of her husband's death. Catherine's fable is about a princess who gets lost in the forest after wandering too far from where her family is picnicking. Her family looks for but cannot find her, so she is left behind. She concludes the story by saying that the princess is waiting for the return of the prince who has abandoned her and that they will be reunited soon.

The princess, of course, is Catherine. As she creates her story, she also creates her own future (in much the same way that Fielding does in "The Enigma"), finding a myth of which she can become a part. Catherine contemplates death: the future she has created for herself in the fairy-tale. Like the princess in the tale, she fears men and can find no one she can trust and love. The man she did love went away like Prince Florio (a character in her story). Both Catherine and the princess are brown and naked, and they wait in the forest for their lost lovers to return. Now he returns, "smiling, alive, almost fleshed; just as intelligent, beckoning. The other side. Peace, black peace" (ET, 286). In one last meaningless act before acquiescing to death, she drily seduces Peter who has come upon her on his walk away from the others. Feeling "erotic and self-defiled"

(ET, 287), the grotesque sexual coupling with Peter is an act of self-destruction; the relationship between love and death made flesh.

Afterward, Peter descends from the hills and, like the Apostle Peter for whom he is named, denies Catherine, claiming not to have seen her, as the Apostle Peter descended from the Mount of Olives and claimed not to have known Christ. Because he does not tell the others that he has been with Catherine, they leave her to her fate, assuming she has gone ahead. Catherine's absence is unexplained, but like the cloud in the clear sky, her suicide, the "subsequent ritual sacrifice", is suggested. Like the princess in the forest, fearing contact with others, she has, perhaps, chosen the ultimate retreat from life: "The princess calls, but there is no one, now, to hear her" (ET, 300).

The Ebony Tower is a collection of working sketches of characters who reappear in Fowles's novels. The major characters in the four short stories, David Williams, poor Koko, Marcus Fielding, and Catherine, resemble respectively Nicholas Urfe, Daniel Martin, Charles Smithson, and Miranda Grey. The rubric of protagonism in all of Fowles's fiction is the main character's struggle against emotional, moral, or artistic paralysis, The Fowlesian "fatal flaw" which can undermine the other aristos qualities in the individual. The broader canvas of the novel allows Fowles time to correct this flaw in his novels' protagonists. However, in The Ebony Tower, mainly negative portraits are collected of characters who become aware of their paralysis as a condition they cannot change or cure. Sharing the twin faults of deficient will and meager courage, these

characters make up Fowles's collection of human fossils who are unable to evolve even to rescue themselves from extinction.

McCormack (1972:172) quotes Fowles as having said the following: "My female characters tend to dominate the male. I see man as a kind of artifice, and woman as a kind of reality. The one is cold idea, the other is warm fact. Daedalus faces Venus, and Venus must win." The agent of sexual attraction in Fowles's works of fiction is one of those cool, intelligent, and comely young English females without which - it almost seems - no work by Fowles would be complete. In fact, "Poor Koko" is his only work of fiction to date in which such a character does not appear. This emphasises yet again the prominence of the male-female relationship in Fowles's fiction, even in this collection of short stories.

What separates The Ebony Tower from the majority of Fowles's novels is that the protagonists of these stories are less and less able to take the mythic journey of self-discovery because they are trapped in a contemporary wasteland which bewilders and confounds them. The title story describes a quester who inadvertently stumbles into the realm of myth, only to find that he cannot rise to the challenge and is therefore ejected from the mythic landscape. The other three stories all focus on enigmas (one is even titled "The Enigma") or mysteries of modern life that arise because "mystery" in the sacred sense no longer appears valid in modern man's existence. The medieval romance serves as a foil to the other stories, illustrating a quester's success achieved through his acceptance of the challenge of love, which in turn brings out the best in those he loves. It is needless to say that the quest determines the thematic structure of all

the short stories, even though the quest does not always involve a woman: the quest is one for self-knowledge.

Through the stories in The Ebony Tower, Fowles sounds a warning, showing us the despair inherent in contemporary life if we cannot take the journey out of the darkness toward wholeness and individuation.

CHAPTER 6

Daniel Martin - quest fulfilled?

John Fowles's thesis in his fiction is the desire of his protagonists to become questers: he places his protagonists in a "wasteland world and invites them to take the mythic journey, to accept the challenge of the quest which will allow them to approach wholeness" (Barnum, 1981:64). Within Fowles's framework, the measure of a protagonist's success on his journey is his ability to experience love. Daniel Martin is Fowles's first novel in which the quester achieves the happiness he seeks and the woman he loves.

"Whole sight; or all the rest is desolation" (DM, 7). With this maxim John Fowles begins Daniel Martin's "autobiography". Or ends it, since Dan remarks at the end of the novel that he "had found a last sentence for the novel he was never going to write" and then makes "that impossible last his own impossible first" (DM, 704). This framing of the novel with a single sentence makes it clear that the book emphasizes it; the rest of the novel gives this sentence meaning. The process whereby "whole sight" is achieved in psychological, philosophical, emotional, and artistic terms is, then, the substance of the work.

The novel is for the most part a serious and sober piece of mature introspection, and its power lies in its richness of thought as well as its strong commitment to humanism. Fowles poses a popular modern situation: a middle-aged man looks back on his life and wonders where he went wrong. Placed like The Magus in a modern

setting, it deals with a wide variety of contemporary concerns, and ranges geographically from California to Dorset and from Oxford to the Syrian desert. Etter (1985:111) feels that Daniel Martin "is a fusion of the issues which Fowles has displayed in his earlier work". She then mentions the following central concerns which are united in Daniel Martin: (i) the novel as a narrative form; (ii) emphasis on nature, art, and the primacy of feeling (especially as evidenced by women); (iii) the injustice of a biologically-determined class structure and the responsibility of the aristoi toward the hoi polloi; (iv) the importance of choice; (v) the necessity for morally valid action; (vi) the past and its influence on the present; (vii) and the shifting of moods, tenses and narrative voice. One has to agree with Kerry McSweeney (1978:31) who once suggested that Fowles is "more an unfolding than a growing artist; each new work is a recapitulation as well as an extension of what has gone before and contributes to a cumulative richness still too little understood . . ."

The basic plot of the novel is as follows: As a young man Dan spent a happy and successful three years at Oxford, then married and started writing plays; but his marriage collapsed and he took up a career as a Hollywood scriptwriter. When the book starts, he is summoned from Hollywood back to Oxford to the bedside of an estranged friend from his Oxford days, now dying of cancer. Contact having been re-established and peace restored, his friend commits suicide. The mainspring of the subsequent action is Dan's growing love for Jane, the dead man's widow. This love, first experienced in a brief fling when both were students, ripens in middle age into a force which enables Dan both to take stock of his own life (which will involve giving up screen biography in favour of

written autobiography) and to rescue Jane from the sterile self-absorption that threatens to engulf her.

The opening chapters present a series of scenes from Dan's life which show him as a man who has lost the perspective of "whole sight". He has replaced it with selfishness, which leads him into isolation and despair. At the outset, the problem facing Daniel Martin, as with all Fowles's questers, is stated in the epigraph to the novel: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of

morbid symptoms appears."¹ These morbid symptoms are evidenced in Daniel's failure to feel deeply and to be connected to a viable past; thus he lives in a superficial present out of which no future can emerge. The solution is stated in the already quoted first sentence of the novel, and the journey toward this solution is the mythic quest which this novel describes. The events of the novel mark Dan's education into a perspective which overcomes despair through affirming self in relationship. Dan rejects the objective watching of life from an outside perspective as well as the egoistic centering of life on self, to affirm the participation of self in the world.

