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A CRITICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE STUDY  
OF JOHN FOWLES' WORKS

By

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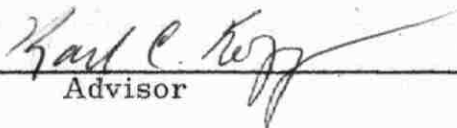
A critical and descriptive study of John Fowles' works.

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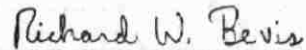
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A modern, still controversial British author is John Fowles, author of The Collector (1963), The Aristos (1964) and The Magus (1966). Published in the last decade and within a period of five years, these books raise issues that concern our age directly. Fowles emphasizes that modern advertising has distorted man's values and alienated him from his world. Unable to cope with reality as juxtaposed to the glamorous world that modern mass media holds up to him, man stands frozen in midair. Any actions he performs are consequently equivalent to feelers he feebly projects out of the conglomeration of self, which is a composite of fact, fiction, and impotency. Symptomatic of 20th Century Western man's inability to act effectively, is his inability to love. Love in the most dynamic sense of the word involves interaction, giving as well as taking. But sadly man has nothing to give, he does not possess himself, he is a prey to a new system of values that our age has created to replace the loss of religious and intellectual ideologies.

In the tradition of James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence, Fowles finds that our century's malaise lies in destroying the role of woman. In Fowles' world, woman is placed on an altar for man to worship. She is invested with beauty, youth, and glamor, an object symbolizing the desirable. Woman's image has ceased to be that of a human being who grows old, suffers, and who is in need of the solicitation of her male counterpart. Having placed her on a pedestal, as an object, man pays her sensual homage and attempts to reach out and possess the ephemeral creature of his own fantasy.

Fowles describes our age's false aesthetic in detail in an article published in Holiday Magazine, entitled "The Trouble with Starlets:"

If we reject woman as fertile mother and as mystic virgin, then we are (or appear to be) left only with woman as source of pleasure, as an instrument, as a substitute for masturbation... in short, as a *houris*. And it is not simply that man is imposing this role; woman herself is accepting it.<sup>1</sup>

By "houris", Fowles means those creators of ambiance, whose "primary function was to constitute the visual tactile décor in a best of all possible worlds."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Fowles, "The Trouble with Starlets," Holiday, IX (June, 1966 ), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

The houris in our world are the models or starlets who are a "chimera of experience," a form of nympholepsy, representing a "desire for the unattainable."<sup>3</sup> There is no room for the image of woman as matriarch or homemaker, but only for the concept of woman as a glamorous, ageless nymph.

By substituting houri for woman, we have "put down the shutters" of reality and created an artificial cult to worship, with resulting decadence of both man and woman. Western man has abused the sacredness of motherhood and the inevitability of old age in his attempt to outwit death. To conform with man's idealization of her image, woman seeks to be youthful at any cost by trying to become something other than she was created for: "Lolita and her grandmother are the same age."<sup>4</sup>

Woman in Greek and Roman times had to be accomplished as well decorative. In primitive societies she fulfilled her role as fertility goddess and mother; Pallas Athene and the Roman Minerva symbolized wisdom and reason, while Artemis-Diana represented chastity. The

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

more recent Japanese hetaera-geisha is admired for her artistic as well as intellectual accomplishments. She is usually fluent in different languages and provides man with spiritual and aesthetic refreshment.

But the starlet is only an anonydine against death. Her purpose coincides with the function of the cherubs in the eighteenth century. The cherubs filled every architectural crevice in profusion, signifying the disorganization and insecurity of their age. When in doubt, put in a cherub. So is our age's insecurity reflected in the modern carpe diem theory, "gather ye starlets while ye may."<sup>5</sup> Fowles emphasizes, however, that he is not a misogynist:

Just as I am certainly not a misogynist, I am certainly not a hater of pleasure . . . Starlets, putti, the inexorable passage of the years . . . easy to know what we desire, but wiser to learn to know what we fear. The next time you see a pretty girl, look at her; and then, I beg you, look beyond her.<sup>6</sup>

For paradoxically, in the attempt to arrest development we promote death. Life implies change and, consequently, a cumulative knowledge of self and the universe; while standing still implies stagnation and death in life.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid ., p.18.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid ., p.19.

By virtue of a large scale conspiracy between the public and the creators of would-be public desires, a world of sham has been created; a world of appearance has been established to drive out the one of reality. The fixed smile on a starlet's face is a facsimile of its own skull-grinning image:

I have, over my desk, a putto hanging on the wall. He was carved in lime wood and painted in the early 18th Century, and given a small, glistening smile, essentially the same, in all but subtlety, as the smile on every starlet's fixed, public lips -- and as the smile, it seems to me, that haunts the maxillae of every skull.<sup>7</sup>

The small statue dating back to 250 B.C. is all the reminder we need of death, "for I need nothing to remind me of death; but always something to remind me of death's cunning."<sup>8</sup> To avoid a living death, inherent in the starlet's smile, we must "look beyond her."

The above advice is not easy to follow. Every mogul is busy projecting this myth onto every small and large screen in the world. He has starlets on parade in beauty contests and swimming resorts. The business tycoon decorates his front office with luscious, buxom beauties, and lugs his favorite on an expense account business tour.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

The fad of nympholepsy has not stopped with women. It has extended to the creation of a "New Young Man." He is the effeminate type, wearing his hair long and adopting colorful dress and an easy gait. "Muscles and virility are out," leaving us with hipsters and Beatles; anything else is considered square. James Bond, agent 007, more commensurate of the idea of masculinity in our age, is only body; as soon as he utters his emotions, it becomes the dialogue between a "mogul and his moll."<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of the female cult of our society, Fowles still sees hope for mankind to break out of this make-believe world it has created. Many cults have come into being and have passed of their own accord, and so will this one. No matter how hard man tries to escape the limits of his self, he will fail. In the final reckoning he has to face up to the torment of his being and remedy the torture at its roots:

She (the houri), may bring pleasure, but never to more people... I compared the starlets to a defensive wall; but walls have two sides. One defends, the other imprisons, and both obscure the real world outside. A mogul may appear, from outside, to be encapsulated in paradise; from inside he may well -- in my view he does -- live locked in hell.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

On the basis Fowles was driven to publish three books: The Collector in which he demonstrates the sickness of modern western man, The Aristos, where he expounds on the nature of man and the universe, and finally The Magus, to suggest a cure.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ARISTOS -- A SELF PORTRAIT IN IDEAS

John Fowles is a writer who, in addition to defining the sickness in the soul and life of western man, posits a cure for this sickness and offers a new set of values to replace the old. Since man is an intrinsic part of the universe, and yet does not determine its nature, Fowles found it necessary to probe into the principle of Being that underlies all creation and reality. In addition to presenting his theories on the nature of the universe and man's relation to it, he analyzes society, ideologies, and religious concepts which have moulded and continue to determine man's outlook. Hence, The Aristos, as Fowles indicates in his sub-title, is a self portrait in ideas. As explained on the fly-leaf of the text, the ideas are modeled on the Pensées of Pascal. He employs, as Pascal had done before him, the system of numbered, aphoristic statements (seemingly at random) to present his didactic message to the reader.

Fowles adopts the word "Aristos" from the Greek word meaning aristocracy -- those best able to govern -- and from Heraclitus who used the word to mean "the best man for the situation."



Heraclitus provides Fowles with the key to the nature of the universe. Our world is in flux, and chaos rules. There is no transcendent deity which imposes order and promotes harmony. Instead, a supreme Logos acts as a limiting and counteracting factor to Chaos. From Heraclitus, he offers the following definitions:

Chaos: the to us human beings apparently disorganizing and disintegrating principle in life and matter.<sup>1</sup>

Logos: Law the to us human beings apparently organizing and integrating principle in life and matter.<sup>2</sup>

The universe includes the three great cosmic components: air, water and fire. But the cosmos is made up primarily of fire:

Look out of the window: everything you see is frozen fire in transit between fire and fire.

Cities, equations, music, loins, landscapes: all are hurtling towards the crucible of the hydrogen fire.<sup>3</sup>

To temper the fire, we add water:

When fire rules, one can add water; when water, fire.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Fowles, The Aristos. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

If there were too much fire or passion, the universe, or its correlative, humanity, would burn itself out. If water or Logos predominates, the result is sluggishness:

When fire has finished all the water, it lacks nourishment, and conversely the water with the fire. Its motion fails, it stops what remains of the other attacks. If either were to be mastered, nothing would be as it is. Fire and water suffice for all that exists to their maximum and minimum degree alike.<sup>5</sup>

As the higher Logos resides in human beings, it is their prerogative to serve as the ordering principle of the world; but, on the other hand, as finite objects, they can interfere very little in the material processes of the universe. In this connection, Fowles points out: "Man is thinking dust in a blind wind."<sup>6</sup>

Any notions of immortality, Fowles says, are incompatible with the chaotic principles of the world. There is no supernatural being who imposes law and order, and Fowles draws on Wittgenstein to substantiate his theory:

The world is all that is the case. This is an admirable principle. But reality is also the world that is not and will never be the case.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

By the "world that is not," Fowles means that state of non-being, which he designates as the "It," and by virtue of its non-being allows all other situations to be:<sup>8</sup>

The white paper that contains a drawing; the space that contains a building; the silence that contains a sonata; the passage of time that prevents a sensation or object continuing forever; all these are the It.<sup>9</sup>

The "It" is the world of infinity or non-entity where man places his gods:

In this other region, this mysterious Ultima Thule, this strange Olympus where nothing is and nothing happens, we locate our gods. My label-word for what inhabits (though in no sense in which man uses the word) this region is the It.<sup>10</sup>

Non-Being and Being are related to Law and Chaos "as an ultimate plus one; and the Chaos is an ultimate minus one."<sup>11</sup> Both limit the possibilities of the other. If Law were to gain control over Chaos, absolute control and perfect order would exist, or as Fowles labels it, a state of Parahades which is impossible since it implies unfreedom, and is really hell. Only a universe based on chaos, allows freedom, progress and happiness.

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<sup>8</sup>ibid., p. 19.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 23.

<sup>10</sup>ibid., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. 17

Man exists in time, and "wherever time passes, there is hazard."<sup>12</sup> The phenomena of hazard is part of the war of existence and is an essential part of our being, while the "It" is unknowable, akin to life in Parahades. The past, however, continues to live in the present in a new dimension where no time exists, in the noösphere. Fowles adopts this term from Teilhard de Chardin's use of the Greek word nous. He explains that "we live encapsulated in the past,"<sup>13</sup> in a dimension where thoughts, creations and expressions of the human mind encircle the lives of the present generation as the atmosphere encircles the earth:<sup>14</sup>

The noösphere with which the Whole Education is particularly concerned is that constituted by the great (secular and religious) saints, the great thinkers, the great scientists and the great artists. All these men belong equally to all mankind and should equally constitute the noösphere of all mankind.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of the noösphere is essential to Fowles' emphasis on learning. It will be explored later in connection with the moral message of The Magus.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

The most deadly mistake of our century is our refusal to accept hazard. We, to use a metaphor, sugar coat the bitter pill of life, and strive to impose perfectability, where none exists. Christianity, Fascism, and Humanism lay stress respectively on immortality, on sacrifice of the individual, and on his intrinsic good nature:

A Christian says: "If all were good, all would be happy."

A socialist says: "If all were happy, all would be good."

A fascist says: "If all obeyed the state, all would be both happy and good."

A lama says: "If all were like me, happiness and goodness need more analysis." To an existentialist there is no one view to which one must commit oneself, no need to destroy what is good in a philosophy for the sake of what is bad.

An existentialist tries to commit himself to what is the best of the best philosophy for the given situation.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, out of the revolt of the individual, existentialism sprang. But Fowles does not agree with the traditional existentialism of Kierkegaard and Sartre:

The best existentialism tries to re-establish in the individual a sense of his own uniqueness, a knowledge of the value of anxiety as an antidote to intellectual complacency (petrification), and a realization of the need he has to learn to choose and control his own life... Existentialism is then, among other things, an attempt to combat the ubiquitous and increasingly dangerous sense of the *nemo* in modern man.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

By the nemo, Fowles means the sense of nothingness, of futility and failure in each man. "It is the ambassador of the It to each; as death is the arrival of the It in each."<sup>18</sup> It is the opposite of the ego and in corresponding to non-being, is the sense of emptiness that pervades mankind. The nemo acts as a goad to human beings. To escape nothingness and emptiness we act, and especially we do so in our day and age. When the emphasis is on this world, man has a short life-span in which to prove himself, to achieve immortality through his actions, whether evil or good. Further, the sense of futility is a terrifying feeling which man constantly tries to fill and conquer. The man who chooses this suffering, death, and even disaster, is the only one who is really free. There is no security in the world, "perfectibility is meaningless, because wherever we enter the infinite process we can look forward and imagine a better age."<sup>19</sup> The only man who is able to walk the tightrope of life, is the "Aristos," or "eighth man." Fowles explains:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

I see seven men on the raft. I see the pessimist, for whom the good things of life are no more than lures to prolong suffering; the carpediemist, who sees or does not see the futility of the situation, but who does his best to get the most comfortable part of the raft; the optimist, always scanning the horizon for the promised land, the Parahades where he would die of horror if he ever set foot; the observer, who finds it enough to write the logbook of the voyage and to note down the behavior of the sea, the raft and his fellow victims; the altruist, who finds his reason for being in the challenge of the situation, in the need to deny himself and to help others; the stoic, who finds no compensation in the situation, who believes in nothing except his own refusal to jump overboard; I see the child, the one born, as some with perfect pitch, with perfect ignorance; the pitifully ubiquitous child, who believes that all will be explained in the end, the nightmare fade and the green shore rise.

