THE CONCEPT

OF

TRUTH AND ARTIFACT

IN

THE FICTION OF JOHN FOWLES

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B.A., Sir George Williams University, 1967

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

in the Department

of

English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October, 1970
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ABSTRACT

The aims of this thesis are to investigate the use of artifice in John Fowles' The Collector, The Magus, and The French Lieutenant's Woman, and show how, through the manipulation of illusion and reality, Fowles explores his own belief that the purpose of the artifact is in revealing the truth.

In the Introduction, Fowles' vision of reality is examined with particular reference to his philosophical work, The Aristos; A Self-Portrait in Ideas. To Fowles, the universe is ruled only by hazard and flux; and therefore, the meaning of life is, in the absence of a comprehensible force of causality, an eternal mystery to man. But it is a positive and omnipresent mystery that can bring to the individual an existential awareness of his own freedom to create meaning through choice and action. In Fowles' vision, the truth that the artifact conveys is this transcendent reality of mystery that lies behind the appearance of the phenomenal world.

In his novels, John Fowles is chiefly concerned with the manner in which conscious artifice brings the knowledge of this truth. Toward this end he imposes a pattern upon his novels that involves the creation of two central characters in a
complementary relationship. One serves as the agent of a fiction within the tale, the other as the elected victim who, through the imposition of that fiction, is brought to an awareness of the truth. Fowles' three novels to date, all moving toward a similar revelation inevitably reveal the recurrent pattern of the search for truth.

Chapter II examines the quest for this truth in *The Collector*. When Clegg, himself a victim of self-imposed illusions, becomes the agent of a fabricated situation into which he brings Miranda, he unwittingly plays the "godgame" and becomes the living embodiment of the absent 'God'. Through him Miranda finds the truth of the mystery posed by the absent 'God'.

Chapter III examines *The Magus* and considers the expanded form that Fowles employs to bring the reader a different perspective. Conchis is examined as the confidant of the author and as the agent in the "godgame". Through his mask of illusion and his portrayal of the "god-novelist" in the tale, he brings to Nicholas the truth that the artifact can offer - the truth of the omnipresent mystery created by the absent 'God'. Nicholas, like Miranda before him, loses him selfhood and
enters into an understanding of the greater truth which Conchis brings him.

Chapter IV examines the nature of the quest in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The central problem of time and history is considered and the novel's relevance to the present is affirmed. The role of the authorial narrator is discussed as a further expansion of Fowles' investigation of the artifact, and Sarah's role as the embodiment of mystery is examined in her approach to the "godgame". In this, the most advanced point of development in Fowles' scheme, the reader shares the quest with Charles and is not provided with the privileged information that will give meaning to the mystery that Sarah poses.
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CHAPTER I
Introduction

One of the primary characteristics that has distinguished the twentieth century novel, as Harry Levin has pointed out, is the increasing self-consciousness of the writer. "The forces which make him an outsider forces his observation upon himself."¹ Those artists, like Joyce, Proust, Lawrence or Gide, who have turned inward in search of their themes are the major experimentalists of our age. To John Fowles, one of the most recent of the self-conscious novelists, the phenomenon of "inward-feeling art" is the necessary result of the artist's awareness of external pressures that threaten his individual identity.² "The artist's main need today," writes Fowles, "seems to him to be the expression of his signed feelings about himself and his world."³

Fowles' philosophical tract, The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas, is the most succinct statement of his own "signed feelings" "to preserve the freedom of the individual against all those pressures-to-conform that threaten our century."⁴ The work itself is an ambitious collection of notes intended to present its author's views on man and the condition of his existence in the twentieth century. By its very nature it
reveals that characteristic inward searching of the self-conscious and alienated artist for a systematic and unique vision upon which he can base his own fictional universe.

Assembled over a period of ten years and published one year following the appearance of his first novel, The Collector, The Aristos represents the end of Fowles' quest for truth in life. As a clear and achieved statement of his vision of reality, the book is inevitably a compendium of the ideas that inform the world of his fiction. This is not to say, however, that Fowles' novels are simply parables that serve to illustrate his private philosophy, for in his fiction, his primary concern is not with the truth of life, but with the truth of art. To Fowles, the literary artifact serves the unique function of providing for the "expression of truths too complex for science to express, or to conveniently express." In his novels, Fowles' principle concern is with an examination of the nature of fiction itself, and the manner in which it communicates truth.

In view of his aims, it is not surprising that one of the recurrent patterns in the fiction of John Fowles is the search for that truth. In each of his three novels to date, The Collector, The Magus, and The French Lieutenant's Woman, the
pattern is repeated with variation, but the nature of the truth sought in each is constant. The quest, taking place on the level of character, is toward an awareness of the immutable truth that the author possesses in advance and wishes to communicate through his creation. "All serious...artists want the same," Fowles asserts, "a truth that no one will need to change."6

The object of the quest in Fowles' fiction is the ontological truth of his private vision that is based in a radical re-interpretation of the nature of God. When the word 'God' appears in The Aristos, it is demarcated with "inverted commas in order to except it from its common meanings; to purge it of its human association."

'God' is a situation. Not a power, or a being, or an influence. Not a 'he' or a 'she', but an 'it'. Not entity or non-entity, but the situation in which there can be both entity and non-entity.7

The description is later echoed in The French Lieutenant's Woman when the author asserts that "There is only one good definition of God, the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist." (FLW,97) Fowles appears, initially at least, to be postulating the familiar existential vision of a totally Godless universe - or at least one in which God has withdrawn
so completely that he no longer, in relative terms, exists. The "situation" thus created by the absent 'God' would be one of total freedom in an indifferent universe;

The final proof of the sympathy in 'God' lies in the fact that we are - or can by exercise become - free to choose courses of action and so at least combat some of the hostile indifference of the process to the individual.

Fowles, however, goes beyond this Sartrean postulation to assert a positive and transcendental truth in the 'God' who is absent from the universe. In this absence, all who seek an "agent" and who raise the question of causality will find no answer in the silence of an indifferent universe. The very meaning of the whole becomes, then, a mystery beyond man's powers of comprehension; since there is no one finally to answer his questions, life remains a mystery. It is a mystery, ultimately that informs "every thing and every moment. It is the dark core, the mystery, the being-not-being of even the simplest objects."

This vision of the positive and omnipresent mystery of life permits Fowles to avoid the philosophical scepticism of so many poets and writers who, confronting the same indifferent universe turned in confusion and fear from its implications.
Fowles finds all doubts resolved through an escape from self-hood into an identification with the real and living mystery of the universe. For this reason, Fowles, though sharing an intellectual kinship with the French existentialists, does not create a fictional world anchored in the concrete reality of the world perceived through the senses. Reality, for him, lies ultimately behind the visible world, and is accessible only to those who recognize phenomenal reality for what it is, a world of appearances.

This conception of a transcendent reality informs his fiction with a distinct quality that is unique. Responding to this quality in a negative manner, one critic (speaking particularly of *The Magus*) concludes that Fowles is an example of "fiction as opposed to the novel,"

fiction, that is, as the quite arbitrary invention of a world having little or nothing to do with the world we live in as commonly observed. It is a legitimate form of fiction, but since the world it presents is an arbitrary invention it is unlikely to throw much light on the facts of existence and the laws governing it in what we call, for want of a better phrase, real life.10

This limited judgement is made by a critic whose own dogmatic conception of reality rests upon the world "as commonly observed." In *The Magus*, Conchis advises Nicholas that: "Verification is the only criterion of reality." That does
not mean that there may not be realities that are unverifiable." (M,221) Upon this vision of the reality that lies behind the appearance of life, Fowles establishes his concept of art. Art, to him serves the unique purpose of revealing and conveying the "unverifiable" truth of mystery because the world created by art is not the actual world. As a form liberated from the restrictions of reality, art provides a revelation of truths that cannot be apprehended in the actual world.

Man does not, under normal circumstances seek the truth behind the actual world because he takes its appearance as the reality. Only when he is confronted with the knowledge that this reality is itself an illusion, is he urged to seek the reality that lies behind the illusion. Art, therefore, which is a conscious illusion calling for - to use Coleridge's famous dictum - the "suspension of disbelief" to be accepted as reality, confronts the observer with a world of declared appearance. To Fowles, even the "simplest and most unemotional realism" involves the use and selection of language that reveals the artist's presence. Artifice is, to him, always present and obvious. Art, then, by posing a conscious illusion implicitly suggests a meaning and purpose behind its appearance. In Fowles' fiction that meaning is the "unverifiable" reality of
the mystery that informs life. When he asserts that "All serious...artists want the same, a truth that no one will need to change," he also suggests that the permanent truth he finds in the living mystery, is the truth that he wishes to reveal behind his art.

In "this century," Wayne Booth observes, men began to take seriously the possibility that the power of artifice to keep us at a distance from reality could be a virtue rather than an obstacle to full realism. Here we may observe another factor that plays a large part in Fowles' fiction. Artifice is desirable because it distances reality, and hence permits the creation of a world that, like dream, gives pleasure free from the restrictions that reality imposes. Freud, in fact, was one of the first to connect the world of fiction to that of the dream, and recognize the value of fiction as escape:

The unreality of the writer's imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art; for many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy, and many excitements which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of the writer's work.

Thus, in Fowles' scheme, literary art by displaying obvious artifice fulfils two purposes. It offers a dream world free from reality, and hence yielding pleasure; and it provides
the conscious illusion that masks the unchangeable and "un-verifiable" truth of the mystery posed by the absent 'God'.

Fowles' fiction is so constructed that the moment we attempt to remove the mask of the illusion, we confront the mystery of the absent 'God'. This fundamentally is both the primary critical problem that Fowles' fiction poses, and the final proof of its success. The reader is invited to search out, like Nicholas of The Magus, the meaning that lies behind the world of appearances; but, once the "unverifiable" reality is confronted, it is discovered to be without meaning. That in fact, is the meaning - the absence of meaning that evokes a sense of mystery. Herein rests the elusive quality of the conundrum that is so much a part of Fowles' fiction. The mystery of ultimate meaning and causality cannot finally be described nor explained because like Sarah of The French Lieutenant's Woman, it is not intended to be comprehended. It is simply an ontological mystery, and must so remain for, "As soon as a mystery is explained, it ceases to be a source of energy."¹⁵ As Mrs. de Sietas informs Nicholas of The Magus; "An answer is always a form of death." (M, 575) Man will only search for meaning within himself when he realizes that it is not without. This is the chief value of the mystery.
In his three novels (at the writing of this thesis), Fowles employs the recurrent pattern of the search for the truth of this mystery of the "unverifiable" reality. All of Fowles' novels move 'toward one great goal' (to dislocate a phrase of Joyce's Deasy) 'the manifestation of God.' In each of the novels, a character moves toward a consciousness of of the absent 'God', and as a result, a recognition of the mystery posed by a vast and indifferent universe.

In Fowles' scheme, the role of the novelist takes on the quality of the priestly function of leading man to the mystery that lies behind the veil of Isis. The "novelist is a kind of mystic and his science is a kind of alchemy." The elaborate "godgame" of another "kind" of mystic, Maurice Conchis - whom Nicholas comes to recognize as "a sort of novelist sans novel, creating with people, not words" (M,229) - is in fact a metaphor for the act of fictional creation, itself. Fowles employs the term in this context when he speaks of the, vanity about it, a wish to play the godgame, which all the random and author removing devices of avant-garde technique cannot hide.

The concept of the "godgame" provides, in fact, an explanation of the manner in which Fowles creates his unique
world. As the "god-novelist" he adopts the mask of the absent 'God' and assumes a relationship with his characters that approximates that of 'God' and man in the real world. His concept, to this point, does not differ radically from that of Joyce's vision of the artist, who, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.  

Both maintain a situation within their novels with the intention of approximating that of the reality outside.

On the character level of his fiction, however, Fowles imposes a pattern that both facilitates and impels the quest for truth. Each of the novels features a magian figure who plays the "godgame" within the novel, and an elect figure who is urged to seek out the truth. In his novels, Clegg, Conchis, and Sarah, the magians fabricate a fictional situation which they impose upon their respective elect - Miranda, Nicholas, and Charles. The important factor is that the elect are confronted with a conscious illusion which they are then urged to investigate in order to discover the reality that lies behind the obvious appearance before them. Each of the elect comes finally to an awareness of the truth that within
Fowles' scheme, abides behind the mask of illusion. They each confront and share in the mystery posed by the absent 'God', and in doing so lose the limiting selfhood that their past realities imposed upon them.