Three of the major early scenes in the novel - the first two flashbacks and Anthony's illness and suicide - deal with death, illustrating how Dan missed his earlier chances to gain "whole sight". The opening scene of the book describes young Dan working in a field in Devon, watching rabbits killed by a mower and watching a German war plane fly overhead. At this point, Daniel is on the threshold of adulthood with "all life to follow" (DM, 16). The second death scene is Dan and Jane's discovery of the dead woman in the reeds at Oxford. The missed chance here comes when Jane, moved by the events of the day, asks Dan to sleep with her, admitting that she is in love with him. Both of them (but especially Jane) see this single sexual encounter between them as an acte gratuite², an act outside time, outside their normal behaviour. It is to be an exorcism of feelings they have never acknowledged. Their union is a surrender to the moment, seemingly without consequences

1. From Antonio Gramsci's Prison Notebooks, in Fowles, J. 1989. Daniel Martin. London: Picador.

and ramifications. In this one shared act, real as no other has been since, Daniel and Jane experience each other and know wholeness. Dan has already recognized that he loves her, but she, bound by her sense of responsibility to Anthony, refuses to act on their perceptions after this one time. The missed chance here may be primarily Jane's, but Dan does not question her decision, except to himself, and sees this as forcing him to marry Jane's sister Nell. However, the acte gratuite cannot simply be nullified and it has serious consequences for the characters involved: each is an exile from the reality of his/her feelings, living out a life that provides less and less meaning as it becomes further removed from love. Dan's marriage to Jane's sister Nell fails, his friendship with Anthony dissolves, and he is set on a path which will lead him even further from his "true" self.

The single sexual encounter is a frequent Fowlesian device, as we have seen in The Collector (Miranda's tragic, though unsuccessful seduction of Clegg), The Magus (Lily-Julie's capitulation to Nicholas before his "arrest" and trial), The French Lieutenant's Woman (the explosive ninety seconds shared between Charles and Sarah), "The Cloud" (the impersonal and dehumanising encounter between Peter and Catherine) and the "tender pragmatisms of flesh" in "The Enigma".

This past event also leads to Anthony's request to see Dan before he dies. Anthony perceives that Jane's sense of duty has alienated her from her truer, more intuitive self. As his death request, Anthony

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2. J.P. Sartre has expressly used the concept of an acte gratuite, first coined by André Gide, to illustrate what the moral choice is not. See Sartre (1948:48).

asks Dan to "help disinter the person Jane might have been from beneath the person she now is" (DM, 202). As a result of this request, Daniel Martin can be seen as a story of second chances, shaped by Dan's anguished perception of the choice he did not make when they were students. Anthony's request results in Dan's offer to Jane to go to Egypt with him. His re-encounter with Jane convinces him "that in some way his freedom had lain in what might have been between Jane and himself . . . or if not freedom, some vital fresh chance; at the least, some true consolation" (DM, 575). As he travels up the Nile River, in a "symbolic re-enactment of the return up the birth canal to the womb of civilization" (Barnum, 1981:73), he experiences a similar return to the womb of his own beginnings.

Relationships between characters fall into complex correspondences in Daniel Martin. The *ménage à trois*, as well as incest, is curious examples. In the first category, the consenting threesome, we find Dan-Miriam-Marjory and Jenny-Stephen-Kate. The classic triangle has many manifestations: Dan-Jane-Nell (as students); Dan-Jenny-Jane (of the fictional present); Jane-Anthony-David (Jane's Harvard "friend"); Caro-Barney-Barney's wife; Dan-Nell-Andrea (as well as his other adulteries). Incest is merely suggested in the novel, though it is a strong undercurrent. When Dan, Jane, Nell and Anthony were involved together at Oxford, Dan "felt an inherent poison in the situation . . . an almost Jacobean claustrophobia, incest" (DM, 106), as if by marrying one sister, he can, according to Freud's theory, have the other. There is a strong tint of incest in Dan's relationship with his daughter Caro. They toy with the idea, banter with innuendo, and at one point Dan says, "I half sensed what could drive fathers and daughters to incest . . . that need to purge the

spoken of the unspoken, to institute a simplicity in place of an obscuring complexity" (DM, 123). There is a strong suggestion of sexual transference in all the May-December relationships in the novel - in Caro's adultery with Barney, in Dan's affair with Jenny, and in Jane's relationship with her lover, which she realizes is not healthy: "He was Anthony's student originally . . . there's always been that Oedipal undertone" (DM, 204). Sex is on everyone's mind a great deal in the novel, and Dan describes many sex acts outright. Sex becomes another way in which people try to get "the feeling" right. The threesomes, adulteries, and implied incests are all situations of disequilibrium and are frequently generated by unhealthy motivations. Dan's affair with Jenny McNeil, for example, is time-defying. It is an evasion of his past, which in the context of their relationship is "like an infidelity, something one has no right to remember or refer to . . . like a past mistress" (DM, 387).

However, the relationship which this novel emphasizes is Dan's and Jane's. Their eventual marriage overcomes both Dan's selfishness and Jane's dogmatism by affirming human love and need. Just as the two lovers are the complements of each other - Katherine Tarbox describes Jane as Dan's "true mirror" (1988:103) - their love relationship is the complement of death. This strange relationship of mirror and object constitutes a definition of love that is only hinted at in Fowles's other books and that boldly speculates on the interrelationship of identities. When Dan finds Jane again he has the strong feeling that they have a consummated fate. Katherine Tarbox (1988:102) says that "Dan begins to get the right feeling when he finds Jane again". He feels a sense of an almost biological bonding

in their union, as if once mated they will belong to each other forever.

Like Sarah Woodruff in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Jane is a shadowy figure about whom Fowles gives very little objective information. The reader perceives dimly that she is haggard and defeated. Darkeyed, cryptic, smiling faintly, she possesses the sibylline, gnostic quality that marks the Fowles heroine and signals her capacity for a wholeness of vision unavailable to the hero. She is the woman whose authenticity is seen to increase with her maturity. Loveday (1985:123) also perceives that Jane exhibits two principal characteristics in the book: one positive and one negative. The positive side, represented in public terms by her deeply felt political idealism and in private terms by her instinctive and almost magnetic sense of right feeling, is fairly familiar to the Fowles reader: like Alison in The Magus and Sarah in The French Lieutenant's Woman, she is to act as guide and muse for her lover, and to be the princesse lointaine for whom he strives. However, the negative side - her obsessive fear of freedom - is equally strongly developed. This fear becomes evident in what might be called her pre-marital adultery which deliberately fobs off the right man so as to leave the field clear for the wrong one. It can also be seen in her subsequent decision to reveal her act to Anthony, thus ensuring that her marriage will be a thorough-going penance; in her flight in to the Catholic church with its conscious "sacrificium intellectus" - all these are in effect forms of distraction behaviour. Daniel Martin, on the one hand, is the progressive revelation of a buried aspect of Jane - an aspect she spinsterishly lacks the courage to face. Dan's task as romantic hero is to uncover this aspect, and to bring Jane to see it -

to release the damsel from the prison of herself. She has the right potential to experience freedom.

The young Jane has "a sort of pensive inwardness" (DM, 60); Daniel envies "her young womanhood, which he felt allowed her both a more natural and a more mature attitude" (DM, 61). Jane is

someone whose spirit remained not quite like that of any other woman he [Dan] had ever known; that there are some people one can't dismiss, place, reify . . . who set riddles one ignores at one's cost; who, like nature itself, are catalytic, inherently and unconsciously dissolvent of time and all the naturalist tries to put between himself and his total reality (DM, 413).

Here Daniel describes Jane in her capacity as anima, her ability to unlock the riddle of his unconscious as a catalytic force in his psyche, awakening the buried part within him that, once reborn, will aid him on his journey toward individuation. For Dan, Jane's presence brings the wheel to a "full circle" (DM, 562) and satisfies a deep need for "recurrent structure in both real and imagined events; indeed, married the real and imagined; justified both" (DM, 396). Given the obscurity of the external reference here, what the heroine justifies in effect is the hero as real and imagined self. In this contemporary formulation of the traditional mediating role of the female, woman becomes less mediation than origin.

Dan and Jane's love affirms life and unity. What makes their relationship such a good image for Fowles's philosophy is that it recognizes both the needs of self and the basic unity of the world, here of themselves. Fowles shows Dan moving from the perspective of isolation and helpless fear that feelings of isolation breed, to an affirmation of life in choosing to perceive the world wholly. With perception comes freedom, self-knowledge, and responsibility, but not

guilt or "existential nausea". Love and commitment become appropriate and necessary responses to what is otherwise an empty and unintelligible existence. The book is not an allegory; Dan and Jane's marriage is not the synthesis of a dialectic between selfishness and dogmatism, but a human relationship. In realizing that he wants to live with Jane, Dan feels "a liberation from lies"; he discovers who he is and what he wants. Behind Dan and Jane's differences lies an essential unity. In this realization of need and relationship Dan feels free. Part of true freedom is breaking out of isolation and into unity, here with another person. To Dan, Jane is "like an old enigma in his life, and she had to be solved; tamed and transcribed" (DM, 430). Only as he moves increasingly to self-knowledge does he learn to value the mystery inherent in Jane.