And I see the eighth man, the one they will not listen to.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, the aristos is characterized by his lack of creed, for he walks alone. To attach himself to an ideology is to lose his identity and become submerged in the Many. The aristos by not belonging to any party obtains knowledge of the "mystery tensions" that characterize the chasm between total knowledge, or Parahades, and all that is existent and knowable.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 24 - 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 94.



He is a free existentialist, intelligent and of good actions. The aristos stands in the middle of conflicting forces, in the middle of the current, but through his wisdom, education, and maturity, regulates these forces until he is finally extinguished. Yet he realizes that he is doomed to isolation, suffering, and "absolute death."<sup>22</sup> He stands out among the Many who languish in their prison cells, while the door behind them is open. The aristos sees the blue sky beyond; and walks out to reality. Yet Fowles admits that this eighth man is only an ideal and does not exist.

It takes courage to live with the idea of death, and Fowles stresses that it is only by accepting death that we have the courage to live. Death is like air: totally necessary; and of its nature..."<sup>23</sup> He is carried away romantically and metaphorically with the idea of death:

Because I am a man death is my wife; and now she has stripped, she is beautiful, she wants me to strip, to be her mate. This is necessity, this is love, this is being-for-another, nothing else. I cannot escape this situation, nor do I want to. She wants me to make love, not like some huge spider, to consume me, but like a wife in love, with all the total sympathy of the It, so that we can celebrate our love, bear children and be fertile...

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 27.



She is not a prostitute or a mistress I am ashamed of or want to forget or about whom I can sometimes pretend that she does not exist. Like my real wife she informs every important situation in my life, she is wholly of my life, not beyond, or against, or opposite to it. I accept her completely, in every sense of the word, and I love her for what she is to me. I am not arguing this; but stating that I feel it, each day of my life.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of this idea it would be suicidal to believe in after life, for it would detract from the beauty of immediacy and the necessity of struggle, of coming to terms with the conditions of this life.

The present society can be designated as an "agora", or a money making society as opposed to the "stoa", or ideal society. It is an age where hollow men are in control: "having, not being governs our world."<sup>25</sup>

Our age is an era when the best of art, fashion and luxury is within the reach of all. It is available to a saturation point. And the greater the achievement of outstanding inventors and creators, the more insignificant we feel, which dampens our ability to create. The nemo, or fear of the void, acts as a spur to the ego; the fear of non-existence drives man to fulfill his destiny and to create:

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<sup>24</sup>ibid., pp. 28 - 29.

<sup>25</sup>ibid., p. 3.

I have lived, I have lived, the tombstone cries.<sup>26</sup>

In mankind's daily life, Fowles posits four main tensions which lie at the core of existence. These are pleasure-pain, good-evil, beauty-ugliness, security-insecurity. He demonstrates these tensions in four human activities: Marriage, Illicit Sex Relations, War, and Art.

Human beings fluctuate between these two poles, inherent in the nature of man and in the universe:

Men saw a log, one pushes, the other pulls. But in doing this they are doing the same thing. While making less, they make more. Such is the nature of man.<sup>27</sup>

Out of tension and isolation, love and progress are born.

Marriage is an example of such a relationship. It is a meeting of the poles, where the passionate and the harmonious states are contrasted against the idea of a perfect marriage:

As with all tensional states, marriage is harrassed by a myth and a reality. The myth is that of the Perfect Marriage, a supposedly achievable state, akin to Parahades, of absolute harmony between the partners.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 40

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

But a state of complete harmony cannot be achieved. Either passion rules stimulated by constant quarrels, or a state of harmony reigns with diminished passion.

The twentieth century needs harmony rather than passion, although propaganda advocates the contrary. For by establishing a sense of security within our homes, it becomes possible to project ourselves into society, and attempt to resolve tensions of the outside world:

In passion everything is between thee and me; in harmony it is between them and us. I-thou is passion, we-they is harmony.<sup>29</sup>

When the emphasis is on self, it is "always mother to an age of war."<sup>30</sup> If we extend the principle of passion and harmony to include the relationship of states to each other a simile exists between states that are at war, and at peace. States exist in a state of passion to each other, and to have peace, they have to wage war. Talk of annihilation and nuclear explosions breed a love tension born out of the threat of war and annihilation. But all this is a pre-adult relationship which belongs to the young, the pre-thirty stage, and should be superseded by a state of harmonious, "noscentric" existence which strives to combat over-population, poverty, disease and ignorance.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

Out of the above tensions of marriage and society illicit sexual relationships result. There are two ways of viewing this problem. The official view takes the stand that the I.S.R. (as Fowles calls it) is "in conflict with all those unpermissive modes of thought and conscience," with the "communal superego," that society inculcates in man. There is the risk of the break-up of home, abandonment of children, and fear of the spread of venereal disease.

The other view, is the yearning for freedom which the individual feels for the hazardous and adventurous. These two drives co-exist in man, one which yearns for the security and certainty in marriage, and the other which yearns for "infinite variety, both physically and emotionally; in partner, and place, and mood, and manner and time."<sup>31</sup>

Fowles points out that coitus is not intrinsically moral or immoral. It is a force like other forces and only its manifestation is moral or immoral. It is also an acceptable manifestation of our age, ever since Victorian modesty was thrown off. By allowing freedom in pre-marital relationships, marriage does not become the vehicle for licit sexual relationships, but more of a relationship built on love:

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

If you sternly forbid the I.S.R. to the unmarried, you must not expect them to understand marriage for what it should be: the intention to love, not the intention to have coitus licitly.<sup>32</sup>

Society promotes the I.S.R. Advertisements are keyed to the seductive characteristics acquired by driving a certain car or by smoking a cigarette. The connotations given to innocent objects are to enhance seductive technique, and to appeal in "shades of a love philter" to man and woman. The charm lies in a nostalgia for the unavailable, the unreal, for an escape from everyday drudgery:

When the individual is being attacked on all sides by the forces of anti-individuality; by the nemo; by the pawn complex; by the sense that death is absolute; by the dehumanizing processes of both mass production and mass producing: the I.S.R. represents not only an escape into the enchanted garden of the ego but also a quasi-heroic gesture of human defiance.<sup>33</sup>

It is the characteristic of an agora society to collect items for pleasure, as man collects woman to satisfy the image instilled into him by popular art to satisfy his spring sense of virility. But the greatest mistake is to lay emphasis on sex only and not on love:

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

Sex is an exchange of pleasures, of needs; love is a giving without return.<sup>34</sup>

The best relationship for containing this love is marriage. Yet the I.S.R. is permissible, if love is absent. It is preferable to break up an unhappy marriage than to allow the children to grow up in an atmosphere of disharmony. The basic issue revolves around "what we are and what we are for,"<sup>35</sup> This is the essence underlying human relationships.

In the same way that the I.S.R. is a manifestation of the discontent within man, so can art serve as another outlet for the frustrations of man. Art should not be presented in history of art courses or under trained instructors, but must spring spontaneously from the heart of man. A true artist does not need to be educated in his field.

Keeping in mind the sense of the nemo in man, the best literature and art are those in which the two tensions have been resolved. This is apparent in Beethoven's admixture of serene melodies and tormented fragments; in Bach's contrapuntal style in the Goldberg

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

Variations; in Cezanne's positioning of colors, light and dark, and in Shakespeare's "poetic technique in King Lear and Hamlet.

A condensation of Fowles' views on visual, aural-sensation and plastic-visual art theories can be summed up in his statement:

But the quality of knowing and understanding, and ultimately of feeling, must be inferior in the visual and aural arts to that in poetry.<sup>36</sup>

Poetry is the best vehicle to transport man to knowledge of the Universe. For poetry depends on feeling as opposed to audio-visual sensations, and therefore speaks to man through the totality of his innermost being. For Fowles, two poets who have successfully achieved this immediacy of vision in their poetry are Emily Dickinson and Catullus, while artists and musicians aspire to the reality achieved by these two poets. Through the selective process of poetry, reconciliation of man's conflicts and polar disparities, are effected. Also, the nature of reality being a complex situation, only a symbolic and semantically perceptive poem can encompass all emotional states and submit them to long and deep thinking. Our age is one of the polystylist, the age of Picasso and Stravinsky who

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 154 - 155.



commit all their individuality to express the age they live in. What we need are more dynamic artists who sacrifice their life to grasp the almost irretrievable, instead of the static artists of our day whose vision is limited to the market value of their works.

Finally, out of the tensions of the universe, a system of ethics naturally evolves. Matter itself does not afford any moral connotations; it is neutral, and man colors it. He needs a system of ethics by which to regulate his life and assert his human characteristics. Good and evil form part of the polar tension of the world. Morality is bound up with the pleasure and pain the individual feels as well as the beauty and ugliness that surrounds him. Pain, ugliness, evil, and insecurity are antidotes and at the same time, stimulants to the complex pleasure human beings derive from being good. All measures of beauty and security are relative to their counterpart of evil and insecurity.

Since beauty and pleasure are human characteristics, they are intemporal rather than extemporal attributes. But the 20th C. by commercializing beauty in museums, and attaching labels to all forms of beauty through mass communications, has brainwashed the intemporal self. Instead of the 19th century didactic morality, we now have a



20th century didactic culture. For, Fowles emphasizes, we are in the "Midas Situation"<sup>37</sup> which prohibits the haunting "pristine" tune of the shepherd being heard. We have replaced the pristine beauty with quotidian beauty of mass media. From an ethical standpoint, it is neither good nor bad, but evil enters in when man throws a net of possession around an admired object. It is when the thing becomes my thing and not the thing in itself that has value that evil enters the picture. The pristine tune then becomes as rare to locate as a beautiful butterfly fluttering in the breeze.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE COLLECTOR

Had Fowles been satisfied with publishing articles about the effects of mass media on promoting the sickness of Western man, and a Montaigne-like exposition of man's involvement in world, self, and society, as presented in The Aristos, his status as a critic would have remained doubtful. To confirm this opinion, Mr: R.A. Gray, who recommends book purchases for libraries,<sup>1</sup> attacks Fowles' method of presenting his thoughts in brief, numbered, aphoristic paragraphs. He points out that this staccato treatment is not amenable to the vastness of the subjects treated. Hence, although he recommends its purchase, he stipulates that The Aristos is not an essential requirement for libraries.

The Aristos, however, is consistent in form with Fowles' distrust of systematization. Furthermore, his "portrait in ideas" emerges from the realm of vague concepts when Fowles demonstrates these ideas through

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<sup>1</sup>R.A. Gray, "The Aristos: A self-portrait in Ideas," Library Journal, XC (January 15, 1965), p. 252.

characterization and dialogue in his two novels, The Collector and The Magus . His ideas convey a vivid and dramatic message when seen and understood in this way and have a powerful effect on the reader.

So far, however, Fowles has received more caustic than favorable criticism. Very few have grasped the moral and aesthetic issues Fowles is grappling with. In one review, by Morris Reneck in the Nation, Fowles is described as having a mail-order psychology, is uninteresting intellectually and a hack who is uninteresting as a hack.<sup>2</sup> Evaluation of the validity of this criticism must be left until Fowles' message is explored within the context of his two novels.

The previous chapter ended on the note that evil arises when a net of possession is thrown around an object of adoration. This is the central theme of The Collector where Ferdinand Clegg symbolizes the sickness in the soul of western man, brought about by techniques of modern advertising; and where Miranda, the beautiful artist-student becomes his victim.

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<sup>2</sup>Morris Reneck, " "Worn Elastic": The Collector, " Nation, CHIC. (November 23, 1963), p.352.