In this thesis, I intend to investigate the manner in which the conscious illusion serves ultimately, in Fowles' world, to bring the knowledge of truth. Although the use of the magian and elect figures provide a similar patterning through the three novels, I will draw attention to it only when it seems of value to do so. The achievement of Fowles' fiction does not rest upon the consistent application of a formula to his fiction, nor upon the novelty of his theories. What value his fiction does possess is in his novels, not his philosophy. Fowles' ideas, of course, are of importance in this thesis because Fowles is the common link between his novels; but, his ideas will be discussed only insofar as they help in illuminating and defining the nature of the artifact itself.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


3 Ibid., p.193.

4 Ibid., p.7.

5 Ibid., p.151.

6 Ibid., p.153.

7 Ibid., p.22.


9 Ibid., p.27.


12 Ibid., p.28.


15 Fowles, The Aristos, p.28.


19 Fowles, *The Aristos: A Self-Portrait in Ideas*, p.233. The term *magian* is one that I have borrowed from Fowles, who in turn borrowed it from Heraclites. It implies a priestly role, or that of the "professional mystifier." The term *elect* is also Fowles', and may be understood as the initiate in the ceremony conducted by the *magian*. 
CHAPTER II
The Collector

The feature that most clearly distinguishes John Fowles' *The Collector* from his later novels, is the lack of an explicit authorial presence. In the final chapter of *The Magus*, Fowles intrudes into the narrative of Nicholas Urfe to discuss the fate of his character, and in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, he provides a constant authorial commentary; but, in *The Collector*, his god-novelist remains, like that of Flaubert or Joyce, "refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."¹ Fowles draws attention to the conventional nature of this role he is assuming in the one overt sign of his presence - the Old French epigram that introduces the novel. The fragment translates: "apart from themselves, no person born knew of it."² The reference is patently to the abduction and death of Miranda Grey, for the only surviving explanation of her fate - the evidence of her diary - is locked up in Clegg's deed-box until his death. (C, 228) Obviously, the reader is aware of the fictionality of the tale and is not expected to question the presence of facts otherwise unknowable. The reader and the author implicitly agree to share the conventional limitations of a relationship that depends upon the question of fictional causality not being raised.
By adopting the role of the invisible author, Fowles is able to explore the conflict of illusion and reality in life while allowing the illusion of reality created by the novel to remain unquestioned. In the author's absence, moreover, the reader may witness the fictional event unconscious of either his own role or the author's. The reader's attention is not directed, as in Fowles' later works, to an examination of the nature of the illusion posed by the artifact itself, and is therefore able to regard *The Collector* as a transcription of reality.

The essential pattern of Fowles' later novels, however, is evident in *The Collector*. The plot of the novel is chiefly concerned with the actions of two characters who enter into a complementary relationship that approximates that of the magian and elect. Miranda, like Nicholas of *The Magus* and Charles of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, becomes the chosen, or elected victim of her opposite. She is led through the power of her victimizer, from a world that she has always known and taken for granted and is confronted in the extreme with a situation so extraordinary, that it brings her sense of reality to question. Isolated, both physically and mentally, from the world in which she once believed, Miranda is compelled to seek out
and realize the unchangeable truth that lies behind the deception of the appearances she has always taken as reality. As in the case of her successors, Nicholas and Charles, her search involves a moral quest for truth in which she is finally allowed to draw back the veil of appearances and confront the immutable and living mystery of life behind it. Like them, she must cast off her old identity and the illusory sense of reality that defined her, before obtaining the new perception of self and other that comes with the true vision; she must 'lose herself in order to find herself'.

Clegg, like Conchis and Sarah, is a magian figure, but he differs from them most perceptibly in the fact that he plays the role unconsciously. In an attempt to actualize a fantasy, to make his own dream come true, he unwittingly creates the circumstances that lead Miranda to the true vision of reality. Adamantly refusing to free her from the small prison that he has created, Clegg confesses privately to feeling "like a cruel king". (C,41) The ironical nature of his role is further emphasized later when Miranda gets on her knees in front of him and performs an elaborate and comic ritual of veneration: "Will the mysterious great master accept apologies of very humble slave?" (C,77) The tone of the suggested role is highly
appropriate, for Clegg performs a parodical version of the "godgame", he is a type of magian even though limited, self-seeking and crippled by self-deception and ignorance.

As the maker of a living fantasy, Clegg reflects in his actions the sense of the judgement that Nicholas passes upon Conchis, for he too is "a sort of novelist sans novel, creating with people, not words". (M, 229) But unlike Conchis, Clegg does not function in the authorial or priestly capacity; he is not motivated by a desire to create for others, and hence does not intend consciously to communicate truth through his creation. Clegg is motivated simply by a desire to escape reality and to satisfy his own unconscious sexual desires, and thus, must finally become the victim of the creation that embodies those unrecognized desires.

As both a creator and a victim, Clegg represents within the greater scheme of Fowles' fiction, a synthesis of the magian figure, and the elect as portrayed later in the characters of Nicholas and Charles. Like them, he is lured from reality by a dream that promises the pleasures of an ideal world. Significantly, it is for all three of them a dream that, in essence, is a sexual fantasy that promises the ideal fulfillment of desires, Clegg is drawn to his own ideal image
of Miranda, Nicholas to the ideal Lily, and Charles to the ideal Sarah; each becomes the victim of a dream, but a dream that is no more than a projection of their own desires upon the real object. In one sense, Clegg, Nicholas, and Charles are victims by virtue of their gender alone. "My female characters," Fowles comments elsewhere, "tend to dominate the male. I see man as a kind of artifice, and woman as a kind of reality." 3 Like his male counterparts, Clegg's illusory projection must, inevitably, be denied by the steadfast reality of the female.

Clegg desires in his escape into the world of illusion to negate the circumstances and limitations that reality imposes upon him. A self-conscious victim of his society, he exhibits the "resentful feeling of inferiority" that Fowles holds as one of the chief characteristics of the twentieth century. 4 "My lot," he complains to Miranda, "just do what they're told... and better look out if they don't". (C,143) Even his newly won fortune from the football pools fails to appreciably alter his position in society. "They still treated me behind the scenes for what I was - a clerk." (C,11) Victimized by feelings of impotence and inferiority, Clegg's resentment takes the form of a class hostility directed toward those he believes to have the social advantages; "the
people who can act like public schoolboys," and who speak with "the right la-di-da voice." (C,11)

When Miranda demands to know why he kidnapped her, Clegg, self-blinded to his real sexual desires, quickly fabricates the story that he is in the power of Mr. Singleton, the man-ager of Barclay's Bank. (C,32) The response is, without Clegg's meaning it so, a highly ironic one, for he is indeed the vic-tim of the "money-obsessed" society. Clegg articulates the cardinal philosophy of his society and betrays his own choice of gods, in the words of one of his teachers - "Money is Power". (C,26) In an example of misplaced faith, he believes that his wealth brings also the unlimited power of a god to make concrete substance of a dream.

In the creation of his daydreams, Clegg acts as the maker of a fictional world that is ideal, fabricated to his own specifications and distanced from the real world. Here, he reigns omnipotently as the master of the situation, the daydream negat-ing the feelings of impotence and inferiority that he must endure in life. Within his fantasy world, he can preserve an ideal relationship with an ideal Miranda, and most important, the image of an ideal Clegg. But as long as he is part of
society, he must suffer the tensions of being caught between the world he wishes and the one he does not. When the Miranda of reality contradicts the purity and obedience of the imaginary creation - as when he sees her with the "public-school type" (a painful reminder of his class inferiority) - Clegg retreats into the world of his fantasy to punish her. (C,7)

His desire for Miranda is spiritualized and separated from the real physical desire that informs it. The element of sexuality is consciously omitted from the dream because it contradicts Clegg's ideal image of himself, and serves to remind him of his own real impotency. In reality, he is unable to experience any form of sexual contact. "I dream about it," he confesses to Miranda after his abortive attempt with her, "but it can't ever be real." (C,110) Through the influence of his aunt, an excessively puritanical woman with an obsessive hatred of dirt that inevitably extends itself to matters of sex, Clegg learns to regard his sexual desires as "some animal thing that I was born without." (C,10) Thus, in order to maintain the ideal character of his dream, he desexualizes his relationship with Miranda.

He finds an outlet, however, for his repressed sexual desire and circumvents the problem of having to face it in
reality by pushing it one remove from the real world. Rather than be an actor, he chooses to become a spectator - a voyeur. After his sexual failure and subsequent disgust with a prostitute following his winning of the pools, Clegg takes an interest in "books of stark women and all that", and with the clearly false justification of photographing butterflies, he purchases a camera complete with telephoto lens to collect views of "the things people get up to in places you think they would know better than to do it in". (C,12) Clegg is not initially aware, however, that the voyeuristic level of his sexual desires paradoxically allows him to view Miranda as a sexual object while simultaneously denying the sexual motive.

After his chance winning of the football pools, Clegg chooses to act rather than remain caught between the fact and the fiction, and sets out to make his dream a reality. The cellar of the country house he purchases, like Bourani in The Magus and the Undercliff in The French Lieutenant's Woman, presents the place where the illusion takes on the appearance of the reality; it is, on one level, a symbol for the realm of fiction itself. Appropriately, Clegg's realm has neither the light and openness of Conchis' Bourani, nor the natural beauty of Sarah's Undercliff; but, a reflection of his own lurking
and subconscious desires, lies beneath the earth in darkness. Within his own mind Clegg separates the cellar from the phenomenal world and isolates it in the dimension of the dream: it was like down there didn't exist...It's always been like that. Some days I've woken up and it's all been like a dream, till I went down again. (C,19)

As he develops his plan, he progressively isolates himself from the world of reality and begins to take up residence in his own dream. (C,21)

Miranda's abduction initially provides the satisfaction that Clegg's dreams of omnipotence demanded and that reality had denied. It is of Crutchley from the Annex that he thinks when he considers his triumph, for Crutchley with his acclaimed success with women had always elicited Clegg's jealousy. "I would like to see Crutchley organize what I organized last summer and carry it through," he announces. (C,20) Looking at the newspapers later, he is struck with "a feeling of power" in the knowledge that he is the only person who knows of Miranda's whereabouts. But his triumph is short-lived, for like Nicholas in The Magus, Clegg makes the error of attempting to project upon the real person the fictional role that he wishes her to play. Like Alison, Miranda becomes the intrusion of unwanted reality into the ideal world when she refuses the context of his dream.
In her unwitting refusal to be what Clegg wishes her to be, she brings to him ironically enough, part of the lesson that Conchis attempts—through Lily—to bring to Nicholas: the knowledge of his own fictionalization of life. On the morning following the kidnapping, Clegg goes into the cellar and immediately notices that "she didn't look like I'd always remembered her." (C,31) From this point on, he is kept constantly aware that this is not the imaginary Miranda that he created, but a very real one, a living intrusion of the real world that will continually deny the fulfilment of his ideal. "In my dreams," he complains, finding himself urged by Miranda to defend his actions, "it was always the other way round." (C,37)

When Miranda fails to play her part in Clegg's imaginary world, his dream of omnipotence collapses, and he realizes that the only true power he possesses is that of warden, not the dominant role of the master. (C,118) Since fundamentally the dream depends upon Miranda responding as Clegg imagines she should, he is at the beginning a negative entity waiting and hoping for a positive response. In an effort to encourage her role, Clegg is willing to serve her in any way to actualize his ideal image of her. He inevitably, then, becomes the victim of his victim, or more properly, the victim of the inner desires that he is projecting upon her.
Although Clegg attempts to deny his sexual interest in Miranda, his real desire is evident from the beginning. When she first arrives in the cellar, she finds "an extraordinary selection of weekend-in-Paris underwear" (C,128) provided for her along with the other clothing. This information is significantly absent from Clegg's own narrative, for though he mentions his purchase of clothes for her, he fails to specify the nature, in an effort characteristic of him in the early half of the novel, to separate any thought of a physical nature from Miranda. In spite of his attempt to suppress it, his sexual excitement is apparent from her first arrival. Speechless and nervous, he has a desire "to look at her face, at her lovely hair, all of her small and pretty, but I couldn't, she stared so at me." (C,32) His reaction is that of the voyeur who wishes to see rather than experience, her real presence frustrating his intentions. Later, when her attempted seduction of him serves to remind him of his impotence, he retreats to the photographs of her, because "I could take my time with them. They didn't talk back at me." (C,113)

Miranda is unaware that she is partially fulfilling Clegg's sexual need simply with her presence and by posing for the constant photographs upon which he insists. "Is that why he keeps me?" she asks, "Hoping the dream Miranda will
appear?" (C,246) When he gives her chloraform and undresses her on the night of the intended farewell dinner, he reveals that the voyeuristic need for the photographs has always been close to the surface of his consciousness. "It was my chance I had been waiting for," he admits running upstairs to get his camera, then goes immediately to develop and print the pictures. (C,95)

On the night that Miranda attempts to seduce him in hopes of obtaining her freedom, she succeeds only in destroying in his eyes the possibility of the ideal Miranda, and worse, by confronting him with his real impotence, she denies the ideal in Clegg. He then becomes the punishing Clegg of the revenge fantasies. At this point the dream is discarded and Clegg is able to use her to serve his real sexual ends and justify it as punishment: "I felt happy, I can't explain, I saw I was weak before, now I was paying her back for all the things she said and thought about me." (C,118) The earlier resentment that he felt toward those who had the advantages that he lacked is directed at Miranda.

With her death, Miranda brings about the inevitable destruction of the falsifying vision that Clegg possesses. He becomes
conscious of his fictionalization of life, and grasps, finally the unreality of his desires. With the loss of his idealized self-conception, Clegg momentarily loses his own sense of identity. Turning to confront the new-found unreality that lies within him, Clegg sees himself without his mask of fictionalization for the first time:

I thought I was going mad, I kept on looking in the mirror and trying to see my face. I had this horrible idea, I was mad, everyone else could see it, only I couldn't. (C,282)

Clegg seeks vainly for the reality that lies behind the appearance - the appearance that he now suspects is all illusion.