Jenny McNeil is Jane in embryo: even her name suggests the link. Jenny is, however, the ideal rather than the real. She forces Daniel to live the present: "The past becomes like an infidelity, something one has no right to remember or refer to" (DM, 575). Carol Barnum (1981:67) describes Jenny as "a representative of today's values" who lives predominantly in the world of the present since she has no connection with a viable past.

For Dan the whole process of getting re-acquainted with Jane is equally a re-evaluation of and coming to terms with his past. With Jane he feels able to remember and finally accept his past, an important aspect of self-definition and morally valid behaviour. At Palmyra, Dan tells Jane, "What I need from you is that something inside you, between us, that makes half-living, half-loving . . . impossible" (DM, 567). In his revelation to her, he describes Jane

as his missing or buried half, the feeling side within him that is his anima, and his resurrection of her to her own feelings in turn resurrects himself.

At Palmyra, without the interfering presence of other tourists, Dan and Jane feel driven in upon each other. The last act of the hesitant shadow-play they have been conducting with each other during the course of the trip, is precipitated by external circumstance. In the little primitive inn at the foot of the Krak des Chevaliers where they are to spend the night, Jane is forced to abandon her room because the fumes of the paraffin stove are asphyxiating and it is too cold to sleep without heat. In a gesture of wry resignation, she concludes that she is too old to make a fuss about such matters, and so she accepts Dan's invitation to sleep in his room, in his bed. Thus, in this strange and forbidding setting, between rough, clammy sheets, they renew the physical intimacy they shared just once, two and a half decades before:

It seemed to him, as they let sexual feeling dominate the next few minutes, that someone else was aroused, had taken over her body. It was not that she remained passive; the arms did rise and the hands caressed in return; but that in some paradoxical way made it seem a ritual, a concession to physical convention. For once in his life he would have liked his partner to talk, to know what she felt. He had pushed back the bedclothes and his own eyes, now accustomed to the dark, kept searching her face for answers; and even when they were joined failed to get them. Her body exited him more than he expected - in the dim light from the fire it still looked, was young: slender-armed, small-breasted . . . and that side of it almost came as a last secret she had kept, an added unfairness.

Yet it did not take place as he had dreamed, did not reach that non-physical climax he wanted . . . She had been wiser in not expecting it . . . (DM, 599).

Heterosexual coitus necessarily involves the physical joining of male animal and female animal. An opposite view of sexual union takes it as a mystical or metaphysical occasion, something Dan comes close to in his hope of finding a "non-physical climax" in which he will quite literally embrace the past. What I would take to be the more characteristic province of the novel in the representation of the erotic is the large middle ground between these two extremes. Daniel Martin takes cognizance of both animal fact and metaphysical aspiration, but his imagination of this sexual moment is the perception of one separate person trying to fathom another across the chasm of different pasts, different fears and fantasies, different moral characters. Holding Jane in the dark as their bodies wait for sleep, Dan begins to feel that somehow now at least they know each other, "that this innocent, silent nakedness was a nearer, deeper thing than the love-making; that they were more coupled thus" (DM, 600-601). Alter (1981:77) describes this as the ultimate "moment of fulfilment" in the novel.

In conclusion one has to agree with Loveday (1985:122) that men do not come out of the book well. The central chapter of the novel is entitled "Hollow Men"; Anthony, before his convenient suicide, reveals himself to be an archetypal Fowlesian classifier³; Barney is a "morbid symptom" (to borrow a phrase from Gramsci's epigraph) if ever there was one; Dan himself, linked in many ways with Barney⁴, often seems little better.

3. See (DM, 80).

4. They shared a house at Oxford; both are connected with visual media; both are unsuccessfully married and both are having affaires with girls

Conversely, women are very favourably represented in the book. One has to take note of the novelty and importance of Jenny's first-hand contributions to the narrative; having bullied Dan into getting a grip on himself and writing a book, she resolves that she "just won't be only something in [his] script" (DM, 495) and walks out of the book. Thereafter Jane, associated throughout the book with the leitmotif of "right feeling", takes over the tasks of guiding Dan both into literary creation and into self-knowledge.

Daniel Martin is, then, a novel of affirmation: Daniel and Jane's relationship affirms life and unity, and their choice of "whole sight". In addition, as Huffaker (1980:38) points out, Daniel "reconciles several long-standing alienations: from nature, . . . from his past, from his Englishness, and from artistic freedom". The necessity for individual choice is affirmed; for the individual who possesses self-knowledge, guilt or "existential nausea" are not the only authentic options. Fowles achieves a deep level of human insight by focusing on a large region of experience which we all recognize. He accepts and affirms, despite his moments of deep-felt terror, the unexpected joys as well as the terrible vicissitudes of everyday life.

Daniel Martin ends with a reference to the same sentence that introduces the theme of the quest and comprises the thesis of Fowles's fiction: "Whole sight; or all the rest is desolation" (DM, 7). Thus, the quest comprises a circle, ending where it begins and yet never ending. The message was there from the start, but without the journey it held no meaning for Daniel. And now that he has journeyed, he does not stop with the meaning but moves to deeper

young enough to be their daughters; and both are planning to get out of the rat-race and write their autobiographies.

experience - beyond desolation - with love as the signpost to his future and the novel, in its completion, as the demonstrable product of his growth. Daniel has found his ideal woman; through her he has gained self-knowledge and freedom; by going back to his roots (involving the domain-theme) he has become a member of the elected Few. The quest-theme is thus central and determines the position and the function of the other three major themes in this novel.

CHAPTER 7

Mantissa - Shavian battle of sexual insult and strategy

Mantissa is the most teasing, self-consciously fictive of Fowles's novels to date. The novel reveals a side of Fowles that we only get a glimpse of in his earlier novels: a spirit of exuberant playfulness and a well-developed sense of comedy. The meaning of the novel sometimes seems as obscure as the fog from which Miles Green awakens. An autonomous, self-contained game, whose action takes place inside the putative author's own head, and which consists almost entirely of dialogue between a writer and his Muse¹, it seems to have no centre of interest beyond itself. The plot is constantly being rewritten before the reader's eyes by the characters themselves, who change both shape and identity whenever the need arises. The only thing that is sure is that the action (if indeed action can be said to take place inside a brain) represents the monumental struggle between the author and his protean Muse, whose actual existence is highly suspect.

Dispensing with the traditional elements of realistic narration, Mantissa is no more than a record of its author's own consciousness: "another story about a writer writing a story! Another regressus ad infinitum!"² John Barth might well grumble. Unlike Fowles's previous novels, with the significant exception of The Collector,

1. "The nine Muses (Cleio, Euterpe, Thaleia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia, Urania, and Calliope) were said to be the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory). Their origin as mythological figures is obscure and they were little worshipped, though often invoked. They may owe their prominence largely to poets, who identified them as the sources of their inspiration" (Tripp, 1988:385).

Mantissa is spatially circumscribed. In this novel there is no protagonist who travels symbolically from place to place in search of himself; instead, in *Miles Green*, Fowles presents his most static and his most unsympathetic protagonist since Frederick Clegg. Miles Green is a writer who, in an apparent moment of amnesia, engages with the externalised products of his own imagination. The multi-layered irony is clear: in Fowles's novel, his protagonist realises the imaginative stimuli which are apparently present in the process of creation itself. The central reified figure is Erato, the muse of love poetry. The muse appears in various forms, sometimes established by the writer and sometimes by herself. The entire novel, then, revolves around the encounter between the muse made flesh (who continually denies or is denied her own reality) and the writer:

I only seem real [says the muse] because it is your nauseating notion that the actually totally unreal character I'm supposed to be impersonating should do so. In fact a real me in this situation would avoid all reference to the matter, especially as she would never have got herself into the situation in the first place. If she had any choice. Which she doesn't. As she isn't real . . . (M, 86).