"O brave new world," Shakespeare says in The Tempest, and "O sick new world," Miranda remarks in The Collector.<sup>3</sup> Frederick wishes to be Ferdinand, but can only be half a man, a Caliban:

She wasn't to know F stood for Frederick. I've always liked Ferdinand, it's funny, even before I knew her.<sup>4</sup>

The protagonist of The Collector aspires to the role of Ferdinand who, in The Tempest, must be put through his trials by Prospero to prove worthy of Miranda. But in the world of The Collector, there is no Prospero to preserve Ferdinand from the storms of life, and keep Caliban from overrunning the universe. Ferdinand in Fowles' version has never been told by the moguls of the giant advertising world that he must prove worthy of his object of adoration; he believes that what he wants is there for the taking. He sums up his philosophy in this statement:

We all take what we can get. And if we haven't had much most of our life we make up for it while the going's good.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>John Fowles, The Collector. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), p. 245.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

Ferdinand had once been resigned to remaining a bank clerk, and adding to his collection of pin-ups and butterflies. But through the public facility of investing in lotteries, he acquires £ St. 73,091 which allows him to quit his work and acquire enough leisure time to pursue his hobby of collecting. He had also once been satisfied with admiring the movements of Miranda as she went back and forth from her art school chatting and laughing with her fellow students. Now with his new income he too wishes to hear the "pristine tune of the shepherds," and own the most beautiful butterfly of all, Miranda.

"Money is Power,"<sup>6</sup> Ferdinand argues. But tragically, he knows that his money will not obtain favor for him with either Miranda or the privileged few and he realizes that the image he presents to a successful world is of a lower class, unattractive man with no worthwhile qualities:

I remember a night we went out and had supper at a posh restaurant . . . It was good food, we ate it but I didn't hardly taste it because of the way people looked at us and the way the slimy foreign waiters treated us, and how everything in the room seemed to look down at us because we weren't brought up their way. . .

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

If you ask me, London's all arranged for the people who can act like public school-boys, and you don't get anywhere if you don't have the manner born and the right la-di-da voice -- I mean rich people's London, the West End, of course.<sup>7</sup>

Our modern hero suffers from the disease of collecting, of surrounding himself with beautiful objects, "cherubs," to cover feelings of impotence and inadequacy. From collecting beautiful butterflies, his next logical step is to capture Miranda, to experience the biggest thrill of all. The fact that to his sick outlook she is nothing more than a butterfly, or object to be possessed, emerges from his description of the capture of Miranda:

It was like not having a net and catching a specimen you wanted in your first and second fingers (I was always very clever at that), coming up slowly behind and you had it, but you had to nip the thorax, and it would be quivering there. It wasn't easy like it was with a killing-bottle. And it was twice as difficult with her, because I didn't want to kill her, and that was the last thing I wanted.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly illustrated in the above passage is primitive man, Caliban, who has nothing but his instincts to guide him. He is devoid of all feeling of reverence for the thing-in-itself. All his values are derived from a sick society's monetization of pleasure. Fowles explains this principle

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 40 - 41.

in The Aristos:

An experience is now something that has to be possessed as an object bought can be possessed; and even other human beings, husbands, wives, mistresses, lovers, children, friends, come to be possessed or unpossessed objects associated with values derived more from the world of money than from the world of humanity.<sup>9</sup>

In such a system, the individual as well as society suffer. For "it is the possessor who is always the possessed. Possessing possesses."<sup>10</sup>  
The consequences are eventually detrimental to a whole nation:

The wave of blind longing for vicarious self fulfillment that can allow a Hitler or a Stalin to dominate a whole race.<sup>11</sup>

Guy Davenport, in an article entitled, "Eros Aped," confirms Fowles' insight. He congratulates Fowles on pinpointing British idiosyncracies:

Though its contemporary implications are clear and disturbing, the terror of this encounter between the English mind at its most preciously sensitive and its most constrictively ingrown is as resonant as a myth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>John Fowles, The Aristos: A self-portrait in Ideas (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), p. 173.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 41

<sup>12</sup>Guy Davenport, "Eros Aped," National Review, XV (November 5, 1963), p. 401.

For the myth of what Fowles calls the "new people" resides in the belief that by distorting British public school values, they have created a better world for the masses. Ferdinand states: "(And I'm glad I was, if more people were like me in my opinion, the world would be better),"<sup>13</sup> but to Miranda, his victim, he is a despicable object:

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.<sup>14</sup>

In the first part of the book, Ferdinand's reasoning and the events which lead to the capture and imprisonment of Miranda in the cellar of an old house are explored in detail. In the second part, through the form of a diary, Miranda's psychological development during her period of imprisonment is brought out. In the third and last part, the focus is again on the protagonist, Ferdinand, who remains trapped within the limits of himself.

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<sup>13</sup>The Collector, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 161.



Intrinsic to the planning of society is that "the museum is not here in our house for us to visit when we want; we are obliged to visit it."<sup>15</sup> But Ferdinand is like a miser hoarding all the beauty he can touch in the drawers and the cellars of his private museum. He has carefully labeled his butterflies in their cabinets, and surrounded the most precious of them all, Miranda, with all that her heart can desire, except her freedom.

Ferdinand is full of elation at having captured the butterfly of his dreams. As Stein, butterfly collector in Conrad's Lord Jim explains: "You don't know what it is for a collector to capture such a rare specimen. You can't know."<sup>16</sup> Stein wished to own the perfect butterfly, whose perfection of line, color and ephemerality man could never attain. He hoped by owning such a beautiful specimen to transcend for an instant the world of imperfection and death around him. As a matter of fact he plucks it off the man he has killed; from death. Similarly, Ferdinand, out of his familiarity with the death he has inflicted on all the living beauty of butterflies, plucks the most unique of all butterflies to hoard and watch over.

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<sup>15</sup>The Aristos, p. 83.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim, (London: Collins, 1957), p. 182.

Miranda, the victim, tries all methods to cajole her victimizer into giving her freedom. She in turn snubs him, appeals to his perverted sense of dignity, goes on a hunger strike, attempts to tunnel her way out frantically with a rusty nail, but to no effect. She even genuinely makes the effort to interest him in her art work, and promises that, once free, she will include him in her circle of friends. But all to no avail. Finally, when none of her attempts succeeds, she abandons her principles, and attempts to seduce him. This is the greatest error of all. For as Fowles points out in "The Trouble with Starlets," one of the most important functions of woman is to play the role of patroness or protectress. She must only hint at a mythical sexual happiness, but never blatantly promote sex. For sex is a filthy word in Ferdinand's vocabulary and, if consummated, would bring his self-conceived notions of decency tumbling down.

First, he is obsessed with the notions of cleanliness that his aunt, who raised him, instilled into his young ear. She writes him in this connection from Australia:

I hope you did what I said and aired all the rooms and linen like I said and got a good cleaning woman in like I said the same as with you, I hope.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>The Collector, p. 185.

This is very similar to the cleanliness fad of the American-German household which Graham Greene satirically comments on in The Power and The Glory:

This was the race which had invented the proverb that cleanliness was next to godliness -- cleanliness, not purity.<sup>18</sup>

Second, Ferdinand has never had intercourse with a woman. His only experience was with a whore, whom he labels as an old hag:

... she was old and she was horrible, horrible. I mean, both the filthy way she behaved and in looks. She was worn, common. Like a specimen you'd turn away from, out collecting. I thought of Miranda seeing me there like that. As I said, I tried to do it but it was no good and I didn't try hardly.<sup>19</sup>

So Miranda has committed the fatal mistake, of playing the vital role of a woman, and not a nymph, an object of worship. She has violated the cleanliness and innocence that Ferdinand prides himself on: "It's some crude animal thing I was born without."<sup>20</sup>

In seducing him, Miranda had attempted to reach down into Ferdinand's being and lay bare all that Ferdinand is. At that moment, when naked in front of each other, when passion should rule and conquer

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<sup>18</sup>Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory. (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p.164.

<sup>19</sup>The Collector, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

mind, when one of man's most basic and vital drives should seek fulfillment, Ferdinand fails. We first have Miranda's description of this climactic moment, as recounted in her diary:

And gradually it all came out. The truth about him. And later, his real self.

A psychiatrist has told him he won't ever be able to do it. He said he used to imagine us lying in bed together. Just lying. Nothing else. I offered to do that. But he didn't want to. Deep down in him, side by side with the beastliness, the sourness, there is a tremendous innocence. It rules him. He must protect it.<sup>21</sup>

It is known of certain cases where men, because of a deep and sacred love for their partner (in the film La Notte, for example,) have been unable to consummate the sexual act with them. But we know that Ferdinand has never had intercourse with a woman. He has achieved his climaxes through masturbation. He reacts to the pornographic photographs he takes of Miranda rather than to her, for these seem purer to him in the role of possessor and possessed:

The photographs (the day I gave her the pad), I used to look at them sometimes. I could take my time with them. They didn't talk back at me.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

He sees nothing evil in binding and gagging Miranda to the bed, during her bout of pneumonia, to get pornographic poses of her in the nude.

Ferdinand's capture of Miranda (to be admired) automatically sets a high standard of accomplishment for him. His "love" for her at the same time gratifies him as well as limits any normal sexual outlets:

What she never understood was that with me it was having. Having her was enough. Nothing needed doing. I just wanted to have her, and safe at last.<sup>23</sup>

Miranda realizes this and tells him:

I said, what you love is your own love. It's not love, it's selfishness. It's not me you think of, but what you feel about me.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Ferdinand has been corrupted by the power that money gives. Miranda sees that he would have remained within bounds had he remained poor. Thus, money in the hands of the ignorant invariably promotes evil.

Through the diary of Miranda, in part two, we follow the progress of her self-knowledge during the period of her imprisonment.

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<sup>23</sup>ibid., p. 95.

<sup>24</sup>ibid., p. 242.

She gains a feeling of compassion for the foibles of her former playmates and, had she regained her freedom, would have proved to be a more productive member in her society. She also learns to view with respect the independence and individuality of an older boyfriend of hers, G.P.:

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. Or is it that I've lost my sense of balance? Perhaps it's all a dream... If he came to the door now I should run into his arms. I should want him to hold my hand for weeks. I mean I believe I could love him in the other way, his way, now.<sup>25</sup>

All the feeling and humanity that Ferdinand lacks, Miranda imbues in her former, and elderly admirer, G.P. or George Paston. He is an aristos figure in the novel, but his role is confined to Miranda's reminiscences of him. Their relationship together is a vivid contrast to the feeling of lifelessness and hopelessness that pervades the cellar:

The two of us in that room. No past, no future. All intense deep that-time-only. A feeling that everything must end, the music, ourselves, the moon, everything. That if you get to the heart of things you find sadness for ever and ever, everywhere; but a beautiful silver sadness, like a Christ face.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 189 - 190.

Together they melt into space, and out of time. They recapture the sad music of the nōosphere. These moments are refreshing and rejuvenating; they are necessary amidst the "fuss and anxiety and the shoddiness and the business of London, making a career, getting pashes, art, learning, grabbing frantically at experience, suddenly this silent silver room full of that music."<sup>27</sup>

During her imprisonment Miranda learns the value of her active life and of G.P.'s individuality. Juxtaposed with the dead weight of Ferdinand, he becomes everything vital and alive. G.P. has reverence for the items he collects, and Miranda thinks of one scene where G.P. shouts:

You think that's only a record... -- do you think Rembrandt got the teeniest bit bored when he painted? Do you think Bach made funny faces and giggled when he wrote that?<sup>28</sup>

G.P. had worked himself into a towering rage over the petty nonchalance of his audience, those who want merely to label a painter as an impressionist or a cubist and who do not see him as a living individual. Mass production has belittled all the great achievements of the past to saturation point. Fowles describes this phenomenon in The Aristos:

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 167.



Freedom of access to great art by means of radio, records, reproductions, paperbacks, and so on. The best is everywhere. The smaller we feel, the less able we are to create. We attempt to escape by using futile new styles, by following futile new fashions, as a damned river bursts its banks at a hundred different points. All this is partly fear of the nemo.<sup>29</sup>

As an antidote to the passivity and shallow smugness of the new people, Miranda now realizes that there was something magnificent about G.P.'s rage:

He was terrible. Both ways. He was terrible, because he had started it all, he had determined to behave in that way. And wonderfully terrible, because passion is something you never see. I've grown up among people who've always tried to hide passion. He was raw. Naked. Trembling with rage.<sup>30</sup>

G.P. is involved with life, although he remains uncommitted to any particular school of art. He draws with a clearness of line, without any fussiness or unnecessary detail. To imitate Gauguin and Matisse would be to do "the Paris rat"<sup>31</sup> and adopt the sensibilities of another artist, not one's own. By imitating Paris, the artist would sidestep the vital reality of England, become nothing but a photographer:

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<sup>29</sup>The Aristos, p. 39.

<sup>30</sup>The Collector, p. 168.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 162.



It's all because there's so little hope in England that you have to turn to Paris, or somewhere abroad. But you have to force yourself to accept the truth -- that Paris is always an escape downwards (G.P.'s words) -- not saying anything against Paris, but you have to face up to England and the apathy of the environment (these are all G.P.'s words and ideas) and the great deadweight of the Calibanity of England.

And the real saints are people like Moore and Sutherland who fight to be English artists in England. Like Constable and Palmer and Blake.<sup>32</sup>

England needs the Few who struggle to lift England out of its Calibanity, its stodginess and jealous malice.