Realizing that he "wanted what money couldn't buy," he voluntarily dismisses the potency of the god, Mammon, that had sustained him and turns for comfort to the days when the dream was only a dream untainted by the actual:

All sorts of nice things came back. I remembered the beginning, the days in the Annex just seeing her come out of the front door, or passing her the other side of the street...(C, 281)

Abruptly he wakes from the pleasurable dream with an awareness of the reality of Miranda's death, and like an earlier Caliban awaking from a dream of delight, he cries "to dream again." Clegg accepts, then, the bleak world that lies behind the self-deceiving appearances that he imposed upon it; Because what it is, it's luck. It's like the pools - worse,
there aren't even good teams and bad teams and likely draws. You can't ever tell how it will turn out...That's why I never believed in God. I think we are insects, we live a bit and then die and that's the lot. There's no mercy in things. There's not even a Great Beyond. There's nothing. (C, 284)

But unlike Nicholas, Clegg is never able to perceive the vital truth that lies behind this reality; the positive truth, ultimately that lies behind Conchis' mask of fiction, the mystery posed by the God who is not present. But Clegg feels no compulsion to question, his natural state is one of acceptance: "It's in my character, it's how I was made. I can't help it." (C, 277)

Clegg's failure, in the final analysis lies in his literal-mindedness, for he is incapable of perceiving meaning beyond the appearance of things. During the dinner party on the day that Miranda is supposed to be released they play Charades;

I wasn't any good at it, either acting or guessing. I remember one word she did was 'butterfly'. She kept on doing it again and again and I couldn't guess. (C, 90)

Later, when Miranda asks him to pick out his favourite of a number of still-lifes that she has done, he picks the one closest to the reality, the most photographic and neglects her abstracts.

Clegg's incapacity to understand, or even sense a level beyond what is immediately apparent creates the limitation,
"the small room", he must inhabit. Characteristically, his reaction to Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* reveals his tendency to give credence to that reality alone that abides in the appearance of life. He condemns it as a failure of realism because Holden Caulfield comes from a wealthy home, and people from that sort of background "wouldn't behave like that". (C, 217-218) Miranda correctly observes that "He doesn't believe in any other world but the one he lives in and sees." (C, 223)

In his literal-mindedness, Clegg finally refuses to accept the truth of his own madness. With the coming of a new day, and his discovery of Miranda's diary, he discards his earlier dark insights into his character and begins "to have more sensible ideas". (C, 286) It is not, however, a reversion to his old self, for the incident with Miranda has made him conscious of the real sexual motives that had energized his search for an impossible ideal. When he selects his next victim, it is not done with a desire to fulfil the ideal conception represented in his early dreams of Miranda. He chooses a "common shop-girl" who bears only a vague similarity to Miranda, and resolves that "this time it won't be love, it would just be for the interest of the thing." (C, 286-287) The ideal of Clegg's dream will not be revived, for he has learned, if nothing more, to
accept the limitations of reality. Through choosing to satisfy his realistic sexual needs, he avoids the anguish created by a dream that can never become the reality.

Unlike Clegg, or her later male counterparts, Nicholas and Charles, Miranda is not led into the fabricated situation by the ideal pleasures that it offers. The moment of her abduction marks an abrupt departure from the world that she knows, and her initial reaction is one of incredulity at the hazard of life: It is "Like falling off the edge of the world. There suddenly being an edge." (C,128) To her Clegg's fabrication is both "a hell" and a flat denial of her own desires. (C,133) Terrified in a darkness and an isolation that she has never faced before, her first reaction is to pray - "something I haven't done for years" - to a God whose true existence she can only partly accept. Her prayer is simply for "daylight" (C,129), for Miranda possesses an instinct and a desire for the natural and the real that is the informing quality of Fowles' female characters. She abhors the "artificial light" of the cellar, for it falsifies her own art. (C,133)

Ironically, when Clegg isolates Miranda from the outside world with the intention of fulfilling his own fantasy - a
fantasy created to cathect the reality - he imposes upon her the real condition of his own life. Locked in the cellar, itself a projection and image of the "small room" of Clegg's limited world, Miranda faces the isolation and impotence that are the lot of the victim. In her search for the true meaning that lies behind the relative unreality imposed upon her, and the manner in which she contends, both morally and philosophically with that truth, Miranda serves as an exemplum for the possible way in which Clegg can deal with his own predicament. But Miranda and Clegg, frequently imaged in the novel as two opposing parts of a whole, move in conflicting directions; he strives to escape the real world, she seeks to engage it.

Isolated from the world that she has known and made aware of her own physical inferiority, Miranda is forced into the role of the victim. Eventually, she comes to recognize this role, and the circumstances of her captivity as the only immediate and verifiable reality in her life. The world beyond the cellar "has ceased to exist" as a living reality, and to Miranda it moves into an illusory dimension: (C,148)

It is not that I have forgotten what other people are like. But other people seem to have lost reality. The only real person in my world is Caliban. (C,149-150)
This inversion of values is an ironic one demonstrating the mirror-like contrasts posed by Clegg and Miranda. When he strives to make his dream a reality by abducting her, he subsequently forces her reality to become a dream.

When Miranda is forced into the role of the victim, her immediate desire to escape is a reflection of Clegg's own objective in the outer world. When she fails to do so physically, she turns to her diary and the power of language to evoke the non-present world she desires:

I felt I was going mad last night, so I wrote and wrote myself into the other world. To escape in spirit, if not in fact. To prove it still exists. (C, 167)

Unencumbered by the literal-mindedness that characterizes Clegg, Miranda finds in language the power of evocation that Clegg only finds through possession of the reality. She discovers that "writing here is a sort of drug".

This afternoon I read what I wrote about G.P. the day before yesterday. And it seemed vivid. I know it seems vivid because my imagination fills in all the bits that another person wouldn't understand. I mean, it's vanity. But it seems a sort of magic, to be able to call my past back. And I just can't live in the present. (C, 175-176)

In its power to fulfill her desires, Miranda's diary serves a similar function to her, as the cellar to Clegg. Both represent to their creators, the place where the illusory and non-
present world is given reality. Both the diary and the cellar are the fictional projections of their makers and in both the same movement may be observed. As Clegg comes, eventually, to recognize that the dream he wishes to create is an illusion that cannot be made real, so Miranda becomes conscious that the world she creates in her diary - a reflection of the reality of her past - is only a world of appearances. Unlike Clegg, who must learn of his own fictionalization through Miranda's insistent denial of his desires, Miranda is able to penetrate the illusion that informed her life before her abduction.

Her early self-fictionalization centers upon the figure of G.P., a rebellious and cynical artist who stood against the artificiality of her Ladymont environment. "I've never been the same," Miranda confesses, "since he told me how he hated fey women. I even learnt the word from him." (C,153) In the isolation of the cellar she prepares a list of "the ways in which he has altered me". (C,153) In total it represents a rather naive formula of the attitudes that the ideal artist must possess. Its superficial tenets (as, for example, the insistence that an artist must be "Left politically because the Socialists are the only people who care") reflect Miranda's imperfect and superficial understanding of what G.P. was telling her. Taking G.P.
as her exemplum, she considers the lessons that she has learned from him as moral commandments of conduct, and she attempts to emulate his actions and his ideas. In truth, as Miranda finally comes to understand it, she is merely miming the appearance of her 'ideal' artist.

In her elevation of G.P., Miranda projects upon him the guise of a god with the power of ultimate judgement. In his omnipresent shadow, she regards herself as both his creation and subject:

It's the thought of him that makes me feel guilty when I break the rules. If he's made me believe them, that means he's made a large part of the new me. (C, 154)

Miranda's illusory conception of self, then, is based in the superficial alteration of her own character to please G.P. She acts as she believes he wishes her to act. While looking through some of Miranda's work, G.P. criticizes her for "painting someone else's style". (C, 170) Only later, when her imposed solitude forces her to re-examine her past does she realize that her own identity is nothing more than a copy of the abstract ideal that she sees in G.P.

Parallel to Clegg in her vision of the ideal individual, Miranda desexualizes her image of G.P. Though she wishes "to
marry, someone with a mind like G.P.'s", she insists on it being someone "much nearer my own age, and with looks I like." (C,151)

Miranda's attitude is a reflection of her own highly abstracted idealism; she is a creature of the abstract, spiritualized world of beauty, as Clegg is one of the world of concrete physicality. In her rejection of the physical in G.P., Miranda denies his total reality, and elevates him to a god-like role that she, in turn, attempts to emulate. Her denial, in the final analysis, is the denial of her own physical reality. G.P. draws attention to her illusory vision of him:

At your age one is bursting with ideals. You think that because I can sometimes see what's trivial and what's important in art I ought to be more virtuous. My charm... for you is simply frankness. And experience. Not goodness. I'm not a good man. Perhaps morally I'm even younger than you are. (C,190)

In the solitude of the cellar, Miranda comes, eventually, to an awareness of her denial of the physical reality of herself. Like Clegg, she begins to perceive the truth that lies behind her appearance:

Staring at myself in the mirror. Sometimes I don't seem real to myself, it suddenly seems that it isn't my reflection only a foot or two away. I have to look aside. I look all over my face, at my eyes, I try to see what my eyes say. What I am. Why I'm here. (C,235-236)

When Miranda attempts to seduce Clegg in her hopes of obtaining her freedom, she abruptly confronts the physical reality that she had previously denied, and loses the innocence
that had informed her illusory idealism. The act, above all, alters her own perception of herself by severing her from her past: "I've done something for the first time in my life something original...The last of the Ladymont me. It's dead." (C, 254) Ironically she repeats one of the lessons of G.P. that she in turn attempts to pass on to Clegg:

you could become whatever you liked. Only you've got to shake off the past. You've got to kill your aunt and the house you lived in and the people you lived with. You've got to be a new human being. (C, 82)

After her experience with Clegg, Miranda embraces her total reality, and is aware for the first time of "The power of women! I've never felt so full of mysterious power." (C, 258) Her old self and the illusions of her past are discarded as childhood pursuits:

It's like the day you realize dolls are dolls. I pick up my old self and I see it's silly. A toy I've played with too often. It's a little sad, like an old golliwog at the bottom of the cupboard. (C, 257)

Miranda, then, comes to an awareness of her real self, free from the mask of illusion. But this is only a part of her total quest, for she also looks into the world beyond herself.

"Where is this, who are you, why have you brought me here?" (C, 31) Miranda's first words to Clegg embody the pervasive questions in the initial stage of her search for enlightenment.
She wishes to know the meaning that lies behind the bizarre situation into which she is placed, in short, Clegg's motive. Through her own quizzing and careful analysis of her captor, she penetrates the appearance of Clegg's fabrication and comes to realize what he himself will not face. On her arrival she judges him initially by appearances, finding him "Absolutely sexless", a "lily-white boy." (C, 130-131) In his effort to suppress his own desires, this is precisely the appearance that Clegg wishes to give, but Miranda eventually sees beyond the exterior, and confronts him with the reality that he will not accept himself: You've had a little dream, the sort of dream I suppose little boys have and masturbate about...you won't admit to yourself that the whole thing is nasty, nasty, nasty. (C, 82)

Although she comes to understand Clegg's motive in creating a living fantasy, Miranda fails to successfully grasp the ultimate meaning why she is chosen to play a part in it. When she first arrives, she realizes on examining the art books he has supplied "that they were there for me. That I wasn't a haphazard victim after all." (C, 128) Here, the familiar pattern of the elect in Fowles' novels takes form, the pattern that provides the direction and energy for the quest. Miranda is confronted with the fact that her presence in the cellar is not an accident, but rather, the result of a plan. She is a chosen victim. If it is
part of a plan, it must then have both a reason and a meaning behind it. Miranda, like Nicholas and Charles after her, struggles to perceive the larger picture, and poses finally the ontological question, "Why?" (C,136) The question itself is evoked by appearances. The small world of fantasy that Clegg creates appears in Miranda's eyes to have both order and purpose, direction and meaning. She is in the final analysis, an integral part of the whole meaning. Most immediately, she can perceive Clegg as the direct agent of the situation, for she soon discards the explanation that he is under the control of a third person. But Miranda turns inevitably, once the question is evoked, to search out the agent who is behind the situation of which they are both a part; she seeks, ironically, for a third all-knowing person who will answer the ultimate question that she poses.

In Miranda's search, there is the suggestion of the vanishing planes that potentially are present in The Collector, and are progressively explored in Fowles' later novels. As Miranda is part of a situation that Clegg has created in his version of the "godgame", so both Miranda and Clegg are a part of the situation that Fowles has created with the novel itself, in his application of the "godgame". The problem of agency and meaning is resolved as the question moves from level to level.
Finally, though the question itself is not overtly posed until The French Lieutenant's Woman, the reader and the author also create a situation which is the final experience of the novel. Who ultimately is the agent of this situation? The question is resolved in Fowles' concept of "mystery", there is ultimately no agent, and no meaning; there is only the question that the absence of an agent can evoke. The important point in Fowles' fiction, is not the answer to the question, but that the question itself be evoked and asked. The knowledge of the mystery comes only with the knowledge that the question cannot be answered.