Fowles insists that artistic inspiration is intimately related to sex: "My imagination is highly erotic," said Fowles while busy writing *Mantissa*; "I think about almost everything in terms of erotic situations" (Stolley, 1970:58).³ Mantissa tries to parody this very

2. Barth (1969:117).

3. This whole concept can be linked with Roland Barthes's view that "The text you [the novelist] write must prove to me [the reader] *that it desires me*. This proof exists: it is writing. Writing is: the science of the various blisses of language, its Kama Sutra (this science has but one treatise: writing itself)" (1975:6). He further states that "The pleasure of the text is not the pleasure of the corporeal striptease or of narrative suspense . . . : the entire excitement takes place in the *hope* of seeing the sexual organ (schoolboy's dream) or in knowing the end of the story

obsession: Miles is berated for being, among other things, a macho chauvinist indulging in diseased, sexist fantasies, "the original pig" (M, 56). The title of the novel implies a female praying mantis devouring its own mate, Erato's revenge on a representative male novelist for his part in the literary conspiracy that has reduced her sex to a fantasy troupe. Miles attempts to justify his treatment of women by protesting "the sex was just a metaphor, for heaven's sake" (M, 115). Gotts (1985:85) feels that "in a modern novel erotic fantasy serves a didactic purpose" but he still regards the opening chapter of Mantissa as "a remarkable piece of soft pornography". "The curse of fiction" is "all those boring stretches between the sexy bits" (M, 159), Miles concludes, but the irony is double edged, for it is the opening chapter's "sexy bits" that are the novel's triumph. Poole (1982:27) even went as far as to remark that Fowles is not "beyond exploiting his theme for the kind of frisson associated with 'upper thigh' bestsellerdom".

It is not surprising to find, then, that at the centre of each Fowles novel is sexual conflict, normally galvanized by sexual fantasies.⁴ Following the thesis of man "as a kind of artifice" and women "as a kind of reality"⁵, plot turns on a selfish man's ritualistic rite of passage, an existential quest for authenticity largely aided by an enigmatic and erotic woman. Thus woman functions symbolically as initiator of a more enlightened consciousness in man. In Mantissa, however, woman acts as object of quest for the writer himself: she

(novelistic satisfaction). Paradoxically (since it is mass-consumed), this is . . . [an] intellectual pleasure" (1975:10).

4. I owe this point to Gotts (1985:84).

5. Fowles (1977:146).

is Erato, the "lovely" muse. As Malcolm Bradbury puts it, "Woman is Story itself" (1982:24).

Writing, as the object of the writer's quest, becomes a metaphor for the quest motif in this novel. This can be linked with Fowles's playful style of writing in Mantissa: he is deliberately trying to seduce the reader into accepting everything he/she reads at face-value. Then he suddenly shocks the reader back to "reality" only to find later that he/she has been seduced once more. It is a continuous process right up to the end of the novel.

In Mantissa Fowles was not content merely to celebrate the role of woman as a mysterious and provocative Other. Nor did he wish to portray her simply as a valued functionary in the larger spectacle of male discovery and self-possession. Opening himself fully to her ambiguous presence, Fowles sought in Mantissa to internalize the authority of woman. Only thus could he accord her an integral and equally creative role in the (now) self-conscious task of removing all that stands between artist and his total reality. The role of women, then, in Fowles's fiction is inseparably linked to the abiding sense of mystery that is "the driving force at the heart of [his] creation" (Le Bouille, 1981:204).

The book begins with an extremely vivid account of a mind's gradual awakening to consciousness, as though of one just coming around after heavy sedation. The floating sensation, the "murmured sounds and peripheral shadows" that focus to "voices" and "faces", the swimming disorientation of a mind conscious but "bereft of pronoun" and "bereft of time" - the condition is reported with lucidity and conviction. This mind is forced to accept that, "far

from augustly floating", it is attached to a body, which is lying in bed. Two women gazing down disturb the pleasurable sense of nothingness, an intrusive reality demanding response. These figures, it would seem, are the patient's wife and a young doctor; and the patient, we are told, is suffering from amnesia, under observation in the private room of a hospital. The tired nervous wife, thwarted in her efforts "to establish ownership," leaves him in the "good hands" of the doctor, who wants to start "preliminary treatment" (M, 14).

These opening six pages in which the above-mentioned takes place, successfully arouse our curiosity. With the departure of the wife from this relatively realistic world, the narrative shifts abruptly into a different key: that of the bizarre, menacing, and increasingly erotic. Our wonder is teased by the discovery that the patient is naked - and with the doctor's frankness of "I wear nothing under this" (M, 15) - that he is lying in a tantalizingly unconventional room. The remaining pages of the chapter are a lively sequence of startling, surrealistic eroticism: Miles discovers that he is a virtual prisoner of the Central and at the evident mercy of its chief "neurologist", the proleptically named Dr. Delfie, and of her black assistant, Nurse Cory. Together the two women perform intensive sexual therapy on the outraged Miles, replete with scrotal massages and oral stimulation, in an apparent effort to restore the "broken circuit" of his memory. The alert reader has meanwhile already begun to suspect the metafictional truth behind this preposterous premise - that the novel's fantastic plot and characters are themselves the products of Miles' feverish and deluded brain. Or are they?

As Dr. Delfie, Erato has all the classic elements of the Fowlesian female: she is "distant" (M, 15), enigmatic and provides a "test" (M, 18). She is the parody of the female magus teaching the male the limits of masculinity: as she later says,

I happen to be a female archetype with an archetypically good sense, developed over several millennia, of deeper values For all your only too palpable faults and inadequacies, I did have some faint hope that you might one day with my help grasp that the very least your selfish, arrogant and monotonously animal sex owes mine for all its past . . . Cruelties, is a little affection when we ask for it (M, 139).

In part two Dr. Delfie undergoes an abrupt and radical metamorphosis. After a brief but volatile appearance as a feminist rock star, she finally divulges her real identity. She is in fact Erato, a daughter of Mnemosyne; and her torture of Miles is actually a form of retributive justice, born of her discontent at being always relegated to a minor role in the creative process.⁶ The remaining sections of the book comprise a more or less continuous debate, punctuated by moments of erotic violence, in which the two antagonists ventilate the dominant critical issues of the day: the fate of the author, the role of the imagination, the value of structuralism, and, of course, the suppression of women. In the novel's concluding segment Miles' incorrigible egoism stands fully revealed - one is tempted to say fully "satirized". Undergoing a physical transformation of his own, he acquires the beard, horns, and cloven

6. The relationship between the real and the fictional is undoubtedly one of the most crucial tensions present in Fowles's fiction. The distinction between fiction and reality is extremely blurred in this novel. Erato lives (and has lived) beyond the confines of Mantissa: her mythological origin is distinct from Fowles's work. In addition, she maintains that she provided the inspiration for Shakespeare, Milton, Rochester, Shelley, H.G. Wells, and T.S. Eliot. Her association with these historical figures suggests that she is as real as they are/were: Fowles is

hoofs that brand him for the chauvenist he has inwardly been: the goat can be seen as a sexual symbol representing lust.

Fowles generates ironies by revealing inconsistencies in the role a character is playing at any given moment and his or her true feelings. Miles, for example, professes great moral indignation at being raped by his medical attendants, while he is obviously enjoying himself very much. Later, he appears to defend his manhood staunchly against Erato's belittling, even though in the role of shrew she seems to be the wish fulfillment of his female domination fantasy of part I. Fowles creates a strong tension between Miles' wish to be "bereft of pronoun", to be, like Leopold Bloom in "Circe", in charge of female authority figures, and his wish to protect himself from "castration". His chagrin at being unmanned is counterpointed by his flight from manhood in the amnesia fantasy. One has to agree with Julie-Anne Etter (1985:134) when she makes the following statement: "In his protagonist [Miles Green], Fowles has created a figure who embodies the masculine follies; as Miles himself perceives, the male 'I' is characterised by a "sense of belowness, impotence, foolishness" (M, 10). The picture of the male that comes across is once again a negative one - as one has come to expect of Fowles. Miles Green is quite patently a self-parody, an erotically obsessed fantasist for whom writing is sublimated sex, and sex itself a fiction. Green is shown trapped within his own text, an anxious and incompetent novelist caught in the limits of his own sexual fantasies, endlessly revising them for the pure indulgence of going through their possible permutations. What

challenging the fiction-reality dichotomy. He uses these classical allusions in his fiction in order to do so.

happens in the book is number twenty-nine of an endless series of "variations" (M, 162) through which Green manipulates his fantasy idea of the ideal woman and is himself manipulated by it. The situation reiterates in parody form the whole Fowles repertoire in miniature, and quite self-consciously. It is The Collector revisited with Erato accusing Miles of being himself, as male novelist, a necrophiliac collector "of a series of wretched imaginary women" (M, 94): "You just collect and mummify them. Lock them up in a cellar and gloat over them, like Bluebeard" (M, 95).