In the silence of her cellar Miranda becomes more considerate of the faults of G.P.'s flirtations and haughty ways:

I've seen so little of the world. I know that G.P. in many ways represents a sort of ideal now. His sense of what counts, his independence, his refusal to do what the others do. His standing apart. It has to be someone with those qualities. And no one else I've met has them as he has. People at the Slade seem to have them -- but they're so young. It's easy to be frank and to hell with convention when you're our age.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in order to be able to evaluate correctly the mass of information that is produced daily, the aristos has to be a mature man.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p.218.

Trapped in her cellar, Miranda dreams that she has painted a large painting. But while away, she finds it has been torn to shreds with a pair of large secateurs which her mother holds up for her to examine. In this dream she has a foreboding of her own doom, where her life will be shattered like the painting. To quiet her fears she makes faces at herself in the mirror, and puts on records. She is "like the little Japanese girl they found in the ruins of Hiroshima. Everything dead; and she was singing to her doll."<sup>34</sup>

Miranda finds in Arthur Seaton, hero of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning by Alan Sillitoe, the counterpart of Caliban, the prototype of the New People without a soul -- the New people who have desecrated the landscape and turned it into a wasteland, similar to a great silence:

Every decent person I've ever met has been anti-Tory. But I see what he feels, I mean I feel it myself more and more, this awful deadweight of the fat little New People on everything. Corrupting everything. Vulgarizing everything. Raping the countryside, as D says in his squire moods. Everything mass produced. Mass-everything.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

But Caliban goes one step further than Arthur Seaton:

If Arthur Seaton saw a modern statue he didn't like, he'd smash it. But Caliban would drape a tarpaulin round it. I don't know which is worse. But I think Caliban's way is.<sup>36</sup>

Selfishness, resentment and ignorance of the intrinsic worth of objects usually leads to blind destruction, while the Calibans lay a shroud over existence, nullifying progress:

How I hate ignorance! Caliban's ignorance, my ignorance, the world's ignorance Oh, I could learn and learn and learn. I could cry, I want to learn so much.<sup>37</sup>

But Miranda although gagged and bound by Caliban, by natural man (the savage who needs to be tamed and made benevolent before he can learn), manages to learn.

Learning is a major theme in The Tempest and occupies a central place in the dispositions of providence. Miranda, both in The Tempest and in The Collector is a child of nature (or art), but she is capable and eager to learn, while Caliban is not. But in the later work,

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p.231.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

Miranda has to shed all the false values that society had set up for her to follow. She has to learn to unlearn, and succeeds in realizing the fact:

I looked in the mirror today and I could see it in my eyes. They look much older and younger. It sounds impossible in words. But that's exactly it. I am older and younger. I am older because I have learnt, I am younger because a lot of me consisted of things older people had taught me. All the mud of their stale ideas on the shoe of me.<sup>38</sup>

She looks in the mirror and sees a new face, one that looks out in wonder at a world she had never really understood before, a world where only G.P.'s behavior is the right one. She had been wary of the twenty-one years age difference, and of his having been married twice before. He had given the impression that he was a wrecker of homes:

People like your bloody aunt think I'm a cynic, a wrecker of homes. A rake. I've never seduced a woman in my life. I like bed, I like the female body... Innocence.<sup>39</sup>

G.P. only hates women "when they don't behave in their own way."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

Miranda learns that in G.P.'s promiscuity there was something young, creative and vital:

He creates love and life and excitement around him; he lives, the people he loves remember him.<sup>41</sup>

Art is the medium of excellence both in Shakespeare's play and for G.P. and Miranda in The Collector. Miranda draws a picture to express a smile, where words fail and become useless like a "kindergarten poster painting of a turnip with a moon-mouth smile."<sup>42</sup> Words in comparison to drawing, painting, and sculpture, seem crude. Miranda tries to interest Ferdinand-Caliban in painting, but her attempts are like "trying to draw with a broken lead."<sup>43</sup>

Caliban is Apeneck Sweeney among the nightingales, living by his brutal instincts and retarding civilization.<sup>44</sup> He is featureless, nondescript. He stands in opposition to Prospero and the world of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 149 - 150.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> T. S. Eliot, Selected Poems (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1961), p. 46.

Art; he is Nature, or Chaos, opposed to the Logos which orders the sun and earth (Ariel and Caliban) to do its bidding. Caliban (Carib) is a savage inhabitant of the New World, the name itself an anagram of "cannibal". Caliban is, thus, raw nature without access to the art that makes love out of lust, the art that is man's power over the created world and over himself, and who lacks all knowledge of gentleness and humanity. "He is a savage, capable of all ill: he is born to slavery and not to freedom."<sup>45</sup>

Fowles' Ferdinand has all the characteristics of Caliban. He sits in "a certain bowed-and upright posture,"<sup>46</sup> and his physical appearance is repulsive:

He's six feet. Eight or nine inches more than me. Skinny, so he looks taller than he is. Gangly. Hands too big, a nasty fleshy white and pink. Not a man's hands. Adam's apple too big, wrists too big, chin much too big, underlip bitten in, edges of nostrils red. Adenoids. He's got one of those funny in-between voices, uneducated trying to be educated...<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed., Frank Kermode. (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1958), pp. xxiv - xxv.

<sup>46</sup> *The Collector*, p. 149.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

To capture him on canvas would be a mockery. For he is an object who needs to be smashed: "But you can't smash human ugliness."<sup>48</sup>

He lacks any benevolent expression that could obliterate the impact of physical repugnance. Completely sexless he "watches" with his fish-eyes. When he speaks, he abuses the British language. Ferdinand complains of Miranda's observation of this:

She was always criticizing my way of speaking. One day I remember she said, "You know what you do? You know how rain takes the colour out of everything? That's what you do to the English language. You blur it every time you open your mouth."<sup>49</sup>

Caliban is deformed physically, the product of sexual union between a witch and an incubus. He is half a man, whom Prospero realized "'stripes may move, not kindness'."<sup>50</sup> Setebos, the devil, is his acknowledged God, and Caliban would have peopled the earth with half-men, if not restrained by Prospero.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

But there is no Prospero in Miranda's cellar, where Caliban rules. She is trapped by a twentieth century Caliban, who has surrounded her with expensive art books, exquisite perfumes, beautiful clothes, as in the movies. This primitive human monster, suffering from a deep class neurosis, and the influence of the little back street values his aunt has inculcated in him, combined with the effect of mass media brainwashing, is unable to learn or unlearn. Miranda contracts fatal pneumonia and Ferdinand is incapable of bringing her a doctor:

The doctor came out again and I could see he was the officer type in the army, they've got no sympathy with you, they just give you orders, you're not their class and they treat everyone else as if they were dirt.<sup>51</sup>

Until the end he is trapped in the vicious limits of his self, and cannot transcend his selfishness. So Miranda dies. Now he has to rely on his instinct of what is right to overcome this development which his past knowledge does not provide any guideline for:

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 268 - 269.



I know you're meant to wash dead bodies, but I didn't like to, it didn't seem right, so I put her on the bed and combed out her hair and cut a lock. I tried to arrange her face so it had a smile but I couldn't. Anyway she looked very peaceful. Then I knelt and said a prayer, the only one I knew was Our Father, so I said some of that and God rest her soul, not that I believe in religion, but it seemed right. Then I went upstairs.<sup>52</sup>

He buries her in a box under the apple trees and quietly goes about preparing the cellar for his next victim. Miranda who had sensed the evil lurking around their domain, and stated "in a way we're on the same side against it,"<sup>53</sup> moves away from his side and obtains her spiritual release through knowledge, and precious freedom by dying. Caliban-Ferdinand, however, by the end of the novel, remains in control of the island.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAGUS

Prospero as a mage controls nature; as a prince he conquers the passions which had excluded him from his kingdom, and overthrown the law; as a scholar he repairs his loss of Eden; as a man he learns to temper his passions, an achievement essential to success in any of the other activities.<sup>1</sup>

In The Collector, G. P. (the Prospero of the novel) remains outside the sphere of the evil in the cellar and Ferdinand remains in control of his island. The aristos figure effects a change in Miranda's attitude towards the world she is in exile from, through her reminiscences of him and of experiences they had shared, but he is unable to interfere and release Ferdinand and Miranda from imprisonment. Miranda slowly dies, choked to death by her inhuman collector, while Ferdinand continues to revolve within the narrow sphere of moral and aesthetic blindness imposed on him by his upbringing and by society.

The situation changes in Fowles' second novel, The Magus, where Prospero is in charge of his island:

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<sup>1</sup>William Shakespeare, The Tempest, ed. Frank Kermode (London, Methuen and Co., 1958), p. xlviii.

The dark figure on the raised white terrace; legate of the sun facing the sun; the most ancient royal power. He appeared, wished to appear, to survey, to bless, to command, dominus and domaine. And once again I thought of Prospero. . . Conchis had turned away -- to talk with Ariel, who put records on; or with Caliban, who carried a bucket of rotting entrails.<sup>2</sup>

Conchis, a Prospero figure, mage, prince, scholar and teacher, is of mixed British and Greek ancestry. He was raised in England, but came to Greece with his mother to fulfill her desire to see her native land before she died. He arrived at four o'clock on the afternoon of April the eighteenth, 1929, and tells Nicholas, his guest:

"I knew at once that I must live here. I could not go beyond. It was only here that my past would merge into my future. So I stayed. I am here tonight. And you are here tonight."<sup>3</sup>

Nicholas Urfe, Conchis' guest, has arrived from England with a two-year contract as English teacher at The Lord Byron School on the island of Phraxos, in which Conchis has taken up his residence. A product of the British public school system, an orphan like Ferdinand Clegg, protagonist of The Collector, and former Oxford

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<sup>2</sup>John, Fowles, The Magus, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

"dandy," before applying for this job Nicholas felt he "needed a new land, a new race, a new language... a new mystery."<sup>4</sup> He had tired of his technique with women, which was "to make a show of unpredictability, cynicism, and indifference then, like a conjurer with his white rabbit [produce] the solitary heart."<sup>5</sup>

While waiting for the result of his application, Nicholas meets Alison, an Australian girl, who had been studying languages abroad in the hope of obtaining employment as an air hostess. She is engaged to a man she understands too well, and who is therefore unable to satisfy her yearning for fulfillment. Alison admits to Nicholas that she, through mutual agreement, with her fiancé, Pete, has slept around with various companions during her travels. But the affair she embarks on with Nicholas has a lasting and profound significance for her, while Nicholas walks jauntily away, glad of his release once more, hugging to himself his cherished concept of his lonely heart. He is unable to differentiate between love and lust:

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 9.

I remember one day when we were standing in one of the rooms at the Tate. Alison was leaning slightly against me... I suddenly had a feeling that we were one body, one person, even there; that if she had disappeared it would have been as if I had lost half of myself. A terrible deathlike feeling, which anyone less cerebral and self-absorbed than I was then would have realized was simply love. I thought it was desire. I drove her straight home and tore her clothes off.<sup>6</sup>

Nicholas' arrival in Greece sharpens his senses. He becomes aware of the permeating, living odor of flowers, of the sweet smell of the earth and the absence of sound. A deep silence pervades the island, "beautiful, so all-present,"<sup>7</sup> with a Circe-like quality. But Nicholas is not equipped to handle the latent poetry and womanhood of Greece. He envisages himself a patient lying under interrogation under arc lights:

... already I could see the table with straps through the open doorway, already my old self began to know that it wouldn't be able to hold out.<sup>8</sup>

The poetry that he prides himself on creating, sounds childish and contrived in Greece, land of light. He feels, along with the BBC news broadcasts, like their own version of the one hundred years ago program. The tempo of education at the Lord Byron School,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

seems accelerated in the placid life of Greece, and the students proceed with "a mole-like blindness to their natural environment."<sup>9</sup> His frustration leads Nicholas to contemplate a dramatic suicide to end the "black O of his non-existence."<sup>10</sup> But hearing the pristine tune of a shepherd girl coming over the mountains, he realizes that this decision is merely an aesthetic and dramatic gesture, a last act of defiance and exhibitionism, a search for a Mercutio death:

All the time I felt I was being watched, that I was not alone, that I was putting on an act for the benefit of someone, that this action could be done only if it was spontaneous, pure, isolated -- and moral.<sup>11</sup>

The protagonist turns to exploration of the island, the site of myths, and stumbles on the worn out sign reading "salle d'attente," which Mitford a former professor at the school had warned him against before his departure from England. He also comes across a perfumed towel and a marked book of poetry lying on the seemingly deserted beach near the southern tip of the island (Conchis' domain). He opens the poetry book at one of the marked passages, and reads a selection from T. S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*:

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time. <sup>12</sup>

He discovers that he is trespassing on the property of Conchis, a wealthy, enigmatic, mystery man of the island, and initiates inquiries about him in the village adjoining the school. From Sarantoupolos, proprietor of a tavern, and "leading estiatoras, a great walrus of a man, "<sup>13</sup> he learns that Conchis does not co-mingle with the villagers because they believe he had betrayed them during the German invasion of Greece in World War II. Hermes, Conchis' messenger, who is present at the tavern, who "had a bad eye, fixed, with a sinister pallor, "<sup>14</sup> volunteers the meagre information that Conchis lives alone with Martha, his housekeeper and passes his time by cultivating his garden. Otherwise he has no visitors, reads voluptuously, speaks many languages, and at regular intervals departs on mysterious voyages.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 64.