Compelled through circumstance to seek out an answer to her unanswered question, Miranda is faced finally with the knowledge that it cannot, or will not, be answered. "I don't think I believe in God anymore," she concludes in her assessment:

What I feel I know now is that God doesn't intervene. He lets us suffer. If you pray for liberty then you may get relief just because you pray...But God can't hear. There's nothing like human hearing or seeing or pitying or helping about him. (C,233)

Miranda, it must be noticed, does not reject a 'God', what she does reject - and in this she is a small version of her author - is a third person God. Though He may have created the universe, Miranda concludes that he is no longer present in it; "we have to live as if there is no God." With the cold truth of this
reality comes the image of a sky that is "absolutely empty," "pure and empty". It is at this point that Miranda ironically identifies Clegg's role in the novel as that of the self-appointed god, the self-created representative of the absent God: "He's not human; he's an empty space disguised as a human." (C,234) (emphasis mine)

Through Clegg and the world of illusion he creates, Miranda thus comes to an awareness of the truth that Fowles wishes to make evident in his own assumption of the role of the tale's absent 'God'. She comes, as all of Fowles' elect characters, to finally sharing her author's vision. There is no 'God' who will intervene in the affairs of men. Behind the world of appearance there is only an abiding silence that evokes the search.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II


2 I am indebted to Professor F. Holdaway of the French Department of the University of British Columbia for translating and dating Fowles' epigram. The phrase, "que fors aus ne le sot riens nee" may be placed sometime in the late 11th or early 12th century. It does not, however, contain any key words that would connect it to a known source. I can therefore conclude that Fowles did not expect his reader to recognize it. I am even tempted to add that he probably did not expect them to understand it.


5 Ibid., p.3.
CHAPTER III

The Magus

Trapped in the mystifying world of 'Wonderland', where anything seems possible, little Alice considers her plight; I almost wish I hadn't gone down the rabbit hole - and yet - and yet - it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what can have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened - and now here I am in the middle of one!¹

At this point in Alice's reasoning, the reader's attention is drawn abruptly to the fiction as an illusion. Alice is, in the reader's conscious perception, stranded in the midst of a fairy-tale, and if the passage went no further, she appears to be momentarily addressing directly, and sharing with the reader a consciousness of her own fictional role. As the passage continues, however, the perception is radically altered: "There ought to be a book written about me...That there ought! When I grow up I'll write one..."² Now Alice is no longer addressing herself to the reader with a consciousness of her own fictional-ality. She is presenting herself as a real person talking, quite literally to herself - that is, someone who considers herself to be in a real world that only resembles a fiction. The irony is overheard and shared only by the reader and the author. Although Alice is the narrator of the tale, and the author is not obviously intruding, she is incapable of possessing the information that she is fictional.
Similarly, when mid-way through *The Magus*, Nicholas, speaking to Alison, pleads the necessity of returning to Phraxos because "It's like being halfway through a book. I can't just throw it in the dustbin" (M, 259), the reader's perception is a similar one to Alice's statement. The reader, in other words, is the possessor of privileged information which is immediately shared only with the author himself, for the two are aware that the character is in fact a fictional creation. When a writer resorts, as in the above examples, to drawing attention to the illusion of reality, the effect, as Louis Rubin suggests, is to intensify the illusion, not to destroy it. The reader's principle demand, that the characters view themselves as real people in a real situation is fulfilled. "I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into?" Tolkien's Master Samwise asks Frodo, the immortal hobbit;

"I wonder," said Frodo. "But I don't know. And that's the way of a real tale. Take any one that you're fond of. You know, or guess what kind of a tale it is, happy-ending or sad-ending, but the people in it don't know. And you don't want them to." (emphasis mine)

In another passage, this time from *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* - a passage that Fowles employs as a chapter epigraph in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (FLW, 403) - there appears a further variation upon the reader's ironic perception,
"Why, about you!" Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. "And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?"

"Where I am now, of course," said Alice.

"Not you!" Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. "You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!"

"If that there King was to wake," added Tweedledum, "You'd go out - bang! - just like a candle!"

"I shouldn't!" Alice exclaimed indignantly. 5

Again, the reader can share with the author the irony that Alice is indeed merely a creation of the mind, an illusion, but here, there is one difference, for briefly, Tweedledee and Tweedledum appear to possess, also, the privileged information that both the reader and the author share - the knowledge of the tale as illusion.

In The Magus, Fowles draws the conscious attention of the reader to his own presence as author by breaking the silence that he maintains throughout The Collector. In addition to employing a single and obvious chapter heading in a book that otherwise has no chapter headings (M, 374) - he blatantly intrudes into the final chapter of the novel and addresses the reader directly. (M, 594) By breaking into Nicholas' narrative and discussing him as fictional character, Fowles makes the reader immediately aware that the tale he has been reading and conventionally accepting as reality (as in the case of The Collector), is, after all only an illusion itself. Even though the intrusion comes at the end of the novel, it provides a retrospective view that
radically alters the reader's perception of *The Magus*, and, most particularly of the role of Conchis in the fiction.

In the novel, John Fowles draws his reader back one remove from the perspective offered by *The Collector* and includes within the immediate pattern of the mise en scène of the novel, a magian figure, Maurice Conchis, who serves as the author's direct agent and confidant. In *The Collector*, it will be remembered, Clegg serves as the agent of the fictional situation within the tale when he undertakes his version of the "godgame". But Clegg quite patently does not represent either Fowles' approach or vision of reality. Conchis, on the other hand, offers to the reader a level of causality that *The Collector* lacks. In the latter, "Caliban" and Miranda stand alone in the greater illusion that only the reader and author can share, for Prospero is, in the conventional sense of the novel, absent from the tale. In *The Magus*, however, Prospero - self-announced and revealed - appears in the novel in the guise of Maurice Conchis. (M, 79)

On one of the occasions when Conchis is absent from his domaine, Nicholas, insistent in his pledge to search out the "reality behind all the mystery", investigates the lands of Bourani. (M, 152) Although, to his disappointment he finds them
empty, he discovers a trace of the old man's presence in a spider:

I laid my hands in its path and it jumped onto it; holding it up close I could see its minute black eyes, like giglamps. It swivelled its massive square head from side to side in an arachnoidal parody of Conchis' quizzing; and once again, as with the owl, I had an uncanny apprehension of the reality of witchcraft; Conchis' haunting brooding omnipresence. (M,349)

The image of the spider - a suggestive symbol for the creator of the fiction, which appears also as a designation for the novelist-god of The Collector (C,264) - again finds expression during the 'trial scene'. Momentarily struck by the apparent self-effacement of Conchis, who has assumed a secondary role in the proceedings, Nicholas is "not misled by the new mask. He (Conchis) was still the master of ceremonies, the man behind it all; at web center." (emphasis mine) The comment is an ironic one, but it is an irony that only the reader can fully recognize, for he is aware that "the man behind it all," absent from his domaine and "at web center", is Fowles himself. (M,460)

The reader, though on the dramatic level compelled to follow Nicholas' searchings, as narrator, and misled as Nicholas is misled, is nonetheless in possession of the greater consciousness that Nicholas himself is a fiction. The irony is intensified and made obvious by Conchis' "smile of dramatic irony" - the smile "of those who have privilaged information." (M,143) The privilaged information that Conchis possesses, is the
knowledge that he is a character in a novel, that he, like
Nicholas, is a fabrication of the author's imagination (hence
the heavy irony of his name, an obvious homonym for 'conscious').
"And are you the producer?" Nicholas asks Conchis, in an effort
to know more about the "new meta-theater":

"No. This year the director is a very old friend of mine.
He used to come here before the war."
"Shall I meet him?"
"That depends on him. But I think not."
"Why on him?"
"Because I am an actor too, Nicholas, in this strange new
meta-theater. That is why I say things both of us know cannot
be true. Why I am permitted to lie..." (M,367)

There is throughout the novel no further mention made of the
director. The discussion, then, would appear to be an irrel-
evancy unless it be concluded that the reader is intended to
recognize that the director is none other than Fowles himself.
He is not, Conchis implies, an actor in the theater but some-
thing else. In The French Lieutenant's Woman, Charles does
have the opportunity to meet the director, but he is unaware of
the identity of the man sitting across from him on the train to
London. (FLW,403)

Given the open collaboration between Conchis and his
'director', the reader is prepared to accept Conchis' descrip-
tion of the "new meta-theater" for what is - a description of
the novel form itself:
I conceived a new kind of drama. One in which the conventional relations between audience and actors were forgotten. In which the conventional scenic geography, the notions of proscenium, stage, auditorium, were completely disregarded. In which the action, the narrative was fluid, with only a point of departure and a fixed point of conclusion. (M, 366) (emphasis mine)

The description is reminiscent of James’ delineation of novels as “fluid puddings” or that of Joyce's Dedalus, who speaks of the novel as the "fluid and lambent narrative" yielded when the "personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea." Patently, Conchis as the agent of the fiction within the tale, is consciously working to create the novel that Fowles is writing.

Nicholas, quite justifiably feels himself to be the victim of a conspiracy (M, 440), for as a confidant of Conchis, Lily also possesses an awareness of the privileged information: "We are all actors and actresses Mr. Urfe," she advises him, "You included." Nicholas, however, unconscious of the irony, takes her comment as a simple cliche and answers facetiously: "Of course. On the stage of the world." (M, 170) Even Mrs. de Seitas is an "aspect of his (Conchis') character." It is Mrs. de Seitas, in fact, who provides the raison d'être that lies behind Conchis' elaborate 'masque' and the motive behind the fictional
creation. "I should like the whole world. I could give it something so much better than what possesses it now." (M,572) Here, simplified, is embodied the altruistic purpose that contrasts the creation of Conchis with that of the self-seeking Clegg; Conchis creates for others with the conscious desire to improve man's condition through self-awareness.

Attempting to search out the meaning of the 'masque', Nicholas observes early in the experience "two elements in his 'game' - one didactic, the other aesthetic." (M,157) In truth, Conchis reflects his author's desire - stated in The Aristos - "to approach a reality, to convey a reality, to symbolize a reality, to summarize a reality, to convince of a reality."9 This is the didactic aim of his creation, to communicate to Nicholas (as Fowles does to the reader) the true nature of human reality.

Early in his narrative, Conchis informs Nicholas of the nature of phenomenal reality. Speaking of the lesson that he learned from the experience of Aubers Ridge, he confesses that his error then had been his belief that the horror of the war was "an expiation for some barbarous crime of civilization", that it had meaning;

I know now it was our believing that we were fulfilling some end, serving some plan...Instead of the reality. There is no plan. All is hazard. And the only thing that will preserve us is ourselves. (M,124
Here the philosophic voice of Fowles, the voice of *The Aristos* - even to the identical wording\(^{10}\) - addresses itself to the real nature of the world. It is that experiential part of the truth of man's condition that Clegg articulates at the end of *The Collector* (C,284) and that Miranda moves toward recognizing.

In the final analysis, it is the truth that drives man to create illusions; "We are all in flight from the real reality." Fowles claims in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. (FLW,97)

Like Miranda and Clegg before their experience, Nicholas embraces a factitious vision of reality that has never been questioned or truly tested. In spite of the atheism he claims to espouse (M,106), he comes to realize that he does possess the belief in a third person god. Drawing to a more complete awareness of himself late in the 'masque', he finds the words to describe this 'other' being:

All my life I had tried to turn life into a fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good and bad behaviour - a god like a novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please, the sensibility to feel slighted, the ability to adapt himself to whatever he believed the the god-novelist wanted. (M,487)

Basically, the vision is not one of a god transcendent, but more a description of the self divided. Speaking of his youth and his forced enlistment into the army, Conchis describes the configuration: "There I became two people - one who watched
and one who tried to forget that the other watched." (M.114)

The concept is best understood in terms of the Sartrean post-
ulation of 'posing':

Man is faced with the difficulty of existing, this is his situation... To cope with it, man must never cease willing and choosing; he must be forever renewing, forever free. Rather than make the requisite exertion most men prefer to fashion a definite image of themselves, to see themselves congealed into a stable existence.11

Sartre, discussing Baudelaire, suggests a form of escape from the real situation, that is achieved through the conscious fabrication of personality:

He is a man who, most acutely aware of his human predicament, sought most avidly to hide it from himself. Since his 'nature' escaped him, he tried to ensnare it in the eyes of others.12

Essentially it involves escaping the consciousness of self through the eyes of another - a self-created other.

According to Sartre our life often consists of 'posing' of exhibiting ourselves to others not through superficial vanity but because the image that they fashion of us from without seems like a solid reality which can reassure us concerning ourselves and keep us from having to exert ourselves.13

"Thus", says Sartre, "we escape anguish by trying to apprehend ourselves from without as we would the Other or a thing."14

The application of this concept to Nicholas, is Fowles' further development and clarification of the type of self-fictionalization that is apparent in Miranda of The Collector.
Like Nicholas, she falsifies her true identity by seeing herself through the eyes of a fabricated third person. When she falsifies G.P.'s reality and idealizes him, she provides for the falsification of herself. The configuration is perhaps best described as a mirror; in the reflection, one views self as object and is able as a result to escape the reality of self.