In contrast, Erato represents the eternal Fowlesian woman. The epigraph to part I, which Fowles borrows from Lempriere, describes the muses as "generally represented as young, beautiful, modest virgins . . . fond of solitude, [who] commonly appeared in a different attire, according to the arts and sciences over which they presided" (M, 7). The different and quite contradictory personae which Alison and Sarah assume for their own purposes in The Magus and The French Lieutenant's Woman respectively are here taken to their extremes: Erato literally metamorphoses, assuming the roles of psycho-therapist, nurse, punk rocker, and classical muse, either at the behest of Miles or seemingly at will.

These quite extraordinary forms which Erato assumes are an integral part of Fowles's comic spirit. The professional veneer of Dr. A. Delfie (the pun intended is obvious) is emphasised by the white coat she wears, but the suggestion of virginal purity conveyed by the colour white is soon dispelled by her methods of treatment. Nurse Cory is her alter ego. Both these women have been "created" by Miles and appear to fulfil perennial male fantasies.

It is precisely this sexist manipulation of the female characters which enrages Erato, who appears in her next manifestation as a late twentieth-century punk rocker. With "maenadic fury", she dispels Dr. Delfie and Nurse Cory, "leaving nothing but a flutter of falling white typescript" (M, 52). Her next transformation is no less dramatic:

Her right hand begins to pick at a scale, a remote one, the Lydian mode. The transition is melting rather than instantaneous, yet extraordinary. The hair starts to soften and lengthen, to suffuse with colour; the hideous make-up drains from the face, the colour from the clothes, and the very clothes themselves begin to dissolve and modulate into a tunic of pure white samite Round her forehead appears a small chaplet of pinkish-cream rosebuds among myrtle-leaves; and the guitar has become a nine-stringed lyre She lets the lyre fall; and lets him stare, openmouthed, at unmistakable and immemorial divinity (M, 58-9).

The change in her appearance signals an altered perception. Erato undergoes a metamorphoses from militant punk to immortal vision and it is in this classical guise that she remains for most of the encounter.

Erato, one notices, is very ambivalent about her femininity. On one hand, she wants to be the virginal and gossamer fantasy pictured by Lemprière; but her actions seem to distinguish her more, as Miles points out, as "a by-blow of the randiest old goat in all theology" (M, 114). Her relationship with Miles is also dominated by ambivalence. She professes to want fair play, and open honesty; yet she brutalizes him in both word and deed, and her "honest" comments - she describes him as a bloody pedant, a typical capitalist sexist parasite, and a degenerate tenth-rate hack during the course of the novel - are perhaps less than constructive.

Superficially, it might seem that Fowles was intent only on offering his readers a comic study in sexual contrasts. In reality, the issues raised by the novel far exceed the amusing battle of the sexes in which Miles and Erato are ostensibly engaged.

The contention between Miles and Erato centres around the crucial question of Erato's, or imagination's contemporary role in the creative process. Their mighty battles result mostly from their failure to interpret each other's irony correctly. They become lost in a miasma of words as they play off each other's supposed moods and masks. Each picks up and drops roles as easily as he and she put on and take off clothes, and they play an eternal, unresolvable game of catch-up. Their relationship is frankly sexual and frequently tense, suggesting too, as Fowles would have it, the creative process. The most obsessive repetitive action in the novel is the creation of fiction during some kind of sexual engagement. The sexual emphasis is a metaphor for the creative process, procreation a metaphor for creativity. Just as the muse couples with various lovers, creating works of art, so letters couple to create words, and words combine to form sentences.

Central to Mantissa's effect is that it not only uses the repertoire of sexual writing; it also exploits links between sexuality and writing. Crucially, it shows how men construct fantasies of women and obtain power through language, forms of discourse, and systems of representation. Katherine Tarbox (1987:127) describes Mantissa as "a graphic illustration of the clinical relationship of writing to the writer's libido". She feels that the blatant sexual element serves to

define the origin of the literary work. One can safely assume then that Fowles is writing a novel about how a novel is written.

All the elements of Fowles's sexual imagination that we might anticipate can be found in *Mantissa*: the ménage à trois; the man subjected to two powerful women; the room cut off from the rest of the world; the archetypal enigmatic female encountering the uncertain male. At the end of the novel, Green is already planning his "next revision" (M, 180), mentally rehearsing the possible ways in which he might use the image of his ideal women and, in the process, revealing how that very activity relates to a notion of male power:

Polynesian, Irish, Venezuelen, Lebanese, Balinese, Indian, Italian, Russian and various points between; shy, passionate, pert, cool; dressed and undressed, tamed and wild, chased and chasing; teasing, in tears, toying, tempestuous . . . a whole United Nations of female eyes, mouths, breasts, legs, arms, loins, bottoms prettily slink and kaleidoscopically tumble through, or past, the windows of his mind; but, alas, like the images in the fluttered pages of some magazine; or like snowflakes, frozen because unrealizable.

The maddening thing, of course, is that they all lie, waiting to spring or be sprung into charming life and labile reality, inside the body his right arm loosely holds . . . (M, 181-2).

Erato is the creature of Miles' imagination and the main aim of the novel is to expose how women are constructed as sexual according to male demands through language. Bruce Woodcock (1984:153) feels that "Language as the 'symbolic order' makes women subject to, and the subject of, the phallic text - all very, and appropriately, Lacanian."⁷

7. Lacan's view is that within the process of language, "woman is constructed as an absolute category (excluded and elevated at one and the

As an allegorical narrative of the process of writing fiction, Mantissa makes visible the interrelated elements of inscription and erasure that invariably constitute the act of writing. The value of Erato to Miles Green (and to Fowles) lies precisely in her challenge to his absolute authority as maker of the text. In Mantissa it is the muse as much as the author who writes the story, weaves the text. By this "reversal of normal narrative", Erato usurps Miles' authority as maker and exposes him anew to the radical indeterminacy of art to what Haegert (1986:179) calls "the wild zone underlying aesthetic mastery". This is the very complaint that Erato makes against Miles and that, arguably, Fowles levels against himself: First, that he has "ignored" the "talents" of his heroine by restricting her to an ancillary role - directing and arranging the activities of a mediocre hero - and second, that he has underestimated the mystery and waywardness, the really colossal subversiveness, of his own creative imagination.

Fowles's provisional solution to these conflicts in Mantissa is nothing less than remarkable and endearing. Rather than embody his "female principle" in yet another mortal woman - thus risking its further reification and reduction - he resituated it in the androgynous depths of his own imagination. In this way he avoided portraying his heroine as a catalyst, a function, an agent, or a muse - a mere "mantissa" in the life of the hero.⁸ Erato's ultimate purpose in the

same time), a category which serves to guarantee that unity [of the subject] on the side of the man. The man places the woman at the basis of his fantasy, or constitutes fantasy through the woman". It is the "construction of woman as a category within language" that both differentiates and validates male prerogatives (Mitchell and Rose, 1982:47).

8. Only a few pages from the end of Mantissa. Fowles provides the definition of the term "mantissa" in a footnote: "An addition of

work is, then, to reaffirm the sovereign power and subversive influence of Fowles's earlier heroines. In their name she performs an intertextual return of the repressed, bringing to the surface all the liabilities and debts that Fowles's fictional procedures may have unconsciously incurred. Fowles sought to re-establish his heroine as the first principle and matrix of his art and he was successful in his attempt to do so in Mantissa.

CHAPTER 8

A Maggot - a novel of education

Initially, it seems as if A Maggot will be like the medieval romances that Fowles admires and that the reader will accompany the hero on a quest. It begins appropriately: a mysterious nobleman, a perilous journey, a clandestine rendezvous. Then, having seduced the reader¹ into accompanying him into this mystic realm, Fowles abruptly breaks the illusion. His usual protagonist, the disaffected young man, disappears; his servant is found hanged; the others scatter, and the narration is resumed by "the rasping voice of a dyspeptic lawyer, determined to use the logical tools of the Age of Reason to untangle this Romantic mess" (Gardner, 1987:219). Instead of the tryst we have been expecting, we get a trial - or at least a series of unpleasant cross-examinations, interspersed with historical chronicles from The Gentleman's Magazine of 1736.