Two professors at Nicholas' school admit they had met Conchis in 1949, one describing him as a cynical man, and an atheist, the other as a retired musician. They both agree that the owner of the villa cherished his privacy. They furthermore, clarify the role Conchis played in the Greek resistance movement against the Germans, and explain that the Germans had asked him to execute three guerrilla fighters responsible for the shooting in cold blood of three bathing Germans, but he had refused. He was consequently lined up for death with eighty-one hostages rounded up from the village. By some miracle Conchis was not killed by the firing squad's bullets. Due to the massive revengeful massacre imposed on the inhabitants, the villagers felt that Conchis should have turned over the guerilla fighters to the Germans and saved the lives of the innocent hostages.

Nicholas, now fully curious about the Magus, this magician and "juggler of dice," pays him a call and finds that he is expected, heralded by Hermes, the fleet-winged messenger. Nicholas meets favor in "Prospero's" eyes and becomes a regular week-end visitor at the villa.

Now Nicholas, seated opposite Conchis on the terrace of his villa on the central crest of the south side of the island, far away from



the village and the school, describes his host:

He was nearly completely bald, brown as old leather, short and spare, a man whose age was impossible to tell; perhaps sixty, perhaps seventy; dressed in a navy-blue shirt, knee-length shorts, and a pair of salt-stained gym-shoes. The most striking thing about him was the intensity of his eyes; very dark brown, staring with a simian penetration emphasized by the remarkably clear whites; eyes that seemed not quite human.<sup>15</sup>

" "Come now, Prospero will show you his domaine,"<sup>16</sup> Conchis bids Nicholas and leads him away from the terrace over looking the Aegean sea and the languishing ash-lilac mountains towards the cliffs and his private beach. Conchis explains to Nicholas that the Albanians had called the cliffs Bourani:

"The Albanians were pirates. Not poets. Their word for this cape was Bourani. Two hundred years ago it was their slang word for gourd. Also for skull. "... Death and water." "<sup>17</sup>

The skull-like name has found itself metamorphosized in Conchis himself, Nicholas' host. Conchis with his emotion-purged, mask-like face, never smiles. The deep furrows which run down the side of his nose suggest experience to Nicholas and give him the impression

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

that he is slightly mad. His self-possessed host reminds him of

Picasso:

He had a bizarre family resemblance to Picasso; saurian as well as simian, decades of living in the sun, the quintessential Mediterranean man, who had discarded everything that lay between him and his vitality. A monkey-glander, essence of queen bees; and intense by choice and exercise as much as by nature.<sup>18</sup>

During his visits, Nicholas is initiated into a life of mystical, mental and aesthetic practises, knowledge of which his host had himself acquired over a number of years. Both the exterior and the interior of the villa exhibit a wide range of artistic objects. The house itself seems to Nicholas to be too un-Greek and opulent, like Swiss snow, while among the trees, overlooking the blue Mediterranean, is erected the figure of a Priapus, "with a grotesquely enormous erect phallus."<sup>19</sup> Its hands are also raised while "on its face it had a manic-satyric grin."<sup>20</sup>

"In classical times every garden and orchard had one. To frighten away thieves and bring fertility. It should be made of pearwood."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

There is also the sign, now worn out, reading salle d'attente, which Mitford had warned Nicholas to beware of.

The same serenity and luxuriousness that characterize the landscape and the exterior of the villa, is extended to the interior. The living room contains original paintings by Modigliani, a maquette by Rodin, a sculpture by Giacometti, with the sculptor's scrawl on the back: "the side that museums never show,"<sup>22</sup> and two Bonnards :

"Sunlight. A naked girl. A chair. A towel, a bidet.  
A tiled floor. A little dog. And he gives the whole  
of existence a reason."

Nicholas is impressed, and stands completely transfixed by the experience:

It was an unforgettable painting; it set a dense golden halo of light around the most trivial of moments, so that the moment, and all such moments, could never be completely trivial again.<sup>23</sup>

The "quintessential Mediterranean man," is calculating and purposive in every gesture or acquirement in his villa. There is never anything

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 88.

trivial or meaningless that Conchis does, and the wealth, mystery, and symbolic possessions Conchis has acquired, combined with the sense of learning, mystery and self-confidence he exhibits, create around Conchis an aura of luxuriousness and profundity that leave Nicholas baffled. While Ferdinand had purchased indiscriminately for his house in The Collector, and with no sense of value of the items purchased, Prospero with taste and understanding has bought the original works of The Immortals, the works of famous, great men of the past.

A musician as well as art collector, Conchis owns a collection of harpsichords on which he plays works by Bach, Telemann and Rameau. From his seat of self-assumed cultural superiority Nicholas is forced to admit:

I stole a look at Conchis as he gazed up at the picture; he had, by no other logic than that of cultural snobbery, gained a whole new dimension of social respectability for me, and I began to feel much less sure of his eccentricity and his phoniness, of my own superiority in the matter of what life was really about.<sup>24</sup>

Every aspect of artistic accomplishment is represented in the villa. While biographies and autobiographies as well as scientific and medical books fill the elegant bookshelves, Conchis has very little use for novels:

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

"Why should I struggle through hundreds of pages of fabrication to reach half a dozen very little truths... Words are for truth. For facts, Not fiction." <sup>25</sup>

Consequently he had burnt all the novels he had once owned by Dostoievsky, Flaubert, Dickens and Cervantes.

Conchis had also at one time been interested in ornithography, and possesses many books on this subject. Side by side with these acquisitions, and grotesquely out of place with the quiet elegance of the furnishings are other items. One is a snuff box, the interior of which has the engraving of two satyrs coupling with a woman in an obscene pose. Another is an eighteenth-century clock with a cupid through whose loins a shaft protrudes, pointing at eight o'clock, signifying Enchantment. Three other states of desire are pinpointed at six o'clock to signify Exhaustion, ten o'clock for Erection and finally twelve o'clock for Ecstasy. These items are reminiscent of Nicholas' college days when he had flirted with Dandyism.

Also on the same mantelpiece and in direct opposition to the note of eroticism struck by the above items, stands framed the photograph of a demure, Edwardian, innocent-looking girl. Conchis

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

comments to Nicholas on this photograph: "She was once my fiancée."<sup>26</sup>  
It is with the introduction of Lily, Conchis' dead fiancée, that the plot, already rich, thickens.

The Magus is prefaced by the following passage from The Key to the Tarot, by Arthur Edward Waite:

On the table in front of the Magus are the symbols of the four Tarot suits, signifying the elements of natural life, which lie like counters before the adept, and he adapts them as he wills. Beneath are roses and lilies, the flos campi and lilium convallium, changed into garden flowers, to show the culture of aspiration,

Conchis finds in Lily one of the elements of natural life, a "lilium convallium," inherent in the Edwardian characteristics of modesty and innocence. Pure and innocent, she is again Miranda, for whom Nicholas/Ferdinand will have to undergo certain tasks set for him by Prospero before becoming worthy to win her hand. Juxtaposed on the mantelpiece, the photograph and the erotic clock symbolize and sum up the essence and values of two centuries. The former signifies the image of Victorian propriety and modesty that has passed, while the latter emphasizes the 20th century stress upon lust.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

Conchis points this out to Nicholas:

"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. And if you are wise you will never pity the past for what it did not know. But pity yourself for what it did."<sup>27</sup>

Nicholas is still a Caliban, who, to be raised to the level of Ferdinand, must learn to unlearn all that 20th Century western culture has thoroughly nurtured in him. He has only vague stirrings of remoteness and unrest. As he shares an evening meal on Conchis' terrace a ship calmly sails by, and Nicholas' sense of remoteness and alienation from himself and his past is emphasized. An unconscious part of him longs for the presence of Alison at that instant:

I could imagine her beside me, her hand in mine; and she was human worth, normality, standard to go by. I had always seen myself as potentially a sort of protector of her; and for the first time, that evening at Bourani, I saw that perhaps she had been, or could have been a protector of me. . . I lit a cigarette as Alison, at such a moment, would have lit a cigarette.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

A new level of reality is being created for Nicholas where even homosexuality among the beautiful men of Greece is permissible. Conchis pries out of Nicholas the relationship he had with Alison in England and prods him to take action, not to drift:

"You think of her, you want to see her -- you must write again!... You are leaving it to hazard. We no more have to leave everything to hazard than we have to drown in the sea... Swim!"<sup>31</sup>

The island is a site of myths, Nicholas observes, "split into dark and light,"<sup>32</sup> with the potential of a clean canvas. On it the Apollonian and Dionysian cults intermingle in the two levels of existence; one signifying mental harmony and unity, the other alive in the subterranean level of the "moha" in man:

"Visitors who went behing the high walls of Saint-Martin had the pleasure of seeing, across the green lawns and among the groves, shephers and shepherdesses who danced and sang, surrounded by their white flock. They were not always dressed in eighteenth-century clothes. Sometimes they wore costumes in the Roman and Greek styles; and in this way the odes of Theocritus and the bucolics of Virgil

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 53.



were brought to life. It was even said that there were more scandalous scenes -- charming nymphs who on summer nights fled in the moonlight from strange dark shapes, half man, half goat. . . "33

The past merges with the present and enacts the symbolic scene for Nicholas' benefit. The calm and peace of Bourani is shattered by the blowing of horns and a projector floods the trees with light. Conchis-Prospero (who has a flock of ariels and calibans ready to do his bidding) affects nonchalance and seems to disappear in some mystical reverie. Nicholas, transfixed, watches the scene out of Le Masque Francais au Dix-huitieme Siecle unfold itself before him. In the midst of the beam of light stands Apollo reincarnated wearing on his head a crown of leaves, but who otherwise is absolutely naked. A nymph, pursued by a satyr runs out from the trees into the light and disappears. From the exact spot of her disappearance, a new figure, the nymph metamorphosized re-emerges in a long saffron chiton with a thin blood-red hem. She has long knee-length buckskins and carries a quiver on her shoulders, while her left hand holds a long silver painted bow. Her face is painted to an almost unnatural white with the eyes and hair drawn backward and elongated to give a sinister effect. Like a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

hunter stalking its prey, she puts the arrow in the quiver and drives it into the heart of the still crouching satyr. Artemis-Diana has obtained her revenge over the bucolic lust of Dionysus; she calmly walks to and stands by the side of her brother, Apollo.

Conchis has created for the benefit of Nicholas a prolonged and complicated masque in which Nicholas must participate. It is one that cannot be lifted, and one in which the actors assume different persona and disguises. The masque never comes to a stop and is satisfied with its audience of one.

"In our age it is not sex that raises its ugly head, but love,"<sup>34</sup> Nicholas realizes. The cult of the Dionysian reigns supreme and unchecked to the detriment of humanity. Conchis, on the other hand, asserts that the dead live again through love, and within the masque Lily is resurrected from the dead to participate in the life of the villa. Nicholas first hears her playing the recorder in accompaniment to Conchis on the harpsichord, and soon sees the girl of the photograph in the flesh. She had died from typhoid after World War II, long after she and Conchis had broken off their engagement because of a divergence in views over the necessity of his dying for his country.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

Conchis recalls the story of their separation and recounts it to his guest:

"Love is the mystery between two people, not the identity. We were at the opposite poles of humanity. Lily was humanity bound to duty, unable to choose, suffering, at the mercy of social ideals. Humanity both crucified and marching towards the cross. And I was free, I was Peter three times renounced determined to survive, whatever the cost."<sup>35</sup>

What Conchis had discovered was the presence of a sixth sense, that of a "passion to exist." He was dismayed at the senseless destruction of minds: memories, loves, sensations, worlds, universes "all for a few hundred yards of useless mud."<sup>36</sup> "For the human mind is more a universe than the universe itself --" and to destroy men in the name of an ideal or in the name of justice is self defeating:

"I saw that this cataclysm must be an expiation for some barbarous crime of civilization, some terrible human lie. What the lie was, I had too little knowledge of history or science to know then. I know now it was our believing that we were fulfilling some end, serving some plan --

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

that would come out well in the end, because there was some great plan over all. Instead of the reality. There is no plan. All is hazard. And the only thing that will preserve us is ourselves. "<sup>37</sup>

Man comes from night and goes into night, he explains. "Why live in night?" The theme of Fowles' article, "The Trouble with Starlets," is again reiterated, that death is part of life and should be accepted, not camouflaged with the cherubs of "Patriotism, propaganda, professional honor, esprit de corps," <sup>38</sup> Perfection is non-existent -- a Parahades -- and only hazard reigns supreme.