In a conversation with Lily, Nicholas reveals the process at work:

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. (M, 234)

Nicholas, in other words, sees himself from without; his fabricated identity is a pose to fulfil the ideal he postulates for himself. During his suicide attempt, he feels that he is "being watched...putting on an act for the benefit of someone." (M, 58) and for that reason he feels incapable of carrying it through:

I was trying to commit not a moral action, but a fundamentally aesthetic one; to do something that would end my life sensationally significantly, consistently. It was a Mercutio death I was looking for, not a real one. A death to be remembered, not the true death of a true suicide, the death obliterate. (M, 58)

The "someone" for whom he feels he is attempting the act, is his second self, like Miranda's G.P., the one who watches, and
judges. Nicholas' self-created "god-novelist" is in fact, a third person creation who will meaningfully relate self to all external to self. Both Sartre and Fowles correctly condemn this as an escape from the responsibility of facing man's true freedom. It is a "flight from the real reality". (FLW, 97) Nicholas recognizes this for in his failure he feels "intensely false; in existentialist terms, unauthentic." (M, 58)

Nicholas' pose is fictional and histrionic, for he 'acts' in the meaningful manner of a character for an observer - a self-created observer. His role-playing develops essentially from a failure consciously to distinguish between reality and appearance, thus allowing the antithetical realms of life and fiction to be blurred. In his youthful participation in Les Hommes Revoltes, an Oxford existentialist club, Nicholas confesses to taking the appearance of fiction for reality:

...we didn't realize that the heroes, or anti-heroes, of the French existentialist novels we read were not supposed to be realistic. We tried to imitate them, mistaking metaphorical descriptions of complex modes of feeling for straightforward prescriptions of behaviour. (M, 13)

Like Miranda, Nicholas can live a fiction - a self-created dream - because he accepts the appearance as the reality.

The character of his dream world is most fully revealed in his own mind, when he examines the manner in which he treats "the fact of Alison's death";
(I) had begun to edge it out of the moral world into the aesthetic, where it was easier to live with.

By this sinister elision, this slipping from true remorse, the belief that the suffering we have precipitated ought to ennoble us, or at least make us less ignoble from then on, to disguised self-forgiveness, the belief that suffering in some way ennobles life, so that the precipitation of pain comes by such a cockeyed algebra, to equal ennoblment, or at any rate enrichment, of life, by this characteristically twentieth century retreat from content into form, from meaning into appearance, from ethics into aesthetics, from aqua into unda, I dulled the pain of accusing death..." (M, 364) (emphasis mine)

The transposition of values that he observes here, is fundamentally that which had produced his fictional perception of reality. Unable to face the unmasked truth of life, Nicholas effaces the reality with a representational world that he creates through his 'novelist-god' (his observing second self). Through those objective eyes he views himself from without; he then can distance the reality of the real world he wishes to escape, and endow the world of appearances, thus produced with ideal values. Nicholas tries literally "to turn life into a fiction". (M, 487)

The representational world that Nicholas creates for himself is defined, in fact, in the terms of a literary fiction. The distinction that he is drawing between content and form is perhaps, best explained in the following lines of Mark Schorer's:

Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of achieved content, the form, the work of art as work, that we speak as critics.15

The real experience of life becomes mutatis mutandis, the
experience of fiction. The meaning that event possesses in life, then, is exchanged for the appearance of meaning offered by the illusion. Here, the ethical and moral considerations that pre-dominate in the real world of real actions - judging ultimately the means and the ends - are discarded in favour of the aesthetic world which is beyond action and serves as an end in itself.

If the mind penetrates deeply into the facts of aesthetics, it will find more and more, that these facts are based upon an ideal identity between the mind itself and things. Thus, in his representational world of appearance, Nicholas is free to impose at will only those relationships that reflect his conception of his own ideal identity. The world of appearances that he creates for himself is then like a mirror that will reflect, not his real self, but what ideally he conceives himself to be.

The process of fictionalization that supplants reality with illusion, is for Nicholas one of self-falsification, for, like Miranda's indulgent and distorting idealism, it is a self-centered creation that obviates truth and grossly limits the individual possibilities. It is the anda which belies the agua, the appearance of meaning that denies the true meaning.

On his return from Athens and his parting with Alison,
Nicholas looks forward to an intensification of his relationship with Lily. On meeting her again, he immediately projects his own desires upon her:

There grew in me an intuition that she had, right from the beginning, found me physically more attractive than she wanted to admit. Narcissus-like I saw my own face reflected deep in her indecision, her restlessness. (M,269)

Again deceiving himself with a reflection of his own desired projections, he finds Alison "a mirror that did not lie". (M,487)

In displacing the real world with his illusory representation, Nicholas becomes the agent of his own deception.

Early in his relationship with Nicholas, Conchis frequently directs his guest's attention to the true nature of human reality, and to the unlimited freedom offered by a world that is ruled only by planless hazard. But that freedom can only be achieved when Nicholas casts off his old identity and the illusory 'god' that provides him with his fictional vision of reality. Conchis advises him to act and return to Alison while he may. "We no more have to leave everything to hazard than we have to drown in the sea...Swim!" (M,41) But Nicholas chooses to remain on Phrazos and become part of the organized experience offered by the 'masque' of Conchis

Nicholas allows himself to be drawn into the illusory world
that Conchis offers, for the same reason he takes refuge from the world of reality in his own illusions. Conchis' Bourani offers the fictional promise of a world of adventure and mystery - free from the restrictions of reality - that is organized and staged for Nicholas' benefit alone. As the creator of a world of fictional form and values, Conchis ironically usurps the role previously played by Nicholas' "god-novelist". During his early visits to the domaine of Bourani, Nicholas is constantly aware of the same feeling of "being watched" (M,64,66) that he had experienced during his abortive and histrionic suicide attempt. (M,58) Upon meeting Conchis, he is informed that he had indeed been secretly observed while near the domaine (M,77) Later, Lily impresses upon Nicholas the omniscient and omnipresence that characterizes Conchis: "Everything you say to me and I say to you, he hears, he knows." (M,193) Inevitably the old man becomes consciously associated in Nicholas' mind with the role of the "god-novelist" always near or above his living fiction: "Now I saw Conchis as a sort of novelist sans novel, creating with people, not words." (M,229) When Conchis becomes Nicholas' "god-novelist" creating an illusory world of mystery and adventure for him, the youth gradually relegates the control of his life to the magus and waits expectantly for developments that will be provided from without.
Early in the experience, when Lily makes her entrance upon
the stage of Conchis' fabrication, Nicholas' seduction into the
world of illusion is accelerated. Like Clegg, he finds in the
fictional realm an ideal world of play that promises to fulfil
his desire for pleasures denied him by reality. In essence,
these pleasures are of the body, and, as such, are of a marked
sexual character. With Lily and the suggestive Priapus that
stands in the centre of Bourani, Conchis lures Nicholas with the
promising image of a dream world in which he may satisfy his
narcissistic desires for pure pleasure uninhibited by reality.
Nicholas is drawn into the world of illusion by the element of
pure pleasure that is common to both the fictional experience
and the daydream. Conchis, the 'maker' of the dream, draws
attention to that element with his metaphoric reference to the
octopus he catches with a piece of white cloth; "You notice
reality is not necessary. Even the octopus prefers the ideal."
(M,134)

In his becoming the victim of a dream that promises pleas-
ures denied by reality, Nicholas echoes the experience of
Fredrick Clegg. Because of his superior intelligence and creat-
ive insight, however, his eventual search for the reality that
lies behind the world of appearance, allies him more closely
with Miranda. Like both of them, however, he becomes isolated from the relative reality of the world he has known and is confronted with a situation that he consciously finds characterized by its obvious unreality. The movement for him, initially, is a movement from England to Greece. Upon his arrival in Athens, he finds himself "alone, as Alice in Wonderland" in a place that is far from London and Alison, "not in distance, not in time, but in some dimension for which there is no name. Reality perhaps." (M,45) The division like that between Clegg's cellar and the outer world is that of the reality and the dream.

As he settles into life on Phraxos, Nicholas perceives his circumstances more clearly, as an "exile from contemporary reality" (M,52), and later, when he is drawn into the elaborately organized fabrication staged by Conchis, he becomes aware of confronting a force that is openly antagonistic to the real world he knows. "You realize," Lily tells him later, "that Maurice's aim is to destroy reality." (M,307) Ultimately, of course, it is the nature of the conscious fiction itself that threatens Nicholas' hold on his falsified vision of the real world. Sitting on the terrace, listening to Conchis' narrative, he is aware of the force imparted by the agent - the force of fiction itself;
As he began to speak again I smelt the night air, I felt the hard concrete under my feet, I touched a piece of chalk in my pocket. But a strong feeling persisted, when I swung my feet off the ground and lay back, that something was trying to slip between me and reality. (M,116)

Nicholas is the voluntary victim of the fantasy and can freely give himself to the pleasures it offers. But like Miranda, he struggles in the face of an unreality, to maintain his own identity, his own sense of reality which he finds threatened. As his female counterpart, Miranda, embodies her past reality in G.P. - and through his memory seeks to remain sane - Nicholas attempts to maintain his sense of reality by calling to mind his single connection with the outer world - Alison. Like the school chalk that he touches in his pocket - itself a remnant of the world beyond Bourani - Alison serves as a link with his past reality:

...she was human warmth, normality, standard to go by. I had always seen myself as potentially a sort of protector of her ...I saw that perhaps she had been, or could have been, a protector of me. (M,107)

Faced with the relative unreality of Clegg's world, Miranda of The Collector emulates G.P., for he is to her an immutable and constant symbol of her own idealized conception of reality. Nicholas endows Alison with a similar value of constancy and, like Miranda, seeks to negate the force of unreality through
 emulation; at that moment he hghts "a cigarette, as Alison, at such a moment, would have lit a cigarette." (M,107)

Essentially, Nicholas' grasp on his old self is maintained through a simple faith in the evidence of the senses to provide a final verification of ultimate reality. For this reason, Alison's constant physicality is central to the perpetuation of his erroeneous vision of life. She is to him a fixed and verifiable fact and therefore, an object of his absolute faith in fact. Faced with the unreality posed by Conchis' fabrication, Nicholas instinctively searches for the verifiable fact that lies behind the obvious illusion of the appearance. To him, all that exists can be rationally explained. In response to his probing questions, Conchis rebukes him:

Your first reaction is the characteristic one of your contra-suggestible century: to disbelieve, to disprove...You are like a porcupine. When the animal has its spines erect, it cannot eat. (M,101-102)

In order to come to an awareness of the truth and mystery of life, Nicholas, like Miranda before him, and Charles after, must 'lose himself in order to find himself'; or, in the words of the poem he finds on the rough drafts in the underground room that reveal the intentions of the 'masque': "Spare him
till he dies. Torment him till he lives." (M, 498) But as long as Nicholas is able to maintain his image of Alison as a "constant reality", he is able to defend himself from within against the outward assault of Conchis' illogical world. With this fixed point in the outer world, he is able to retain his 'old self' and the illusions of his past. He answers Lily with confidence;

...you've no idea how strange this experience has been I mean, beautifully strange. Only, you know, it's one's sense of reality. It's like gravity. One can resist it only so long. (M, 205)

In the manner of "Sciron, a mid-air man", to whom he likens himself early in the novel (M, 52), Nicholas finds himself caught between the two worlds. On one hand, he wishes to preserve the "constant reality" that he sees reflected in Alison, and on the other, the fictional ideal embodied in Lily. The first is dependable and anchored firmly in physical reality, but the second, though part of the uncertain and mysterious 'masque', offers the pleasures of dream. Rather than choose, Nicholas maintains a duplicity in his vision. On the weekend that Alison is coming to Athens, he explores the two-fold possibilities:

If he (Conchis) invited me, I could easily make some excuse and not go. But if he didn't then after all I would have Alison to fall back on. I won either way. (M, 199)

Alison, however, is quick to see through his deceit and accuses him with it directly:
Tart it up so it makes you seem the innocent one, the great intellectual who must have his experience. Always - both ways. Always cake and eat it. (M,261)

Walking in Piraeus with Alison, who draws the noisy attention of males in the street, Nicholas cannot help making a comparison that inevitably is at her cost: "I had a vision of Lily walking through that street, and silencing everything, purifying everything; not provoking and adding to the vulgarity." (M,237). Lily's immediate supremacy over Alison, like the dream Miranda's over the prostitute that confronts Clegg with his own impotence, lies in the fact that she offers Nicholas an ideal image of himself. Though his true interest in her is informed by his sexual desire, Nicholas attempts to desexualize his view of Lily. While with her on Bourani, he is struck by "the nape of her neck, her slim shoulders, her total reality". (M,202)

Here he reveals the true physical interest in her appearance but, later with Alison in Piraeus, he thinks of how Lily would "purify" the sexual attention that Alison evokes.

Nicholas is able to feel "a passionate wave of desire" for Alison, only when he has successfully transposed her into the aesthetic context of the fictional situation.