As do his earlier works, A Maggot centres around a conflict between the masculine and the feminine, or Logos and Eros. As in earlier novels and short stories, A Maggot uses the heroine to represent feeling and the male protagonist to represent thinking; the author manipulates the reader into trying to achieve a balance between these two sets of values or modes of perception.

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1. As we have seen in Chapter 7, this whole idea of the reader being seduced by the novelist is also an integral part of Mantissa. This can be linked with Barthes's idea that "So-called 'erotic books' . . . represent not so much the erotic scene than the expectation of it, the preparation for it, its ascent; that is what makes them exciting . . ." (1975:58). Fowles is a master in the creation of this expectation, in preparing the reader for the pleasures that are still to come.

A Maggot is a variation on Fowles's preferred genre - Gardner (1987:221) calls it "the novel of education" - with one notable difference: the young man who is being educated, Fowles's usual protagonist, disappears fifty pages into the novel. Who, then, is being educated and what does (s)he learn?

Analysed thematically, the central mystery of this novel, a character who simply walks out in the middle of the story, is itself a variation on a plot and theme that Fowles introduced in The Ebony Tower. A Maggot, like "The Enigma", presents the reader with a mystery that cannot be solved by deduction. In "The Enigma", however, Fowles's sensitive, imaginative young heroine puts the clues together for the reader; in A Maggot, it is up to the reader to put the clues together for himself.

Structurally, A Maggot is to the eighteenth-century novel what The French Lieutenant's Woman was to the Victorian: a skilful recreation of the novel of an earlier age that undercuts the formal expectations it sets up, and in doing so comments on the values of both that time and our own.

A Maggot opens with a journey through the middle of a dark wood, emblematic of the spiritual journey that Fowles's protagonist is on. Like all Fowles's heroes before him, this young man feels defined by external forces - class, family expectations, birth order - and wants to break free:

I am born with a fixed destiny . . . my father is an old fool; and hath given birth to another, that is my older brother. I am . . . offered a place in history, and I am not forgiven for refusing to play it . . . I have no liberty, Lacy, unless I steal it first (AM, 37-38).

The protagonist (Bartholomew), a young lord who remains nameless up to the end of the novel, is on a quest of which the true nature is secret. To his four companions he lies about the purpose of the trip, or tells fragments of the truth. He prepares individual scripts tailored to the character and interests of each player. All the versions he creates are differently clad metaphors for the essential story, that of his journeying toward a meeting with an important woman.

He tells Jones a story that would fit his alphabet: that he is going to curry favour with a rich aunt. He flatters Claiborne's vanity by saying he will make her famous for her part in a wild orgy. To Lacy, the actor he has hired to play the role of his uncle, he at first claims that he is pursuing a girl he intends to marry against the wishes of his father and hers. Tarbox (1988:150) describes it as "a Romeo-and-Juliet story", one Lacy would be accustomed to playing and that would appeal to his tender heart. It has the stock characters and situations of typical melodrama: star-crossed lovers, angry parents, surreptitious communication, the go-between maid, intercepted letters, and missed meetings. Finally he admits to Lacy that the tryst he anticipates for the next day is not a romantic one. Nevertheless, he insists, "I go to meet one I desire to know, and respect, as much as I would a bride - or my Muse indeed, were I a poet" (AM, 36). He hopes somehow from the rendezvous in the cave to gain his liberty; more than that he will not say.

Bartholomew places Rebecca in the centre of this labyrinth of conflicting stories. While the other players only have to be concerned with their own roles, Rebecca must fit herself into the others' plots by pretending to be either a maid for Bartholomew's

intended, with whom he is eloping, or a maid for the Bideford aunt. In addition, she must uphold the terms of her own plot, which Bartholomew matched with her alphabet. She believes she is to cure him of impotence through voyeurism with his servant and, to ensure the outcome, they would travel to curative waters with a famous doctor (Lacy).

So far, this young man seems spiritually identical to Fowles's earlier protagonists - Nicholas in The Magus, Charles in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Dan in Daniel Martin - emotionally immature men whose psychological development is inspired by desire for a passionate, alluring, mysterious woman. In the previous novels, the hero is granted a tryst with the heroine early in the novel, only to lose the object of his desire (Nicholas/Alison in The Magus, Charles/Sarah in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Dan/Jane in Daniel Martin). He spends the remainder of the novel striving to grow worthy of her in order to regain her love. This novel breaks this pattern. The young lord disappears some fifty pages into A Maggot. The reader does not see him gaining self-knowledge and individuation (despite the fact that this probably does happen as a result of his experiences). The reader sees how Fanny/Rebecca gains existential meaning and how she changes as a result of what happened to her.

Fowles habitually uses twin sisters (or two women) - June/Julie in The Magus, Sarah/Ernestina in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Erato/Nurse Corey in Mantissa - to play out meta-theatrically the warring desires of the godgame's victim. In A Maggot Fowles employs the twin brothers Dick and Bartholomew, to that end.

Bartholomew is chaste, "insusceptible to the temptations of flesh" (AM, 182), and Dick is lust incarnate. They engage in an unusual sexual threesome (another familiar aspect of the Fowlesian godgame) with Rebecca/Fanny, the young prostitute whom he pays to accompany him on his journey. This sexual partnership is founded on voyeurism, as Rebecca says,

There was such closeness between them they needed no words, they were as one person, tho' two in body. I might almost believe his Lordship did enjoy me, despite he would not bear my touch, yet through Dick's enjoyment (AM, 311).

When Ayscough points out this seeming contradiction to Bartholomew's noble mission - "Did he not keep you in sin and lechery?" - she replies, "That I should see it better" (AM, 325). Bartholomew forces her to the limits of depravity by making her couple with the "dog" when she clearly desires the master, who only watches and viciously berates her performance. He assures her that her fall will be total and obvious. He performs the final humiliation when he makes her stand naked before him and denounce herself.

The young lord in A Maggot thus supposedly has a physical as well as a spiritual ailment. Carnal knowledge of Fanny/Rebecca is achieved only by proxy; he watches as his deaf-mute servant, Dick, performs the act. He is unable to feel desire. One has to agree with Gardner (1987:229) who feels that Bartholomew, like the male protagonists of Fowles's previous novels and short stories, "suffers from a split between the masculine and feminine sides of himself, between Logos and Eros, reason and feeling". However, Fowles has never made the split so total; only in myths and fairy tales are characters so one-sided:

There seems something demonic in that face . . . demonic not in its anger or emotion, but in its coldness, its indifference to this female thing before him. It speaks of a hitherto hidden trait in his character: a sadism before Sade . . . Had one to represent in a face the very antithesis of human feeling, it is here, and frighteningly so (AM, 43).

Plainly the young lord represents Reason; he is split off from the physical side of himself, which is represented by his aptly named "servant", Dick, who has:

a regular, well-proportioned face, which altogether with his evident agility, an innate athleticism and strength, adds an incongruous touch of the classical . . . to one of lowly-born origins and . . . his strangest feature are his eyes, that are of a vacant blue, almost as if he were blind, though it is clear he is not (AM, 7).

Dick's character is the mirror image of the young lord's. It is no surprise when we learn later in the novel that they were

like to twins, even born on the same day . . . two men . . . yet of one soul. What one lacked, the other had, as it is with man and woman, tho' both were men (AM, 304-305).

The flatness of these two characters and the mythic overtones suggest to the reader that he is in the world of the romance. The hero is on a quest; he is going to meet a mysterious woman; he is wounded, but hopes to be cured.

The sole purpose of the young lord in A Maggot is to put in an appearance and then disappear; figuring out the significance of that act is left to the reader. The characters offer various solutions to the mystery: Jones, the Welshman, thinks he has gone to the devil, Ayscough² rationalises that he must have killed himself, Rebecca claims that she has seen him in the spirit. Fowles offers yet another

2. He suffers from the same character flaws as the hero. What better representative could there be of the Logos personality than a lawyer?

alternative: the possibility that the protagonist disappeared in the "maggot-shaped" spaceship into the future, and that the events in the cave were an account of a visit to the past by beings from the future.