That night, the powerful smell of decaying bodies in war-time trenches permeates Nicholas' bedroom to the accompaniment of the song "Tipperary." The magician has conjured up vividly through the senses of smell and sound the reality of the war experience to Conchis which Nicholas can only recognize, but in which he had never participated. The magician has opened up before his Ferdinand another aspect of unfamiliar reality with which he must become familiar. In a later scene, Nicholas is brought face to face with war time Greece in which Conchis played a vital role, as was mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

Nicholas must be initiated into the reality of history, the terrors of war, the wonders of faith, the limitations of science, and the intrusion of the past, of history into the present. The mystic in Conchis asserts that man can develop, by virtue of his mind, the ability to live through many other centuries and travel in knowledge through their experiences. Nicholas with wide-eyed politeness questions Conchis:

"You . . . travel to other worlds?"

"Yes. I travel to other worlds." . . .

"In the flesh?"

"If you can tell me where the flesh ends and the mind begins, I will answer that."

"You um . . . you have some evidence of this?"

"Ample evidence . . . For those with the intelligence to see it."

"This is what you meant by election and being psychic?"

"In part."<sup>39</sup>

Conchis considers himself one of the elect, one of those chosen by hazard to understand the various aspects of reality, in other words, an aristos figure and a Magus, a "juggler and caster of dice." He also acknowledges that it is his duty to impart his hard-won knowledge to the new generation in his century. As Nicholas proves to be a willing and eager pupil, and representative of his generation, the Magus tells him:

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 97 - 98.

"I am going to say something about you that may shock you, I know something about you that you do not know yourself. . . You too are psychic, Nicholas. You are sure you are not. I know that."<sup>40</sup>

Conchis senses Nicholas' disbelief and negative reaction to his words, and warns him of the dangers inherent in our contra-suggestible century:

"You are like a porcupine. When the animal has its spines erect, it cannot eat. If you do not eat, you will starve. And your prickles will die with the rest of your body."<sup>41</sup>

Any feelings of heroism or optimism in our age have been shattered, and the pupil cannot see where the ultimate goal of all striving leads:

"I was rather ambitious once. I ought to have been blind as well. Then perhaps I wouldn't feel defeated. . . It's not all me. It's in the age. In all my generation. We all feel the same."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

But Conchis is optimistic over the prospects and the future of the present era. He finds it one of enlightenment that has destroyed more darkness in the last fifty years than in the last five million. He stresses to Nicholas:

"But you and I ! We live, we are this wonderful age. We are not destroyed, We did not even destroy." <sup>43</sup> We

Lily soon joins them in their conversations and in Conchis' narratives about the past. She fascinates Nicholas with the old world charm that she practises, coquettishly tantalizing him then withdrawing. It is a world familiar to the elderly generation but foreign to Nicholas.

Through the senses of smell and hearing and the reincarnation of Lily, the horror and meaninglessness of war became real to Nicholas. And now, he questions:

Taste seemed irrelevant -- but touch ... how on earth could he expect me even to pretend to believe that what I might touch was 'psychic' ? <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

Yet touch is one of the most important senses to cultivate for the man who has "learned to temper his passions" (Prospero), and Nicholas must be trained towards that end. In our day of collecting, an appreciation for the intrinsic value of objects threatens to disappear along with the "whole species of feeling" that is part of the heritage of modern man. To demonstrate this theme once more, Conchis admits his indebtedness to de Deukans, owner of a beautiful chateau, Givray-le-Duc, for the example he provided, for by attempting to create an island of perfection in the midst of an imperfect universe, he destroyed all his possessions as well as himself.

The chateau, of Moorish and British design, contained in addition to a very large and rare collection of various kinds of musical instruments, Renaissance bronzes, armory, and a case of Breguets, "la Maitresse-Machine," Mirabelle. This mechanical woman, lies with open legs on a four-poster bed. When her human master lies on top of her, he must -- to avoid being stabbed to death by a knife that would otherwise pierce his groin -- press a lever at the back of her head. Any other adulterer, ignorant of the secret, would inevitably be stabbed to death. In this manner



the owner protects his own, and his machine-mistress only respects her master.

The collector in our century has gone one step beyond the Dionysian cult where lust reigns supreme. Woman has lost the power to guide her destiny and has been converted into a machine that her owner turns on and off at his command. Modern western man has not only lost the capacity to love, but has turned into a scientific monster.

To illustrate further the dehumanization of man by the inventions of modern technology, de Dukans even collects the "Holy Member" as an item worthy of collection:

"... The religious or indeed human blasphemy it represented had no significance for him."<sup>45</sup>

He is completely possessed by his possessions, as Ferdinand Clegg before him. One night, one of his hired help makes the mistake of admitting a live woman into the mechanical and precise atmosphere of the chateau, de Deukans, in a fit of furious rage, drives her off.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

As an act of revenge the outraged lover sets fire to the invaluable possessions of this small utopia, and it goes up in smoke. Before destroying himself, de Deukans bequeaths Conchis the fragment of a question in Latin:

"Which are you drinking? The water of the wave?"<sup>46</sup>

Since chaos and logos or reason and passion, rule the world, Conchis points out: "We all drink both. It is not a precept. But a mirror."<sup>47</sup>

Yet de Deukans' system of ordered and controlled chateaux is springing all over the world, mushrooming over putrescent flesh and the poverty of masses. There is an unequal distribution of wealth and power advocating mass quality goods for the public while the intellectual and educated blindly surround themselves with objects to worship:

"Whenever I see a photograph of a teeming horde of Chinese peasants, or of some military procession, whenever I see a cheap newspaper crammed with advertisements for mass-produced rubbish ... I see also de Deukans."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

In the meantime, Nicholas has been amorously pursuing Lily who keeps him in a state of perpetual suspense and bewilderment. Dressed in World War I fashions, a striped mussel-blue dress with white and pink colors, she carries a matching, fringed sunshade. As she stands in the sunlight against the background of the ocean, her clinging dress outlining the contours of her perfectly proportioned body, blond strands of her long hair play against her face. In over-precise pronunciation, she tantalizes Nicholas who had expressed the desire to kiss her:

"Mr. Urfe ! . . . Are you asking me to commit osculation?"

He gives her "what I trusted was both a hopelessly attracted and a totally unduped look,"<sup>49</sup> to lure her into bestowing her favors. But it is a double faced relationship where she continues to be enigmatic towards him too:

And it was perfect; a mischievous girl of 1915 poking fun at a feeble Victorian joke; a lovely double remove; the linguistic-dramatic equivalent of some complicated ballet movement; and she looked absurd and lovely as she did it. She pushed her cheek forward, and I hardly had time to touch it with my lips before she had skipped back. I stood and watched her bent head.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

Nicholas is thrilled and his future seems to hold the promise of fulfillment; he is fascinated by the aura of mystery surrounding the undiscovered. A new reality, heretofore unknown to him has been opened up in his consciousness:

... I had the strangest feeling, compounded of the early hour, the absolute solitude, and what had happened, of having entered a myth; a knowledge of what it was like physically, moment by moment, to have been young and ancient, a Ulysses on his way to meet Circe, a Theseus on his journey to Crete, an Oedipus still searching for his destiny.<sup>51</sup>

It is precisely this sense of adventure derived from the unravelling of mystery and the sense of reward to be achieved later that the weaver of mysteries, Conchis, is seeking to inculcate into his young initiatee. Conchis posits that mankind needs the existence of mysteries, not their solution. Men cannot confront reality immediately -- they cannot see it, as it were, face to face. As man's symbolic activity advances, so does physical reality recede in direct proportion. It is only through language, myth, and art that man can confront reality. Nicholas still has to meet with the reality of himself through the web of human experience, which Conchis is weaving for him.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

To confuse Nicholas' tenuous relation with Lily further, her twin sister Rose-June joins the masque. Having just parted from Lily and started his walk up towards the villa, Nicholas sees her suddenly at the top of the steep incline accompanied by a figure dressed in black, "masqued in the head of an enormous black dog, or jackal, with a long muzzle and high pointed ears."<sup>52</sup> He is Cerberus, guardian of the underworld and of the twins. At the appearance of Rose, the second flower of the garden, Lily sheds her demure pose as an Edwardian and informs Nicholas that she and her sister had been hired as actresses to play in a movie directed by Conchis, had been misled and are really at his mercy. Nicholas, already carried away emotionally with the promise of capturing the elusive Lily, promises to help the two escape the clutches of the wealthy Greek and return to their native country, England. But, in the meantime, Nicholas as the acknowledged week-end guest of his patron must continue to play his part in the outdoor theater created for him by Conchis.

To show Nicholas the inefficacy and insufficiency of reason to handle the world's problems, Conchis gives our hero a pamphlet

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

to read by "The Society for Reason," to which Conchis had belonged in his youth. It asserts that the only way to a better life is to "introduce reason at all times."<sup>53</sup> But even Nicholas realizes:

Words have lost their power, either for good or for evil; still hung, like a mist, over the reality of action, distorting, misleading, castrating; but at least since Hitler and Hiroshima they were seen to be a mist, a flimsy superstructure.<sup>54</sup>

Lily had told Nicholas that he had no sense of imagination or poetry in him, that he would take a beautiful toy apart to see how it works. Nicholas had retaliated that "it's one's sense of reality,"<sup>55</sup> which like a sense of gravity one could resist only so long. This is the subject of another pamphlet that the host hands his guest to read "On Communication with other Worlds." It asserts that the muses are not a poetic fiction, but inhabit the world, and that spiritual communion is possible with other worlds. It is from this more advanced world that mankind obtains its noble and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

beneficial mental behavior; "which appears in our societies as good conscience, humane deeds, artistic inspiration, and scientific genius."<sup>56</sup>

Conchis had already explained to Nicholas his belief in an extra-sensory world, the world of the noosphere and the "It." To enter this world his guest would have to put on a rose-colored pair of Kantian glasses to enable him to pervade that "world of eternal doubt that hovers between the thing-in-itself and our perception of it."<sup>57</sup> Conchis prepares the ground for Nicholas' psychic participation in a multi-lateral universe by tiring him physically in rebuilding a stone wall surrounding the grounds at Bourani. Next, at their usual dinner rendezvous on the terrace, he has him consume more than his ordinary quota of raki and then asks him to relax and acquiesce to hypnosis.

Nicholas finds he has lost all sense of self and is floating in a volitionless universe. He has "no sensation of beauty, of morality, of divinity, or physical geometry, " only the " sensation of the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>57</sup> John Fowles, The Aristos. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), p. 127.

situation,"<sup>58</sup> which an animal might have. The sensation of a rising of tension is followed by a gust of wind blowing across his face, then a sensation of light and finally a realization of his suspension in a void;

I had the sense that this was the fundamental reality and that reality had a universal mouth to tell me so; no sense of divinity, of communion, of the brotherhood of man, of anything I had expected before I became suggestible. No pantheism, no humanism. But something much wider, cooler and more abstruse. That reality was endless interaction. No good, no evil; no beauty, no ugliness.<sup>59</sup>

This is consistent with Fowles' philosophy that nature has no moral connotations, that it is man who imposes on it interpretations of good and evil. It is also the failure of the seven men on the raft of life to fathom the true nature of being; a privilege reserved for the free existential, the aristos, to uncover, and arrive at the quintessence of pure being.

Amidst this confusion of myth and mystery, Nicholas receives the news that his Australian girl friend, Alison, intends to come to Athens for a few days to spend her holiday with him. She writes

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<sup>58</sup>The Magus, p. 223.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 224.



him a letter from cold, rainy England to inform him of her intention. Her life as an air hostess is exhausting and mechanical and she still hopes to find in Nicholas the solace for the ache and loneliness she suffers. She explains that she is writing to him in a room with mauve wallpaper decorated with green plums, "You'd be sick all down it."<sup>60</sup> Nicholas' reaction is the same as before:

I began to think erotically of Alison again; of the dirty-weekend pleasures of having her in some Athens hotel bedroom; or birds in the hand being worth more than birds in the bush; and with better motives, of her loneliness, her perpetual mixed-up loneliness.<sup>61</sup>

He has not ceased to want to exploit Alison's love for him and her loneliness; he is unable to place himself in Alison's place, to grasp her desperate need for human affection and fulfillment. Nicholas will only learn to appreciate her love for him after he has been reformed at the hands of Conchis. His mature host explains to him:

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

"There comes a time in each life like a point of fulcrum, At that time you must accept yourself. It is not any more what you will become. It is what you are and always will be. You are too young to know this. You are still becoming. Not being."<sup>62</sup>

Conchis has faith in the transience of Nicholas' moral blindness and aspires towards his aesthetic enlightenment. He is aware of the "silence" which reigns within Nicholas, which needs to be filled. Nicholas has admitted to himself:

I was worse off than even Alison was; she hated life, I hated myself. I had created nothing, I belonged to nothingness, to the neant, and it seemed to me that my own death was the only thing left that I could create.<sup>63</sup>

In his talks with Lily he misrepresents his image of himself and past relationship with Alison:

So we talked about Nicholas: his family, his ambitions and his failings. The third person was right, because I presented a sort of ideal self to her, a victim of circumstances, a mixture of attractive raffishness and essential inner decency. I wanted to kill Alison off in her mind, and confessed to a "rather messy affaire" that had made me leave England.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 100 - 101.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 49 - 50.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 326.