She (Alison) did not know it, but it was for me an intensely literary moment. I could place it exactly: England's Helicon.
I had forgotten that there are metaphors and metaphors, and that the greatest lyrics are very rarely anything but direct and un-metaphysical. Suddenly she was like such a poem and I felt a passionate wave of desire for her. (M, 255)

Nicholas can only fully relate to Alison within a contest that is essentially a self-imposed illusion. While watching her sleeping in the cabin on Parnassus, however, he pays tribute to the greater truth that he is eventually to internalize, a truth that represents a synthesis of the duality he poses in the polarized figures of Alison and Lily. He observes in the sleeping Alison: "Young and ancient; innocent and corrupt; in every woman, a mystery." (M, 250) This is the figure that Nicholas cannot ultimately accept as one, and chooses in his pragmatic sense of reality to separate into two. On one side he sees Alison, self-acclaimed "Queen of the May" (M, 255), an image of the physical and worldly and on the other, Lily, "Astarte, mother of mystery" (M, 202), the embodiment of the spiritual and the mysterious. Like Conchis' octopus, Nicholas "prefers the ideal" offered by the illusory Lily, and hence attempts to distance Alison. She is "an intrusion - of dispensable reality into pleasure" (M, 199); but, even as such, he does not wish to discard her entirely. After she leaves him in Athens, he writes her a letter composed with the object of maintaining her in reserve. (M, 266)

When Nicholas returns to Bourani after his separation from
Alison, he attempts to impose upon Lily, the role that he had previously desired of Alison. His interest in Lily becomes more consciously physical, and he unhesitatingly projects those desires upon her. (M, 269) In spite of the numerous deceptions that confront him in the 'masque', Nicholas chooses to believe Lily when she tells him the fabricated tale of her past. He believes her because he wants her interest in him to be real; I knew documents can lie, voices can lie, even tones of voice can lie. But there is something naked about eyes; they seem the only organs of the human body that have never really learned to dissimulate. (M, 313)

Once again, Nicholas deceives himself, for Lily's eyes serve as a mirror showing him only what he wishes to see. (M, 269) He becomes, then, like Clegg, the unwitting victim of his own desires, and totally at the mercy of Conchis' manipulations.

When Conchis 'stages' Alison's suicide, he breaks Nicholas' contact with his past self and the outside world. With his isolation intensified and his future possibilities with Alison permanently destroyed, the youth turns to Lily as a "total necessity". (M, 362) When she finally betrays him, he is left completely alone in the world stripped of his hopes and ideals. The copulation scene in the ritualistic "disintoxication" serves a similar function in The Magus as Miranda's attempted seduction of Clegg in The Collector. Seeing Lily and Joe together in the
in the sexual act, has the effect on Nicholas that Miranda's seduction has on Clegg. From this point, Nicholas is dispossessed of his dream, and Lily is reduced in his eyes to the level of a whore.

Regaining consciousness after the "disintoxication", Nicholas finds himself in the ruined city of Monemvasia. The ruins are an image of his past hopes and illusions; robbed of them Nicholas feels "absolutely alone, the last man on earth, between sea and sky of some medieval Hiroshima." (N, 429) Later when Alison's staged reappearance robs him of even the memory of her virtue of constancy, he finds himself totally adrift in an alien world that cannot be masked with illusion. Early in the experience, Conchis had told him that: "A woman is like a keel." (N, 220) Now, in a terrifyingly empty and hostile sea, Nicholas desires to regain Alison.

He is thus made aware of his self-fictionalization, but, as with Miranda, this lesson is only part of the truth that Nicholas confronts. The purpose of the 'masque' is two-fold, for Conchis wishes also to bring his guest to a recognition of the "unverifiable" truth of mystery that abides behind the appearance of life. Toward this end, Conchis' elaborate world of illusion is
structured as a rite of initiation into the true mysteries, and takes the form of a secret ritual in which the elect, Nicholas, is guided to the true vision by the magian and priest, Conchis.  

From the first moment he confronts Conchis, Nicholas is aware of the "rehearsed" effect of all the magus does, and he never ultimately loses sight of the 'maker' behind his creation. Conchis, in fact, works actively to make his manipulating presence obvious. "Come now," he urges Nicholas, "Prospero will show you his domaine." (M, 79) By giving the emphatic appearance that - in the words of the poem Nicholas writes shortly after their first meeting - "the man in the mask manipulates" (M, 91), Conchis evokes the conundrum that impels Nicholas' quest. The reaction that he first manifests is parallel to Miranda's; he wishes to know Conchis' motive, and the immediate reality behind the mask of appearance. His early mystification arises from the "absence of any visible machinery - no secret rooms, nowhere to disappear - or of any motive". Stimulated by the knowledge that a meaning abides behind the dazzling and obvious illusion of which he is a part, Nicholas desires to find the real motive, "the reality behind all the mystery". (M, 152) There is, to his immediate knowledge, but one agent who can provide an answer to his question - Conchis.
"I feel I'd enjoy it more," Nicholas asks one evening, "if I know (sic) what it all meant." Conchis' answer explicitly provides the 'real' condition of life that he wishes his "god-game" to reflect:

My dear Nicholas, man has been saying what you have just said for the last ten thousand years. And the one common feature of all those gods he has said it to is that not one of them has ever returned an answer. (M, 181) (emphasis mine)

Confidant that the agent of his situation is before him, Nicholas continues to probe: "Gods don't exist to answer. You do." "In this respect," Conchis responds, "treat me as if I did not exist." (M, 181) The magus, then, wishes to be taken, literally, as the author absent from his tale. His advice, ironically, is that of the author to his reader. Early in the experience, Conchis suggests to Nicholas: "I do not ask you to believe. All I ask you is to pretend to believe." (M, 133) The remark, again, is that of the author made visible through Conchis, to the reader made visible through Nicholas.

Through his enigmatic remarks and his manipulating presence, Conchis provokes Nicholas' search for the meaning and causality that resides ultimately behind the obvious world of illusion he creates. Eventually, Nicholas pierces the veil of illusion and comes face to face with the one great mystery - the "unverifiable" reality that informs all life. There is no force of causality
that will answer his questions, and ultimately, there is no meaning that can be articulated. But, like Miranda, he must discover this for himself. "The most important questions in life can never be answered by anyone except oneself," Conchis tells Nicholas, and then states bluntly that this is what he is trying to "show" him through his fiction. (N,149)

One of the central experiences in Conchis' 'masque', is the "mind-voyage" that Nicholas is taken on by his host. The event follows the ancient pattern of the "rite of admission into the Orphic Mysteries";

It is believed by some authorities that the neophyte may have been cast into a hypnotic sleep by his "initiator", and whilst in this condition a vision of the "glories of the other world" suggested to him.19

Nicholas' experience is in essence mystical, and as such, can only imperfectly be articulated:

I was having feelings that no language based on concrete physical objects, on actual feeling, can describe. I think I was aware of the metaphoricality of what I felt. I knew words were like chains, they held me back; and like walls with holes in them. Reality kept rushing through; and yet I could not get out to fully exist in it. (N,225-226) (Emphasis mine)

Here, Nicholas experiences directly the mystery that lies behind the appearance of life. It is the "unverifiable" reality that informs the universe - the "dark core", the "dimension in
and by which all other dimensions exist". This is the mystery that Conchis wishes his guest to seek out and embrace. It is the answer, which is no answer, to the questions that Nicholas wishes to resolve with reason. As Conchis tells him, "Verification is the only criterion of reality. That does not mean that there may not be realities that are unverifiable." (M, 221)

Like Miranda, Nicholas is urged to seek out the true meaning behind appearances when he becomes aware that he is confronted by illusion. By creating a seemingly planned world, Conchis evokes, consciously, the same question that Clegg unwittingly evokes in Miranda. If the illusory world is planned for him, then he must seek out the meaning. Nicholas regards the 'masque' as a "maze" that he must explore in order to "reach the center". (M, 301) Not until the final scene of the novel does he realize the answer. Fowles intrudes to draw attention to the truth of the 'masque': "the maze has no center". (M, 594)

This is the truth that Conchis wishes to make evident to Nicholas in his central narrative of the incident at Seidevarre. Watching Henrik "meeting his god," he is suddenly struck by the omnipresent mystery that looms behind the world of appearances:
But in a flash of terrible light all our explanations, all our classifications and derivations, our etiologies, suddenly appeared to me like a thin net. That great passive monster, reality, was no longer dead, easy to handle. It was full of a mysterious vigor, new forms, new possibilities. The net was nothing, reality burst through it...That simple phrase, I do not know, was my own pillar of fire. (M,287)

The experience, an intended reflection of Nicholas' "mind-voyage", is one of an apprehension of the "unverifiable" reality.

Standing in Regent's Park, Nicholas experiences the revelation that Conchis has been leading him toward. Although Mrs. de Sietas informs him earlier of the truth - as Conchis does frequently throughout the 'masque' - it does not become a reality for him until he experiences it as fact. "The god-game is ended." "Because there are no gods. And it is not a game." (M,575) The mask is removed forever when Nicholas abruptly realizes that neither he nor Alison are being watched.

The theatre was empty. It was not a theatre. They told her it was a theatre, and she had believed them, and I had believed her. To bring us to this - not for themselves, but for us. (M,604)

There is no third person god, and ultimately, there is no meaning behind the appearance of life - only an eternal and abiding mystery that will always evoke the question of causality. It is a question that will not be answered, and because it will not be answered, it will always be asked.
The truth that Nicholas finally faces is the knowledge that life unmasked is a mystery - an incomprehensible maze without a center. In Fowles' words of *The Aristos*: "Man is an everlack, an infinite withoutness, a float on an apparently endless ocean of apparently endless indifference to individual things."\(^{21}\) But Nicholas does not conclude, as Fielding of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, that "mystery is only a high-sounding term for a muddle."\(^{22}\) Though both Forster and Fowles have in common the vision of world of flux and hazard, they come to opposite conclusions of man's condition. Whereas Forster was a sceptical humanist who resigned himself to a vision of universal confusion that must be finally endured, Fowles is an existentialist who maintains that:

In order that we should have meaning, purpose and pleasure it has been, is, and always will be necessary that we live in a whole that is indifferent to every individual thing in it.\(^{23}\)

With the knowledge of the real situation created by the absent 'God', comes the awareness of the positive condition of freedom that places on the individual the responsibility for his own choice of meanings and actions. While Forster's Fielding remains a victim of the world of hazard, Nicholas triumphs by asserting his own freedom through action. Conchis had emphasized this solution to the problem of being "afloat on an apparently
endless ocean of apparently endless indifference", when he had, early in the 'masque', advised his guest that "We no more have to leave everything to hazard than we have to drown in the sea ...Swim!" (M,141)

Nicholas' final choice is, ironically, to play a form of the "godgame". He instructs Alison to meet him in the waiting room of Paddington Station (an echo of Conchis' waiting room sign on Bourani) and then leaves her to make her own choice by imposing freedom upon her. "Eleutheria," he thinks as she pursues him "her turn to know". (M,603) As he finally leaves Regent's Park with his new awareness of the truth, Nicholas sees his surroundings as simple objects of the world of appearance.

The autumn grass, the autumn sky. People. A Blackbird, poor fool, singing out of season from the willows by the lake. A flight of gray pigeons over the houses. Fragments of freedom, an anagram made flesh, (M,604)

They are all part of the mystery of life; links in a visible chain through which - as he learned from the "mind-voyage" - the unverifiable reality can be apprehended. At this point fiction blends with life for, the real objects that Nicholas sees about him are to the reader, the words upon the page.

"One cannot describe reality," Fowles insists speaking of the
reality of mystery, "only give metaphors that indicate it." Sharing the vision of his author, Nicholas perceives the phenomenal world about him as signs of the unknowable mystery that abides behind the appearance.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


2 Ibid.


5 Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*.

6 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*.


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 63.


The terms *unda* and *aqua* are used by Conchis in *The Magus* for form and content, respectively. See M, 183.

Like James Joyce, John Fowles postulates a priestly role for the artist. In *The Aristos*, he theorizes that the "artistic experience, from the late eighteenth century onwards, usurps the religious experience. Just as the medieval church was full of priests who should have been artists, so our age is filled with artists who should have been priests." Fowles, *The Aristos*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Signet, 1970), p.196.


Ibid., p.17.


The image of the chain is a frequent one throughout *The Magus*, appearing chiefly in Nicholas "mind-voyage" and Conchis' trip to Seidevarre. (M, 225, 287) In an anagram that Alison poses to Nicholas ("all mixed up but the better part of Nicholas'...six letters" M, 252) the word "chains" is one possible solution I have found. It would connect moreover, the "anagram made flesh" with the described confrontations with mystery.