Both the Ayscough explanation and the science-fiction reading of A Maggot would, by Fowles's standards, be judged deficient: one in sense, the other in sensibility. We are left with two other solutions. Has he gone to "June Eternal", as Rebecca maintains, or gone to the devil, as Jones believes? As always Fowles refuses to decide for the reader; he just lays out the options. The significance, to Fowles, is in the choice: each man has the freedom to make his own heaven or hell.

Every Fowles novel revolves around a strong woman, and A Maggot is no exception. The heroine of A Maggot derives fictionally from other strong women: Fanny Hill, Moll Flanders, and Tess of the d'Urbervilles. In the opening section of the novel, before her conversion in the cave, Fowles's heroine is called Fanny, an apparent, if unconscious, reference to the narrator of Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, Fanny Hill. In "The Enigma", the heroine, Isabel Dodgson, is one of Fowles's wise women; she knows the answers that the protagonist must discover. A Maggot reconstructs a similar situation, but makes one vital change, for the attractive girl does not have all the answers. Fanny (later called Rebecca) is as enmeshed in chains of circumstances as is Fowles's usual protagonist. A Maggot concludes an experiment begun in Daniel Martin, in which Fowles for the first time intentionally portrays the heroine as flawed. Fanny/Rebecca's problem is the converse of the men's: she is intuitively in touch with her emotions,

but feels unable to act authentically in a male-dominated world where circumstances are stacked against her.

In A Maggot, the growth that is spelled out is the heroine's. Rebecca's breaking free from her past and from her deference to authority is the change that is the easiest to identify in A Maggot. She goes through several stages in her personal evolution. The reader first sees her wrapped, cocoonlike, in her cape (Sarah Woodruff undergoes a similar metamorphosis in The French Lieutenant's Woman). Rebecca changes from simple maid to whore as she piles on layers of cosmetics and fine clothes. The narrator says of her change that, "Only those tawny irises . . . remain of the simple young woman who dozed on the bed" (AM, 27). In Cleave Wood she becomes the May Queen. In her final stage she comes out of the cave-cocoon-womb naked, a new kind of being - an Ur-Shaker - and thoroughly individuated. "She transcends the limits on the earthbound larva and becomes a winged creature that soars above the formerly incomprehensible glut of detail" (Tarbox, 1988:153-4). This final metamorphosis is realised in clothing as well: "In her coarse grey dress and pure white cap [she was] . . . a new self, defiant, determined by new circumstance and new conviction" (AM, 287). By the end of the novel, Rebecca is fearless in her repudiation of Ayscough's world and her values. She has evolved, just like the winged creature, toward freedom.

Fowles is focussing on the feminine attainment of self-sufficiency in this novel. His characterization of Fanny in the early part of the novel makes credible her conversion; when the reader meets her again at the end of the novel, she is a changed woman. Moreover,

she goes by a new name: her baptismal name, Rebecca. She also has a new strength; though agreeing with Ayscough about her previous wickedness, she calmly contradicts him when he accuses her of hypocrisy; her quiet strength prevails.

The main event of the novel is, of course, what really happened in the cave, and the only witness is Fanny/Rebecca. Fowles has used all the narrative tricks at his command to ensure the credibility of this witness. He generates the reader's sympathy for his heroine by having her patiently bear the verbal abuse that first Bartholomew and later Ayscough heap on her. Fowles undercuts the reliability of both her interrogators and the reader's sympathy for Rebecca becomes a willingness to believe what she says. Even faced with the supernatural events she relates, the apparitions at Stonehenge and the cave, the reader is inclined to believe in the girl if not in the events: to grant that Rebecca believes that she saw these things.

Structurally, Fowles has retained his eroticism in A Maggot. His technique of seducing the reader is more skilful than ever, but on both the surface level (the plot) and the underlying level (the psychological), he does not offer the reader an ending in which love and sex are united. Moreover, for the first time he does not indicate that they may one day be united. The ending of A Maggot merely affirms that he who has never loved, may love tomorrow, while he who has loved, may love again.

A Maggot abandons the metaphor that Fowles has used for individuation: marriage, union between masculine and feminine. The ideal marriage naturally includes sexuality, but A Maggot does not end with this metaphor for the self. At the conclusion, the

masculine world of the father, represented by Ayscough, has been routed; Rebecca's husband, John Lee, is denied not only his conjugal rights, but even the minimal privilege of naming the child that is not his. A Maggot closes with Rebecca suckling her child. This scene represents the ideal union: the bond between mother and child. For Fowles unity with the mother represents bliss. The final stage of the quest in this novel appears to lead back into childhood.

Despite the fact that the quest theme is very prominent in this novel, there is a definite change in the typical Fowles pattern with regards to this theme. The reader does not follow the adventures of the male protagonist on his way to existential freedom in A Maggot. The male protagonist disappears and the reader is left with the testimony of all the remaining witnesses in an attempt to determine what happened to him. The reader therefore sets out on a quest in order to determine the truth: to distinguish between facts and fiction. During the course of this quest, the reader witnesses Fanny/Rebecca's attainment of self-sufficiency. Fowles focusses on the change in his heroine in this case: his main aim is to establish the female principle at the centre of his fictional framework. Rebecca becomes the embodiment of this female principle as we find it in all of Fowles's writing: strong, independent and free.

Conclusion

This study set out to establish the themes of quest and self-knowledge at the centre of a thematic matrix which can be used to structure the complexity of themes that one finds in John Fowles's fiction. Loveday (1985:3) identifies four major themes in Fowles's work - the Few and the Many; the domain; the contrast between the masculine and the feminine character; and the importance of freedom - and feels that Fowles's whole fictional oeuvre is built around these themes. Loveday further emphasises the fact that these themes are interwoven and that it is impossible to separate them. The main aim of this dissertation was to go one step further than Loveday by establishing a thematic hierarchy in Fowles's work, with the quest-theme (identified by Loveday as the contrasting male-female relationship) forming the foundation of the hierarchy.

Despite a few variations here and there, all of Fowles's work of fiction has the same fixed pattern. The novels and short stories all begin with a protagonist who suffers some degree of narcissism. He (or in the case of The Collector and A Maggot, she) has been living an inauthentic life and playing roles that substitute for true identity. He/she lives, as Nicholas Urfe might say in The Magus, as though someone were looking over his/her shoulder. Nicholas sees himself as the "homme revolté", while Miranda Grey sees herself as the "femme revolté" in The Collector. Charles Smithson tries to be a proper Victorian gentleman in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Rebecca Hocknell tries to be the most depraved of whores in A Maggot, and Daniel Martin has simply forgotten who he really is in the novel of the same title. The same pattern can be found in

Fowles's short stories. These protagonists are always in a state of disequilibrium. Tarbox (1988:2) states that they feel "nebulously ill at ease in their inauthentic lives, but do not know why; in fact, they are not even aware that they are playing roles". The dilemma facing the male characters in general is that they tend to seek refuge from the flux of life behind static images, labels, fictions, and intellectualization. They are, to use one of Fowles's favourite metaphors, schizophrenic - torn between what they perceive is expected of them and what they dimly intuit they need to be. At one stage in The Magus Nicholas Urfe confesses, "I was not the person I wanted to be" (TM, 15); Rebecca echoes his dilemma in A Maggot: "I would not be what I am, sir" (AM, 53).

This statement of desire to escape a false identity, to shed one's self-imposed mask, seals the protagonist's election; and to be elect in Fowles's terms means to be poised on a fulcrum, prepared to change one's wayward course even though the personal risks involved are significant. The protagonist therefore sets out on a quest in order to find his ideal woman, and through her, self-knowledge. McSweeney (1981:321) notices that in each of Fowles's works of fiction a woman serves as the point of contact with mystery and the unknown and as a result stimulates the protagonist's imagination. The male protagonist is continually challenged to discriminate between fantasies of self-gratification and an unselfish relationship that can bridge the chasms of isolation in an otherwise meaningless universe. As a result he goes on this quest for existential meaning. Charles Smithson shows great courage in The French Lieutenant's Woman in setting off on an irreversible course that will expose him to ridicule and loss. Victorian society is safe and predictable, while the

freedom Sarah offers him is decidedly dangerous. Dan needs a similar courage to divest himself of his easy, glib, but superficial life in Daniel Martin. He takes a path that leads him to the terrors of self-confrontation.