Metaphorically speaking, Nicholas is building his house on false pretences with no foundations. "Surrender of the self brings immortality with it,"<sup>65</sup> which is achieved by first traveling outside of the narrow limitations of self into infinite time and space, and secondly, by having recognized the unimportance of the individual in the universal plan, and abandoning oneself. Only through this abandonment can Nicholas achieve resurrection, and balance himself on the tightrope of hazardous existence once more.

Against his will, Nicholas travels to Athens to meet Alison, resenting her intrusion and her interruption of the masque. They climb Mount Parnassus and make love, but he confesses to his love for Lily and they part after a violent quarrel. Alison screams at him:

"I think you're so blind you probably don't even know you don't love me. You don't even know you're a filthy selfish bastard who can't, can't like being impotent, can't ever think of anything except number one. Because nothing can hurt you, Nicko. Deep down, where it counts, You've built your life so that nothing can ever reach you. So

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<sup>65</sup>Hermann Hesse, Steppenwolf, (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 69.

whatever you do you can say, I couldn't help it. You can't lose. You can always have your next adventure. Your next bloody affaire. " <sup>66</sup>

Later he received a letter from her friend Ann Taylor along with a newspaper clipping informing him of her suicide. Guilty and tired of deceiving and being deceived, he resolves to make a clean start, "to be forgiven," weary of being "at the mercy of [my] loins: <sup>67</sup>

My monstrous crime was Adam's, the oldest and most vicious of all male selfishnesses: to have imposed the role I needed from Alison on her real self. Something far worse than lèse-majesté. Lèse-humanité. <sup>68</sup>

Only now through his second fall does he realize he is in need of redemption; by being aware of his guilt he is ready for sacrifice. Nicholas' moral sense is revitalized, for he had sent Alison, bearing her human cross, to death alone. Although Nicholas has renounced Alison and has gained his freedom, he is unable to escape her face: She had said:

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<sup>66</sup> The Magus, p. 261.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 366.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid,

"When you love me (and she had not meant 'make love to me') it's as if God forgave me for being the mess I am ..."<sup>69</sup>

He stands in the same relationship to Alison as Conchis had previously stood in regard to Lily, after breaking off his engagement in defiance of the destruction of war:

"I still see her face, Her face staring, staring into the darkness as if she was trying to gaze herself into another world. 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."<sup>70</sup>

Alison had, in essence, told him "On you my suffering or bliss depends," but Nicholas, unable to surrender his self, had destroyed her. Now increasingly aware of having sacrificed Alison, he seeks to find some solid faith to cling to, categorizing himself and the twins Rose-June and Lily-Julie as "English: born with masks and bred to lie,"<sup>71</sup> Conchis, the mature and intelligent man of the world, now persuades him of the reality of individualistic, irrational faith.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 366

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 338.

One of Conchis' pursuits, in addition to collecting (de Deukans is a persona of Conchis) and playing the harpsichord, is ornithography, as mentioned earlier. This hobby had driven him, he tells Nicholas, to seek out Gustav Nygaard, a world-wide famous ornithographer and farmer whose farm, Seidevarre, lies in the heart of the forests that run from Norway and Finland into Russia. Henrik, Gustav's brother had operated the farm in conjunction with his wife, Ragnar, and their two children. With the fiery soul of a mystic he had in his youth run away to become a sailor and instead was trapped in the engine room of the ship, stacking fuel. Probably a victim of what psychologists designate as anal overtraining, his confinement in the lower berths of the ship had started in him a process of nervous disorientation which led to his final collapse and withdrawal to the outer boundaries of the farm where he awaited the coming of God. His wife, unable to cope with the duties of the farm, had recalled Gustav from his travels abroad to help in its operation. Gustav, working side by side with Ragnar, fell hopelessly in love with her.

Henrik, as a Jansenist, believed in "divine cruelty." In his system, he considered himself elect, especially chosen to be

punished and tormented. The walls of his secluded hut contain inscriptions of passages taken from the book of Exodus in the Bible, one of them reads: "I gave you light in a pillar of fire, yet have you forgotten me, saith the Lord,"<sup>72</sup> Henrik presents the image of a fiery figure himself, and when Conchis attempts to approach him, he strikes at him with an axe. Conchis is saved from certain death through Henrik's inability to see well, his mania having partially blinded him. Conchis, at that time a proponent of medicine, and a student of psychology, had thought that by reasoning with Henrik he could convince him to undergo an operation to remove the cataract which was causing his blindness. He remarks to his audience, Nicholas and Lily, that to that day he had never met an individual who had continued the pursuit of an ultimate truth to the point of madness. For Conchis, science had been the only reality, and his meeting with Henrik had shattered the complacency of his mind, as Henrik had shattered the night with his loud cry to almighty god: "I am waiting, I am purified, I am prepared,"<sup>73</sup> Standing across from him,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

separated by the moon-gray water, Conchis suddenly realizes that Henrik is actually meeting God, and the night takes on an atmosphere of majesty and mystery:

That great passive monster, reality, was no longer dead, easy to handle, . . . The net was nothing, reality burst through it, <sup>74</sup>

The ornithographer returns home much impressed:

"I went back to the farmstead a wiser young man. It seemed incredible to me that a man should reject medicine, reason, science so violently. But I felt that this man would have rejected everything else about me as well if he had known it -- the pursuit of pleasure, of music, of reason, of medicine. That axe would have driven right through the skull of all our pleasure-oriented civilization. Our science, our psychoanalysis. To him all that was not the great meeting was what the Buddhists call lilas -- the futile pursuit of triviality. . . "75

As a result of his experience with Henrik, Conchis scorned the old scientific, classifying approach to life. All standards, beliefs and prejudices seemed trivial in comparison to the power of Henrik's conviction. On the same night that Henrik watches his pillar of fire, a tremendous fire burns Givray-le-Duc, two phenomena, seemingly unconnected, that rupture the thin veil of the limitations

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 286.



of time and space:

"All that is past possesses our present. Seidevarre possesses Bourani. Whatever happens here, now, whatever governs what happens is partly, no, is essentially, what happened thirty years ago in that Norwegian forest."<sup>76</sup>

Seidevarre, landscape with a soul, derived from the Lapp name for "hill of the holy stone," the dolmen is also part of the theater. As de Deukans had exposed the evils latent in scientific exploitation and indiscriminate collection, so had Seidevarre shattered the veil of meaningful, well-ordered reality. A third dimension of human experience is laid bare which holds its own with the mystical religions of ancient Greece and the culture of the orient.

Before the current version of the masque ends, Nicholas on one of his trips back to school is suddenly transferred back to Greece of 1940. He is surrounded by German occupation forces who gutturally order him to stand by and let some Greek resistance fighters pass through. The Greek prisoners are wounded and bruised as a result of the blows of the German rifle butts. Nicholas flinches when their leader is given a harsh blow: "It shocked me

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

almost as if I was the one hit,"<sup>77</sup> Nicholas had been informed by Conchis of the role the latter had played during the German occupation. Conchis had described Colonel Wimmel as a German with a "huge acne-covered jaw and small eyelash eyes,"<sup>78</sup> who had assumed it his duty to reimpose order on the Island in the Nazi mission to impose order on the chaos of Europe:

"One of the great fallacies of our time is that the Nazis rose to power because they imposed order on chaos. Precisely the opposite is true -- They were successful because they imposed chaos on order. They tore up the commandments, they denied the superego, what you will. They said, you may persecute the minority, you may kill, you may torture, you may couple and breed without love. They offered humanity all its great temptations. Nothing is true, everything is permitted,"<sup>79</sup>

Under the easy-going leadership of Lieutenant Anton Kluber, the Germans and Greeks had shown toleration towards one another, the Germans by allowing the Greeks to salvage food from their boats instead of dumping it into the sea -- customary to German policy -- and the Greeks by allowing the Germans to swim and lead a free

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 394.

existence on the island. But with the advent of Colonel Wimmel and his maxim "everything is permitted," eighty hostages are shot to pay for the activities of three resistance fighters who had invaded the island. Conchis explains to Nicholas that the Germans had asked him either to be killed or to batter to death the eighty hostages. He was shot with the rest, but miraculously his bullet wounds were not fatal. As a result of his breach of duty, Lieutenant Anton commits suicide.

The Magus, or magician, of Phraxos, drives the moral home to Nicholas:

"The event I have told you is the only European story. It is what Europe is. A Colonel Wimmel. A rebel without a name. An Anton torn between them, killing himself when it is too late. Like a child,"<sup>80</sup>

When asked with whom he sympathized, Nicholas answers, with Anton. Conchis points out to him: "Then you are sick my young friend. You live by death. Not life,"<sup>81</sup> For to sign up under Anton is to watch and despair, while to enlist under Wimmel is to know the meaning of only one word: "You watch and you despair. Or you despair and watch. In the first case, you commit

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

physical suicide; in the second, moral. "<sup>82</sup> Fowles' observations as posited in The Aristos are evident once more. Since the world is chaos and hazard, man must order his existence with fortitude and meet his fate with a smile. The attempt to slip away from moral responsibility is a form of death. Paradoxically, by becoming a victim of hazard, man asserts his freedom and independence of conflicting tendencies.

The concept of war is meaningless for it is launched by a "man's world of brute force, humorless arrogance, illusory prestige and primeval stupidity. "<sup>83</sup> In wars men feel strong and gallant and feel they can assert their superiority to women. But war is "a psychosis caused by an inability to see relationships. " It is therefore the role of women to make men realize the necessity of "this extra dimension of feeling" which mankind needs in order to view objectively economic and historical facts, and above all, "relationship to nothingness, to death. "<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

The realization that "men have a certain capacity for happiness and unhappiness"<sup>85</sup> not influenced by the economic hazards of life prompted Conchis to launch a theater, or a "meta-theater," which is a refinement of the older form and does not need an audience. As mentioned earlier, the actors in this theater change their roles within the metaphorical masque, and now the purpose shifts to inculcate in Nicholas the meaning of true unhappiness, similar to that which Alison had suffered. As Alison had reflected as in a mirror Nicholas' inability to love, so Greece had shown him that he must suffer in order to learn.

Conchis presumably unaware of Alison's death, advises Nicholas:

"Go back to England make it up with this girl you spoke of. Marry her and have a family and learn to be what you really are."<sup>86</sup>

Nicholas must learn to drink the water and the wave, and not fear to live. To analyze the meaning of life is to destroy it; he must accept the fact that struggle and suffering are part of the essence of the universe.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 373.

The school year is almost drawing to a close and Prospero announces that he is leaving his domain. Nicholas believes he has won the affections of Lily-Julie and that with the imminent departure of Conchis he will be free to possess what he has long waited for. Lily, with her body and kisses, confesses that she loves him, and Nicholas is duped into believing that very soon he will be able to seduce Lily and make her his wife. But a further surprise and shock awaits him. At last he has Lily-Julie to himself in the privacy of a hotel bedroom, but when just about to embark on sexual relations after prolonged coquetry and elusiveness on his partner's part, the door is jerked open and Lily in a hard voice announces: "There is no Julie."<sup>87</sup> Joe, the Negro who had played the part of Cerberus, watch-dog to the girls, and the German, Anton, bind and gag Nicholas.

When our hero awakes in strange and bizarre surroundings (similar to a highly symbolic scene in a modern Italian movie), his guardians put a black mask over his eyes and forehead, decorated with white ribbons and rosettes, the sign of an initiatee in the Eleusinian mysteries and part of Masonic ritual. He is then carted

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

to a long assembly room where a tribunal composed of the emblematic symbols of the Cabala file in and take their places at a long table:

Down the line: the stag-devil, the crocodile-devil, the vampire, the succubus, the birdwoman, the magician, the coffin-sedan, the goat-devil, the jackal-devil, the Pierrot-skeleton, the corn doll, the Aztec, the witch,<sup>88</sup>

Above what Nicholas designates as the "long line of carnival puppets,"<sup>89</sup> stands a black cross with the top swollen, on its left a patch of deep rose over a large door with the painting of a hand condemningly pointing downward.

The Cabalistic crew start to unrobe before starting their official functions. The witch proves to be Lily-Julie, the vampire with the scarred wrist is her twin sister Rose, the astrologer magician is Conchis, the Pierrot skeleton is Anton, and the corn doll, Maria, Conchis' former housekeeper. Colonel Wimmel emerges from under the Aztec head, while the others were various actors whom Nicholas did not know.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Residing in the center is a coffin-sedan containing "Ashtaroth the Unseen"<sup>90</sup> ( which later turns out to have contained Alison).