CHAPTER IV

The French Lieutenant's Woman

To say, as one critic does, that the "significance of The French Lieutenant's Woman" lies in the fact that it is "a remarkably solid historical novel in which Fowles recreates a large part of the ferment in English life a century age,"\(^1\) is a misplaced emphasis that displays an essential misunderstanding of Fowles' immediate purpose in the novel. It is a judgement, ironically, that arises from a process of explication that is demonstrated and rejected in The Magus - that of responding to appearance alone. "By searching so fanatically," Nicholas concludes of his investigation of the 'masque',

I was making a detective story out of the summer's events, and to view life as a detective story, as something that could be deduced, hunted and arrested, was no more realistic (let alone poetic) than to view the detective story as the most important literary genre, instead of what it really was, one of the least. (M,501) (emphasis mine)

To view the most recent novel by John Fowles as a historical novel, is to permit one of those "painted screens erected by man to shut out reality" (FLW,206) - the historical setting - to take precedence over real meaning. As Nicholas discovers, the meaning can only be confronted by passing beyond appearances. "I don't think of it as a historical novel", Fowles himself
declared and dismissed it as "a genre in which I have very little interest."² Charles, Fowles' gentleman anti-hero, provides the explanation of the obvious anti-historical basis of the novel when, gazing at the prostitute's child,

he had a far more profound and genuine intuition of the great human illusion about time, which is that its reality is like that of a road - on which one can constantly see where one was and where one probably will be - instead of the truth: that time is a room, a now so close to us that we regularly fail to see it. (FLW, 320)

The vision bears an obvious similarity to that of Eliot's

Four Quartets:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past³

Fittingly, Conchis of The Magus leaves upon the beach for Nicholas to discover upon the beach, an underlined passage from "Little Gidding" to serve as an epigrammatic introduction to his experience, for Fowles' vision of time is similar, in the final analysis, to that of Eliot. Describing his discovery of Bourani, Conchis reveals it as the realm of the timeless, the place where all times intersect and resolve one another in an echo of the garden in Eliot's "Burnt Norton":

Something had been waiting there all my life. I stood there, and I knew who waited, who expected. It was myself. I was here and this house was here, you and I and this evening were here, and they had always been here, like reflections of my
own coming. It was like a dream. I had been walking towards a closed door, and by a sudden magic its impenetrable wood became glass, through which I saw myself coming from the other direction, the future. (M, 105)

Through his narratives, Conchis frequently draws Nicholas back through time to settings in his past. His Edwardian childhood, like the ominous wilderness of Seidevarre, is isolated in a space and time that is apparently distant from the urbane comforts of the terrace on Bourani. But, as Conchis makes plainly evident to his guest, that apparent distance is largely an illusory dimension:

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. (M, 290)

For Fowles, as for Eliot "history is a pattern of timeless moments". 4

In The French Lieutenant's Woman, Fowles employs a setting one hundred years distant from the present for the purpose, not primarily of capturing the historical reality and perspectives of the Victorian Age, but to emphasize and reveal man's real relationship to history and time. The reader is not to look back along a plane at the distant age behind him - for this is the real illusion the novel poses - he is to share, for the
duration of the fictional experience, the sense of the simultaneity of history. The novel must ultimately be regarded in terms of the realities that it creates for itself, and attempts to communicate:

so if you think all this unlucky...digression has nothing to do with your time, Progress, Society, Evolution and all those other capitalized ghosts in the night that are rattling their chains behind the scenes of this book...I will not argue. But I shall suspect you. (FLW, 97-98)

It is a misconception to regard Fowles' novel as a "digression" from the present, for it is not simply a portrayal, however vivid, of an age past. At the heart of his purpose is the desire to present the timeless truth posited in all ages.

Throughout the novel, Fowles achieves a constant tension between the past and the present through the employment of the authorial commentator. Speaking from the declared vantage of the present, he draws the reader's conscious attention to the fact that his tale is only the illusory product of his own imagination. In this overt relationship with his reader, Fowles openly shares the privileged information of the tale's fictionality that in The Magus (until the intrusion of the last chapter) is communicated only through the comparative subtlety of irony. In openly acknowledging his manipulating presence as author, Fowles assumes a role like that of Conchis - the
omnipresent and omniscient creator "at web center". The reader, in a capacity analogous with Nicholas' role, is frequently reminded that the situation he witnesses is a fictional illusion, a fabricated world of appearances created for his benefit.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles enlarges upon the perspective he previously offers in *The Magus*, and includes within the *mise en scene* of the novel, his own declared presence as the true agent of the fiction. Although as one critic has pointed out, the unmasked authorial intrusion is a "thoroughly Victorian" creation, it represents, within the larger pattern of Fowles' fiction, a progression that involves a further exploration of the nature of illusion and reality through an expanded form. The reader, previously the unacknowledged witness of the fictional event, is directly confronted with the riddle offered by the world of appearance.

Through the epigraphs preceding each chapter, the frequent informative footnotes, and the constant authorial commentary, Fowles keeps his reader aware of his presence from cover to cover. The author's presence moreover, is not simply in the capacity of fellow witness with the reader, but - an echo of Conchis' method - is that of the self-acclaimed creator and manipulator of
the fictional world he presents. He materializes in the final chapter of the novel, with "more than a touch of the successful impresario about him." He gazes upon Mr. Rossetti's house where the final drama of his fiction is taking place, "as if it is some new theater he has just bought and is pretty confident he can fill." (FLW, 462) The metaphoric delineation of his fictional drama is an echo of Conchis' "meta-theater", and like the magus, he stands as the uncontested master of his world.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles openly plays the "godgame" that in his earlier novels he plays behind the scenes out of the reader's sight. His application of the rules governing the game does not radically differ from that of *The Collector* and *The Magus*. In all three, Fowles assumes the mask of the absent 'God' and maintains it with his characters. In the words of the significant epigram that opens the final chapter of this latest novel: "True piety is acting what one knows." (FLW, 461) Fowles simply plays the role of 'God' as he knows and understands it:

'God' is a situation. Not a power, or a being, or an influence. Not a 'he' or a 'she', but an 'it'. Not entity or non-entity, but the situation in which there can be both entity and non-entity.

"There is only one good definition of God," he announces in *The
French Lieutenant's Woman, "the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist. And I must conform to that definition." (FLW, 97)

Throughout his fiction, Fowles assumes this relationship with his characters. He is not "as the gods of the Victorian image, omniscient and decreeing", but constructs for his characters a world governed by the "new theological image" of 'God' - a 'God' who does not intervene but allows his characters to face a world that is like the real world. (FLW, 97) Both Clegg and Miranda of The Collector and Nicholas of The Magus, come to an awareness of the real nature of this 'God'. He is not present watching or judging, and he will not intervene. As Miranda puts it, - and it may be accepted for all Fowles' characters, as for the author himself - "we have to live as if there is no God." (C, 234)

Significantly, it is not the author who brings his characters to an awareness of the true nature of 'God' (and hence, reality), but a character within the novel itself, who echoing the author, plays the "godgame". Clegg becomes Miranda's image of the absent 'God' when he plays his version of the "godgame" with her. Conchis usurps the role of Nicholas' "god-novelist" and playing the "godgame" with him brings him to a realization of the real
nature of 'God'. In The French Lieutenant's Woman, Sarah serves as the fictional agent who brings the knowledge of reality to Charles by playing the role of the 'God'.

The levels of awareness suggested in this pattern are obvious. Within the novel, a character plays a visible version of the "godgame" that the author plays beyond the sight of the reader - in the earlier novels - and characters. In turn, the living reality that informs the real world of which the author is a part contains the true vision behind the roles both he and his characters play. In the words of Mrs. de Sietas of The Magus: "there are no gods. It is not a game." (M, 575). Behind a logical sequence of assumed roles is the vision of reality that Fowles ultimately embraces.

In The French Lieutenant's Woman, Fowles attempts to remove the last mask. His purpose would seem to be suggested in the earlier novels. The character playing the "godgame" within the fiction is able to bring the knowledge of reality to his opposite by making him (or her) aware that he is confronted by a fabricated situation. Faced with a world of obvious appearance, the elect character is drawn to search out the reality that lies behind the appearance. By assuming the role of the
absent 'God' of Fowles' reality, the agent impresses upon the elect the fact that he must seek the answer for himself, and that ultimately there is no one to provide an answer. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles attempts to turn the "game" upon the reader by presenting him with a world of illusion that is patently manipulated. The author declares himself the agent, and through Sarah poses a mystery that he does not offer to solve.

Whether the "game" Fowles would seem to play with his reader is, in the final analysis, as successful as the "game" his characters play, can only be answered by the individual reader. The crucial question of its success depends on whether the reader, like Nicholas, will attempt to search out the meaning behind the appearance. The matter of this problem in Fowles' most recent novel, however, is perhaps only peripheral, for the success of the novel itself does not rest on his evoking the reader's desire to penetrate the mask of the fiction. But, if nothing else, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* offers Fowles' most expanded exploration of the nature of illusion and reality, and, through Sarah, the most explicit representation of his vision of reality.

Sarah, the lyrical "figure from myth" (*FLW*,5), serves the role of the *magian*, the "professional mystifier"8, and, in the
familiar pattern of Fowles' earlier novels, she poses a living conundrum in the face of her elected victim, Charles Smithson. But it is a puzzle that also confronts the reader, for unlike his earlier magians, Fowles does not supply a motive for her inexplicable actions. When Sarah finally informs her hapless victim that there is no explanation for her conduct, that she is "not to be understood" (FLW, 452), it is a comment that is equally levelled at the reader. Throughout the novel, Fowles provides no information that will rationally explain the mystery of her motives.

With Sarah, Fowles retreats from the omniscient view that permits him to explore the thoughts of his other characters. He reports only her actions and the "outward facts" of her appearance. (FLW, 98) The reader is not permitted, as with Charles, Ernestina, or even Mrs. Poulteney, to examine Sarah's thoughts, for there is little authorial commentary to reveal her motives, desires, or objectives. This, of course, is similar to the portrayal of Conchis in The Magus: but he, unlike Sarah, makes his objectives clear in his dialogues with Nicholas, and through his associate Mrs. de Sietas. Sarah, however, is not, like Conchis, openly sharing the comprehensible and didactic aspirations of the author, nor like Clegg, driven by a transparently
obvious unconscious desire. In practice, Dr. Grogan's theory of Sarah's psychological abnormality satisfies neither Charles nor the reader, for it fails ultimately to explain her real actions.

The answer to the riddle Sarah poses in her unexplained actions rises out of Fowles' concept of the omnipresent mystery of life itself. Behind her appearance, her deceptions, and her manipulations, there is no meaning to be articulated. Unlike Conchis, she does not need to evoke mystery through elaborately staged events, for, in one sense, she is mystery. On first seeing her, Charles is struck by her face: "There was no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask." (FLW,10) (emphasis mine) Sarah, above all, embodies the power of mystery that is, within Fowles' scheme, frequently symbolized in the form of the female. Like Jung's anima, she is at once an expression of elusive mystery and the eternal principle of creation. In The Magus, Lily 'plays' the role of "Astarte, the mother of mystery", but in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Sarah is realized in this form without the artifice. Sarah is Astarte.

In a discussion on the nature of God, in The Magus, Lily explains to Nicholas the mystery that she demands of her creator.
She wishes him to provide "no clues. No certainties. No sights. No reasons. No motives." "I ask God never to reveal himself to me. Because if he did I should know that he was not God. But a liar." (M, 274) The comment that Conchis then makes provides a prefiguration of the symbolic role that Sarah serves in The French Lieutenant's Woman:

Just then she paid us the compliment of making God male. But I think she knows, as all intelligent women do, that all profound definitions of God are essentially definitions of the mother. Of giving things. Sometimes the strangest gifts. (M, 275)

The absent 'God' of Fowles' "unverifiable" reality, becomes symbolically represented in the form of Sarah, who brings to Charles, as Conchis did to Nicholas, the gift of the knowledge of truth.

The nature of Sarah's role is emphasized early in the novel. In her childhood, "she had read far more fiction, and far more poetry...than most of her kind." As a result:

They served as a substitute for experience. Without realizing it she judged people as much by the standards of Walter Scott and Jane Austen as by any empiracally arrived at; seeing those around her as fictional characters, and making poetic judgements on them. (FLW, 53).