What separates the short stories in The Ebony Tower from the majority of Fowles's novels is that the protagonists in these stories are less and less able to take this mythic journey of self-discovery, because they are trapped in a labyrinth of contemporary norms and laws. David Williams (The Ebony Tower), poor Koko (Poor Koko), Marcus Fielding (The Enigma), and Catherine in (The Cloud) are unable to change, even to rescue themselves from extinction.

The elect individual (the protagonist) is swept up by a benevolent magus who has already attained selfhood through some personal trial. This mentor draws the protagonist into what Fowles calls "the godgame", a complex production designed to upset, disorient, and in all ways distress the "initiate". In the first phase of the godgame the magus takes the protagonist away from his familiar surroundings and thereby disturbs his tired habits of perception: Nicholas goes to Bourani in The Magus, Miranda goes to her cell in The Collector, Charles goes to the infamous Ware Cliffs in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Dan goes up the Nile in Daniel Martin, Rebecca journeys to Cleave Wood in A Maggot, David Williams goes to Coëtminais in "The Ebony Tower", the narrator goes to a country cottage in "Poor Koko", Jennings goes to his witnessess in "The Enigma", and "The Cloud" recounts the country picnic of eight English people. Once the game is under way the protagonist becomes bereft of ordinary

frames of reference. He will have to see with new eyes and use new standards of judgement.

The magus involves the protagonist in many layers of illusion by playing out, in metaphorical form, aspects of the protagonist's inauthenticity. In The Magus, Conchis dramatizes many of Nicholas' failings, such as his compulsive abstraction of women and his failure to understand his own nature. Sarah dramatizes, in her bizarre charade involving the French Lieutenant, Charles' struggling will to be free of Victorian constraints in The French Lieutenant's Woman. In A Maggot, Bartholomew shows Rebecca, in the extraordinary maggot vision, her own longing for peace, sanity, and more love. This "metatheater" (Tarbox, 1988:3) is less overt in The Collector, Daniel Martin and in the short stories.

The masque is meant to be a mirror in which one sees the reflection of one's self. The various anima figures throughout the novels and short stories also act as mirrors for the male initiates. June and Julie exist in their masque only to receive the projections of Nicholas (The Magus). They will be whatever he wants them to be. Similarly, Sarah acts as the embodiment of everything Charles secretly wishes he were (The French Lieutenant's Woman), just as Jane becomes the eyes through which Dan eventually sees himself (Daniel Martin). Erato appears in various forms to Miles Green in an attempt to satisfy him (Mantissa), while Miranda decides to give Fred Clegg what she thinks he must want in The Collector. As a prostitute, Fanny/Rebecca is ready to do whatever is expected of her in A Maggot and Diana becomes the representative of everything that David Williams is not capable of in "The Ebony Tower".

Sex is very prominent in all of Fowles's fiction. It is, after all, an aspect of love, and love, both Eros and Agape, is the force that propels the male protagonists in their redemptive pursuit of the ideal heroine. Sex always functions as a very significant part of the masque because the erotic element functions as a symbol for the ways in which human relationships are deformed by the protagonist's habit of playing games. Sex within the masque is virtually always masturbatory, voyeuristic, or pornographic, suggesting physical analogues to existential conditions. Nicholas is narcissistic and Fowles often reveals him masturbating in The Magus. Charles is afraid to leap into selfhood, but he enjoys being on the fringe of Sarah's rich life; hence, she makes him the voyeur to her affair with Vargueness in The French Lieutenant's Woman. In A Maggot, Rebecca debases herself in prostitution, so Bartholomew contrives to involve her in a degrading threesome. Fred Clegg, the male protagonist in The Collector, is unable to function sexually, so he takes up photography in order to fulfil his unnatural sexual fantasies: he becomes a voyeur and pornographer. The complex relationships between the characters in Daniel Martin can be linked with this whole idea of unnatural sexual activities: the ménage à trois, as well as incest, is curious examples. Sexual conflict, galvanized by sexual fantasies, lies at the centre of Mantissa. In this novel, Erato acts as the object of quest for the writer himself.

Fowles insists throughout his fiction that women have sexual needs and that they have a right to sexual fulfilment. His heroines assert their freedom quite vigorously - Miranda, Alison, Sarah, Diana, Isobel, Jane, Erato, and Rebecca - in each case it is the woman who makes the sexual advances. However, in only two works by Fowles

does sex come without a price tag of guilt: in Mantissa, where Miles and Erato reach a glorious climax together (M, 151-4), and in "The Enigma". Even here, however, a form of prudishness can be detected - in Mantissa embodied in the prurient gaze of the staff sister, and in "The Enigma" in the simple structural fact that the story ends just before the sexual act takes place. In the last analysis, therefore, Fowles's attitude towards sex is fundamentally dualistic. On the one hand it involves an element of the sublime and mysterious; but possession (a loaded word for Fowles) does away with that mystery, cheapening the woman by turning her into a possessed "object", and leaving a residue of guilt and punishment.

The godgame aims at stressing and ultimately breaking down the protagonist's false identity with the help of a woman or women. The last act of the magus and his/her players is to abscond; they leave the protagonist alone, in exile, thereby forcing him to put himself back together again in a new way. The major lesson of the godgame is that individual existential freedom, the insistence upon one's right to an authentic personal destiny, is the highest human good. Each protagonist learns that he must see through the roles we all play in ordinary life. Thus the characters undergo complete metamorphosis. They begin with false, provisional identities and end as freer, more authentic beings. The metamorphosis encompasses the journey/quest from narcissism to humanism, from playing games and artifice to a respect for decency, moderation, sanity, feeling, and caring. The Fowles-protagonist does not always conquer his ideal woman, but (with the exception of Fred Clegg in The Collector, and Miles Green in Mantissa) he always attains some self-knowledge which gives him the opportunity to become a more complete person

with a specific identity and freedom. The real art of John Fowles lies in his showing the reader the different ways in which we can come to know and be ourselves, despite formidable handicaps and pressures to conform.

To sum up: the quest-theme can definitely be regarded as the thematic, structural and textual basis of Fowles's fiction. Despite the fact that the quest for the ideal woman is not always a successful one - as is the case in The Collector, "The Ebony Tower", and The Magus to a certain extent - the male protagonist usually gains self-knowledge and existential freedom from his experience (Daniel Martin is Fowles's only novel up to date in which the quester achieves both the happiness he seeks and the woman he loves; this novel is used to illustrate the value of the ultimate/ideal quest). The two exceptions are The Collector and Mantissa in which Fowles presents his most static and his most unsympathetic male protagonists to date. However, in The Collector the **female** character comes to insight and gains self-knowledge: Miranda gains existential freedom before she dies. The same deviation in the pattern can be distinguished in A Maggot: with the male protagonist disappearing some fifty pages into the novel, it is the heroine who gains self-knowledge and who becomes a person with existential authenticity. Fowles uses these two novels, together with Mantissa, to establish the female principle at the centre of his fictional framework. Fanny/Rebecca, Miranda and Erato become the embodiment of this female principle that is characterized by freedom and independence.

My working hypothesis has therefore been proven a valid one. The following thematic hierarchy can be used when analysing John Fowles's fiction: (i) the quest for a woman and for self-knowledge as the basis; (ii) freedom as a result of this quest; (iii) the protagonist becoming a member of the Few as a result of the quest; and (iv) the importance of the domain in the quest. It should be emphasized that the order here is a fixed and hierarchical one, in contrast to the order used by Loveday (1985:3) which seems to operate randomly. All the secondary themes in Fowles's fiction - the changing nature of reality, the human need for mystery, the relationship of art and life, the injustice inherent in society, the failure of language to communicate - are also directly related to the whole idea of a quest. It is the determining factor in all of Fowles's writing.

The following areas have been touched on during the course of the study and represent areas which might be investigated further:

- * Writing as the object of the writer's quest - can it be regarded as a metaphor for the quest motif in Fowles's fiction?
- * The use and function of classical allusions in Fowles's fiction.
- * The possibility of establishing a poetics of fiction that would link the form of the medium to the form of the artist's historical consciousness.
- * The use and function of intertextuality in Fowles's fiction.

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