The tribunal inform Nicholas that under a drug-imposed narcosis they had derived clinical evidence about his unconscious desires. Also that it had been important that he, Nicholas, not be aware that he was the subject of an experiment.

A quasi-lesbian reads "in a belligerent transatlantic monotone"<sup>91</sup> the records the court have amassed on Nicholas:

"The subject of our 1953 experiment belongs to a familiar category of semi-intellectual introversion. Although excellent for our purposes his personality pattern is without subsidiary interest. The most significant feature of his life style is negative: its lack of social content.

Our motives for this attitude spring from an only partly resolved Oedipal complex. The subject shows characteristic symptoms of mingled fear and resentment of authority, especially male authority and the usual accompanying basic syndrome: an ambivalent attitude towards women, in which they are seen both as desired objects and as objects which have betrayed him, and therefore merit his revenge and counter-betrayal. . . "<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 461.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



They bring out calmly and in a clinical manner all the deficiencies and repressions of Nicholas' elemental self. As the court continues, their victim squirms with embarrassment at this public exposition of his private life, and ends by hating them for the pertinency of their conclusions.

The students of psychology realize the shame Nicholas is undergoing and hand him a whip to use on Dr. Maxwell, alias Julie, alias Lily. But some intrinsic British decency in Nicholas restrains him:

I understood what I had misunderstood,  
I was not holding a cat in my hand in an underground cistern.  
I was in a sunlit square and in my hands I held a German  
sub-machine gun,<sup>93</sup>

He realizes his freedom lies in not striking back, and that Conchis' process of indoctrination: "the charades, the psychical, the theatrical, the sexual, the psychological,"<sup>94</sup> had led him to this moment of holding the whip in his hand unable to use it on his adversary, as Conchis had been unable to use it on the Greek guerrilla fighters

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid, pp. 473 - 474.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid,

years ago. By refraining from action, he gains deeper insight into his motives and senses that he has entered into some wiser, esoteric society:

As I stood there, close to their eleven silences, their faces without hostility yet without concession, faces dissociated from my anger, as close-remote and oblique as the faces in a Flemish Adoration, I felt myself almost physically dwindling; as one dwindles before certain works of art, certain truths, seeing one's smallness, narrow-mindedness, insufficiency in their dimension and value,<sup>95</sup>

Nicholas' process of "disintoxication" goes on. He is subjected to a scene of passionate love making on film. The principals are Lily and Joe: "Polymus films present ... The Shameful Truth ... With the Fabulous Whore ... who you will remember as Isis, Astarte, Kali ... and as the captivating Lily Montgomery ... As the Unforgettable Desirable Julie Holmes ... and as the learned and courageous Vanessa Maxwell ... and now in her greatest role as herself ... costarring the monster of the Mississippi ... Joe Harrison ... as himself."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., new 474 - 475.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., new pp. 477 - 478.

The obscene and pornographic scene of copulation, carried on before the eyes of the jilted lover is a grotesque parody of the love between Othello and Desdemona, ' "Nothing is true, everything is permitted," ' is driven cruelly into Nicholas. She is Artemis, the eternal liar who can act with her lover the required role. He compares himself to the Venice that Desdemona left behind:

I had taken myself to be in some way the traitor Iago punished, in an unwritten sixth act. Chained in hell. But I was also Venice; the state left behind; the thing journeyed from.<sup>97</sup>

But the heroine of the pornographic film is also Eve, the heroine of an unwritten first act who has caused the downfall of man. Having sown the seed of all betrayal, man must bear the consequences and learn to smile. Nicholas is further humiliated by being subjected to a scene of genuine love-making between Lily and Joe, the Negro. Bound and gagged, the initiatee strains at his cords and realizes that the love scene before him is in direct antithesis to the lustful conduct in the movie. The act of copulation is no longer obscene, but a private, familiar act carried out between two people in love, not suffering from the evils of racial discrimination. Conchis, the

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 486.

Magus, intrudes once more on Nicholas' imprisoned solitude; and orders him: "Learn to be cruel, learn to be dry, learn to survive,"<sup>98</sup> with a smile that denotes the cruelty, humorlessness and ruthlessness of human existence.

On his way back to England after having been fired from the school for neglecting his duties, Nicholas is suspicious that Alison's death might only be part of the masque. His suspicion is confirmed when after a mysterious telephone call to look out of the window of his hotel in Athens, he watches her look up at his window deliberately and then get into a taxi and ride away too fast for him to catch her.

"Love is born out of a feeling of isolation,"<sup>99</sup> and Nicholas must wait for many months before meeting Alison again. He must learn to wait in the "salle d'attente" of life before he can deserve the love that Alison has to bestow on him. Her love is the only true reality left, not one of mystical islands and disappearing princesses. Nicholas has learned:

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>99</sup>The Aristos, p. 34.

All my life I had tried to turn life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good or bad behavior -- a god like a novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please, the sensitivity to feel slighted, the ability to adapt himself to whatever he believed the novelist-god wanted.<sup>100</sup>

It is an attribute that the superego requires to foster its image, and the initiated realizes that this perversion of his concept of himself, typical of his generation, is a form of death. From his superior vantage point and new-found knowledge, Nicholas cannot fit once more into the smug, limited life of <sup>the</sup> European. He realizes:

The solemn figures of the Old Country, the Queen, the Public School, Oxbridge, the Right Accent, People Like Us, stood around the table like secret police, ready to crush down in an instant on any attempt at an intelligent European humanity.<sup>101</sup>

Patiently and systematically with practically no friends except his landlady, Kemp, a worn-out but kindly old woman, and the friendship of Jojo, a girl he had picked up in the movies, Nicholas tries to unravel the origin of the mysterious incidents that had

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 517.

happened to him in Phraxos. He succeeds in finding the mother of the twins, Lily de Seites(Persephone), who admits that she spends six months of the year with her ex-lover Conchis on his magic island. When Nicholas tries to discredit the actions and infidelity of her daughters, she retorts: "My daughters were nothing but a personification of your own selfishness,"<sup>102</sup>

Orpheus continues to search for his Eurydice in the streets of London, but understands that he is still under probation. The author intrudes his views into the action of the novel, to inquire whether the hero must be left waiting as is common with all anti-hero types, or should he find his long awaited award:

The smallest hope, a bare continuing to exist, is enough for the anti-hero's future; leave him, says our age, leave him where mankind is in its history, at a crossroads, in a dilemma, with all to lose and only more of the same to win; let him survive, but give him no direction, no reward; because we too are waiting, in our solitary rooms where the telephone never rings, waiting for this girl, this truth, this crystal of humanity, this reality lost through imagination, to return; and to say she returns is a lie.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid , p. 561.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid , p. 606.

Fowles concludes "but the maze has no center, " for man must learn to live fully day by day.

Nicholas is led to Alison by Kemp, his kindly housekeeper, and finally the two stand face to face at the mid-point of the fulcrum. Towering above them are a row of statues of classical gods and between them "a wall of windows."<sup>104</sup> Alison looks in the gods' direction. Are "they" watching, wonders Nicholas, or have they disappeared before the final act of the drama? A hardened and non-committal Alison refuses to divulge either her emotions towards him or respond to Nicholas' assertions that now, after all this time, all he has to offer her is the possibility of a better life. The decision cannot be made in the park, and Nicholas by pre-agreement slaps her and walks purposively away towards the waiting room in Paddington Station, where he had commanded her to meet him. His walk away from the figure of Alison, is an echo of Alison's love-weary but determined stride away from Nicholas the day they had decided to part.

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 614.

But what happened in the following years is silence; is another mystery.<sup>105</sup>

On this note, Fowles ends the novel, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions.

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 606.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

John Fowles has shown in his writings the inconsistency of the chaotic nature of the universe with various branches of modern systematized knowledge. Moreover, he believes, the ordered universe which religion and schools of philosophy and psychology advocate has collapsed in our modern age of mass communication and technology.

The ancient Greek civilization, with its emphasis on Apollonian world order, had felt threatened by Dionysian uncreativity and the dangers of Pan's sweet, flowing music. Now, although we recognize that ideally the two disciplines should merge to create a harmonious unity, man in our century is at the mercy of mass propaganda, and in competition with the machine.

Fowles is not propagating a return to the Apollonian concept of world order, which to him does not exist philosophically. But in that cult he found that men and women were ennobled and had triumphed

over rampant satyrs and the bestial in man. Today our world has not only given way to a Dionysian world view, where lust rules, but has also created Mirabelle, the Maitresse Machine, through whose medium mankind is threatened with the loss of all genuine appreciation for human qualities. Modern man unable to differentiate between a great work of art and the mass produced, inferior, imitative product, has turned to indiscriminate collecting, to surrounding himself with a wide assortment of commercialized beauty. Furthermore, through the help of advertising moguls and eager business tycoons, man has lost the ability to appreciate human genius, to differentiate between great masterpieces and the rubbish that mass production offers him. Consequently, modern man is faced with the necessity of unlearning all he has been taught, to capture his identity once more, and cultivate respect for the qualities of struggle, genius, and self-sacrifice that an artist undergoes before presenting his masterpiece to the world. Only by recapturing his lost sense of identity will man understand the worth of beauty and human achievement, and hear the tune of the pristine shepherd once more.

So far, however, man has refused to take the difficult path of creativity, and has satisfied himself with becoming a collector. Instead of fighting to affirm his manhood, western man has sunk to the level of the "underground" man who wallows in loneliness and leads a somnabulistic (Ferdinand Clegg) existence. Somewhat of a Magus himself, Fowles advocates, instead, intelligence, maturity, aesthetic accomplishment, and purposive, creative action. His message calls on our society to come to terms with the imperfections, tensions, and inconsistencies of existence. There is no use camouflaging the plight of our age with cherubs, cultivating a starlet cult ("The Trouble with Starlets"), embarking on destructive "hate-passion" wars, or attempting to outwit the terrible reality of death by collecting beauty rather than by creating it.

To explain the nature of existence, Fowles draws on the Heraclitean concept of the elements of which the universe consists; and, for locale and characterization, Shakespeare's works, especially Othello and The Tempest. To perform well on this stage of life, man must exhibit the qualities of courage, humaneness, and virtue, which characterized many of the ancient Greek gods, and can choose either

to play the role of Prospero, the magus, scholar, and prince, or the role of Ferdinand, willing scholar and aspirer to the beautiful (Miranda). Otherwise, he remains a Caliban. Our century, in Fowles' opinion, has opted for Caliban. To counteract an increased feeling of isolation and the dead weight of Calibanity, Fowles states through his mouthpiece, Conchis, in The Magus, that he is not merely presenting a narrative, but offering a character, that of the aristos. This ideal man is one who has chosen to enter society by controlling it and driving it to greater heights by enlisting the aid of our great past heritage.

On the basis of the afore-going, Fowles does not emerge as a "hack writer who is uninteresting as a hack," the view of the critic mentioned earlier, nor is his novel, The Magus, a "colossal bouillabaisse combining black magic, occultism, psychological brainwashing... mystery inevitably turned into nonsense,"<sup>1</sup> as another critic labels it. Fowles has a legitimate message to offer our decade, and he communicates it forcefully and clearly. If The Magus is littered with symbolistic images and occultism, it is because the nature of existence is symbolic and unexplainable. It is precisely

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard Bergonzi, "Bouillabaisse," New York Review of Books, VI (March 17, 1966), p. 21.

the attitude of some of these placid reviewers that Fowles is attacking, those who continue to label and classify works into cubicles as neat as the ones Ferdinand Clegg provided for his dead specimens.

The aristos in Fowles' novels fights the hard, crass materialism of a technological age by listening to the music of Bach, Telemann and Rameau, by enjoying the painting of the great masters of the past, such as Rembrandt, Matisse or Picasso, and by attempting to create new masterpieces in harmony with the reality within and around them. Conchis, the Magus of Phraxos, has incorporated the lesson of de Deukans and the faith of Henrik at Seidevarre into his life at Bourani. He has also conquered the different personae and experiences he relates to his Caliban/Ferdinand/Nicholas. Through knowledge, patience, and the restraint of wild passions, twentieth century man can avoid "lilas," the futile pursuit of triviality."

To alleviate his pain and suffering, man above all must learn again how to love. The great tragedy of our time is that he has, instead of this, perverted love into soul-crippling, selfish lust. While lust is transitory and bestial, love is permanent and rare, well worth waiting for. Nicholas by waiting in the "salle d'attente" for the invaluable love

of Alison, gains insight into himself. He learns, as well, the priceless concept, "Thou shalt not commit pain," by refraining from "using" his faithful friend, Jojo, during the period of waiting. Ferdinand Clegg, on the other hand, exploited Miranda to satisfy his hobby of collecting.

Only by learning to shed his Calibanity, will modern western man lead a fulfilling and meaningful existence during the short time allotted him on earth. This is Fowles' message. On the basis of his genuine insight, he has earned a prominent position among the reformers, critics, and novelists of our age.

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