From this information she would seem, like Nicholas of The Magus, to be the possessor of a highly illusory vision of life. But to the contrary,
She could sense the pretensions of a hollow argument, a false scholarship, a biased logic when she came across them; but she also saw through people in subtler ways. Without being able to say how, any more than a computer can explain its own processes, she saw them as they were and not as they tried to seem. (FLW, 52)

The "instinctual profundity of insight" that Sarah possesses arises from the fact that her judgements reflect, not the illusory aspects of fiction, but the permanent truth it contains.9

Sarah's insight is chiefly into the nature of ultimate reality. With her "instinctual" ability to see through appearances, she is able to penetrate the mask of the age and behold the truth that lies behind it. Unlike Mrs. Poulteney who "believed in a God that had never existed", Sarah "knew a God that did." (FLW, 57) When she undertakes the "godgame" with Charles, she assumes the role, like the earlier magians, of the "professional mystifier" and confronts him with a fictional world. Sarah does not however, assume a mask. Her fabricated tale to Charles is not, like Conchis' deceptions, a conscious histrionic lie, for Sarah reflecting her character, instinctively does what she does. She is never able to articulate her motives; she is only able to maintain that she is "not to be understood." (FLW, 452) Sarah, like the author himself, emulates the epigram of the last chapter - "True piety is acting what one knows (Fowles also suggests "humanity" and the existential phrase "authenticity"
as possible substitutes for "piety") (FLW, 467). But in her portrayal of the 'God' that reflects the condition of reality, Sarah reveals an instinctual, rather than a ratiocinative awareness of the truth. Unlike Conchis, she is unable to verbalize on the condition of reality, she can only, in the existential phrase, 'act it out'. She is not deceiving Charles when she tells him: "Do not ask me to explain what I have done. I cannot explain it. It is not to be explained." (FLW, 355)

Sarah's realm of the Undercliff, the "English Garden of Eden" (FLW, 67) is a symbol ultimately, like Clegg's cellar, or Conchis' Bourani, for the ideal world of illusion, but unlike its predecessors, this realm in which Sarah reigns is not a fabrication, but a natural "unalloyed wildness of growth and burgeoning fertility". (FLW, 68) The image provides an expression of energy and growth, but it cannot be simply accepted in the traditional sense of one representing the natural and cyclical world of Nature. "Only one art has ever caught such scenes", Fowles adds, "that of the Renaissance. Its device was the only device; What is, is good." (FLW, 68) The Undercliff is the natural in art, or an expression of the essence of the truth informing art without the mask of artifice. The inner sanctum of the Undercliff - the "secluded place" to which Sarah leads
Charles in order to tell him her story - possesses only the suggestion of the artificial ordering of natural elements, appearing as "a kind of green amphitheater", where before a "stunted thorn", someone had placed "a flat-topped block of flint". (FLW,166) From this "rustic throne", Sarah reigns as the living embodiment of the mystery posed by the absent 'God', and as such, the bearer of the truth of art.

As in the earlier novels, Sarah, as magian brings the knowledge of truth to a chosen elect, Charles Smithson, whose own vision falsifies reality. The central symbol of Charles illusory faith in the age, and its demand for allegiance to the creed of duty, is Winsyatt, his uncle's rambling Wiltshire estate. With its "symbolic...stable clock" rising over all, it is fixed solidly in the transient world of man; but, it also possesses a value for Charles of an ideal world that time has not decayed. It is an idyllic place where "green todays flow into green tomorrows, the only real hours were the solar hours." Unlike the "unalloyed wildness" of the Undercliff, Winsyatt pervades "a sense of order" which is "almost mechanical in its profundity, in one's feeling that it could not be disturbed, that it would always remain thus: benevolent and divine." (FLW,196) For Charles, Winsyatt is the vision of a controlled and permanent world that hides a real world of
impermanence and flux.

Upon the family seat of Winsyatt, Charles inherits "immense duties" that call for the "preservation of this peace and order". (FLW,197) The benevolent paternalism of the role, places upon his shoulders the duty of maintaining an illusion that distances the real world. In the pursuit of his natural studies, he demonstrates what is, in effect, only an extension of the faith in the order that Winsyatt represents - "the Linnaean obsession with classifying and naming, with fossilizing the existent". In a desire to distance the truth, "to stabilize and fix what is in reality a continuous flux", he projects his illusions upon the "crumbling" cliff-face of the Devon seacoast, and sees "an immensely reassuring orderliness in existence". (FLW,49)

Like Clegg, Miranda, and Nicholas of the earlier novels, Charles takes refuge from reality in a world of illusion. Before his experience with Sarah, he unquestioningly shares with his age, "those painted screens erected by man to shut out reality - history, religion, duty, social positions" unaware that they are "illusions, mere opium fantasies" (FLW,206), that serve only to hide the true nature of reality. Charles, more fortunate than Nicholas of The Magus, who could withdraw only into a self-
created world, can distance reality through merely conceding and conforming to the general illusion of the age. Through "cryptic colouration" - Fowles' loanword from Darwin - Charles is able to guarantee his "survival by learning to blend with (his) surroundings". (FLW,145) But Charles does not fully accept the protection offered by the conventions of the age, for he believes himself to be "not like a majority of his peers and contemporaries". (FLW,129) This assertion of his own unique identity prompts Charles to look beyond the aspirations of his age, and hence, renders him vulnerable to the mystery posed by Sarah.

After meeting her on the Cobb, Charles expresses his dissatisfaction at the absence of "mystery" and "romance" in the town, and returning to his rooms he vaguely perceives "mysterious elements" that the lone woman has stirred in him. Like Nicholas of The Magus, he is unable to know at that moment that he yearns for a "new land" a "new mystery", (M,15) and Sarah offers that possibility. Typically he perceives these "mysterious elements" while gazing at himself in the mirror - that frequent symbol of the other world in Fowles' fiction. (FLW,10-11)
Walking down the beach in search of fossils and moving progressively closer to the realm of the Undercliff, Charles moves symbolically distant from his age, and in his distracted thought, loses track of the time. (FLW, 50) When he begins his climb up toward the Undercliff, he becomes aware of a force it pervades, a force that is antagonistic to his "lust" for scientific classification and order; "the prospect before him, the sounds, the scents, the unalloyed wildness of growth and burgeoning fertility, forced him into anti-science." (FLW, 68)

For Charles it is a confrontation with something he has never before faced; "I had no idea", he later tells Ernestina, "that such places existed in England". (FLW, 88) But above all, he is conscious of the fact that what is before him effecting him so powerfully is "all, in short, that (his) age was not", (FLW, 68)

When he spies Sarah she is inextricably part of all before him. Momentarily the power of the Undercliff overcomes him and "the whole Victorian Age was lost". (FLW, 72) Like Bourani to Nicholas, the Undercliff is to Charles a dimension far from the reality of his age.

Emphasizing and extending the polar values of the Undercliff and age, Sarah and Ernestina offer an embodiment of the choice that Charles must make. From the moment of her appearance in the
novel, Sarah is related to the realm of art and illusion. She stands, when Charles first approaches her, on the Cobb, "a superb fragment of folk art," (FLW,4) that is both distanced and isolated from the town of Lyme Regis. Looking upon her face, Charles is struck by the "sorrow (that) welled out of it as purely, naturally and unstoppably as water out of a woodland spring". (FLW, 10) She stands, as the Undercliff, far from the control and formality that characterize the illusions of his age.

Ernestina, a "shallow-minded" girl in the testimony of the author himself (FLW,264) embodies the illusory vision of reality demanded by the age; she is a girl of appearances, her own sensitivity directed chiefly to the choice of masks required by the circumstance of the moment. A reflection of her own tendency to judge by appearance only, her attraction to Charles is superficial, expressed in her admiration of "the way he walked and especially the manner in which he raised his top hat to Aunt Tranter's maid". (FLW,26) As she looks at herself in the mirror, she does not perceive, as Charles, the "mysterious elements" that abound in life, she sees only her outward form and becomes "lost in highly narcissistic self-contemplation". (FLW,28) Fittingly the Ernestina to whom Charles chooses, in his dream vision, to return and marry, sits embroidering a "watch pocket for him".
She represents the real world of time and change that Charles wishes to escape.

The relative values of Ernestina and Sarah are frequently realized in the novel through a series of contrapuntal images that mirror one another and serve to provide a comparison of the two. While Charles is in the natural richness of the Undercliff looking down upon Sarah sleeping in the open, Ernestina rises from her bed in Aunt Tranter's house to usher in Mary, the maid who carries "a positive fountain of spring flowers" from Charles. To Ernestina it is an "unwelcome vision of Flora", and in her reaction she poses a figure opposite to Sarah's (FLW, 75). She tells the maid that she does not like them so close. (FLW, 76) Distancing the natural, Ernestina places herself in an artificial world far from the Undercliff. Charles, appropriately, had proposed to her amidst the forced blooms of a hothouse.

In two separate scenes, which again mirror one another, Sarah reads to Mrs. Poulteney from the Bible, and Ernestina reads to Charles from The Lady of La Garaye. The very books from which each reads serves to inform of the characters of the women - the latter, a sentimental and "insipid" narrative poem, and the former a compendium of timeless truth and myth.
With a voice, "controlled and clear," Sarah spoke directly of the suffering of Christ, of a man born in Nazareth, as if there was no time in history, almost, at times, when the light in the room was dark, and she seemed to forget Mrs. Poulteney's presence, as if she saw Christ on the Cross before her. (FLW, 57)

Her intensity and sincerity offers a powerful contrast to Ernestina's recitation to a bored and nodding Charles, who watches with "suitably solemn eyes, at Ernestina's grave face." (FLW, 115) Her reading is artificial, attempting to effect a tragic tone for the sentimental scene she reads.

Charles' dissatisfaction with himself, Ernestina, and, in the final analysis, with the age in which he lives, arises from his meeting Sarah. With her naturalness, her freedom from artifice, she provides a stark contrast to all he knows, and brings to him a consciousness of the mask of appearance assumed by himself and all about him: "Ernestina and her like...encouraged the mask, the safe distance; and this girl, behind her facade of humility, forbade it." (FLW, 145) Charles sees Ernestina with a new awareness that Sarah evokes; he perceives with dissatisfaction "that there was something shallow in her - that her acuteness was largely constituted, intellectually as alphabetically, by a mere cuteness." Above all, he perceives a mechanical and artificial quality, "something of an automaton about her", like "those
ingenious girl-machines from Hoffmann's Tales". (FLW,149)

On the Undercliff with Sarah, listening to her recall the story of her relationship with Varguennes, Charles - like Nicholas listening to Conchis' narrative - becomes aware that he is confronting an unreal world that threatens to draw him from reality:

Thus to Charles the openness of Sarah's confession - both so open in itself and in the open sunlight - seemed less to present a sharper reality than to offer a glimpse of an ideal world. It was not so strange because it was more real, but because it was less real; a mythical world where naked beauty mattered far more than naked truth. (FLW,176) (emphasis mine)

Through Sarah's narrative, Charles perceives an aesthetic world that lies - as Nicholas of The Magus learns - far from the moral world of actuality. It is essentially the world of the imagination manifested in fiction - a realm of the ideal distanced and liberated from the restrictions of reality. It is this world that Sarah evokes, and Charles, turning, projects upon the distant clouds above the sea,

like the gorgeous crests of some mountain range...and yet so remote - as remote as some abbey of Theleme, some land of sinless swooning idyll, in which Charles and Sarah and Ernestina could have wandered...(FLW,177)

In this aesthetic world, Charles is able to envision himself with Sarah and Ernestina, for this is not a moral world
that demands choice and action, but rather, one that resolves all tensions and obstacles. The vision evokes in Charles a reminder "of his own dissatisfactions", and he longs for the mystery of the remote lands that reflect the ideality of the dream. (FLW,177) Through her narrative on the Undercliff, Sarah confronts him with the knowledge that he is not what he wishes to be.

Like the dream of both Clegg and Nicholas, Charles' is one of total liberation from the restrictions of reality and time. The sight of Sarah disturbs his repressed desires and her image "unsettled him and haunted him, by calling to some hidden self he hardly knew existed". The "possibility she symbolized" is the promise of an illusory world of pleasure offering both emotional and physical release from the burdensome limitations he shares with his age. Ernestina, with her mechanical and artificial attributes, offers him the alternative of the age's obstructing, "painted screens". He becomes uncomfortably aware that his future with her is without the promise of mystery of adventure; it is "a fixed voyage to a known place." (FLW,130)

Disturbed by his disillusionment in the aspirations he shares with his age, Charles, like those characters of Fowles'
earlier novels, finds himself caught between the dream and the reality:

he felt himself in suspension between two worlds, the warm, neat civilization behind his back, the cool, dark mystery outside. (FLW,151)

He is in the dilemma of - in the words of one of the age's great poets - "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born,"10 In a similar position, Clegg of The Collector resolves the tensions by attempting to move completely into the world of the dream; Nicholas, on the other hand, takes the path of duplicity and attempts to preserve both worlds.

Charles, however, has a third alternative - Winsyatt. Unlike Sarah's realm, it does not offer the liberating vision of the dream, for his uncle's estate is "almost mechanical in its profundity". (FLW,196) But Winsyatt does, nonetheless, offer him a unique and individual identity that will free him from the homogeneity of his age, while simultaneously allowing him to play a leading part in it. Here he takes the role of a benevolent god whose duty it is to maintain the age's illusory faith in "peace and order". (FLW,197) Returning from his evening with Grogan, Charles exhibits his positive faith in the illusion of order that Winsyatt and his future role offer:
Unlit Lyme was the ordinary mass of mankind, most evidently sunk in immemorial sleep; while Charles...was pure intellect, walking awake, free as a god, one with the unslumbering stars and understanding all. (FLW,162)

The promise of the ideal world of Winsyatt would undoubtedly have triumphed over Charles' temptations to yield to the promises of Sarah's realm, if the circumstances of his uncle's marriage had not forever robbed him of the estate. As Charles approaches Winsyatt and considers his future role on the family seat, the scene imparts a force that negates the powerful influence of the Undercliff and Sarah - "that was his real wife, his Ernestina and his Sarah". (FLW,197)

With the loss of Winsyatt, Charles becomes less sure of his intellectual belief in the meaning and order of life. The benevolent forces of universal order become those of malevolent intent. An ammonite serves as a mirror for his own misfortunes, for it too has been subject to the forces of some "catastrophe". It brings Charles a vision of a dark reality:

In a vivid insight, a flash of black lightening, he saw all life was paralleled: that evolution was not vertical, ascending to perfection, but horizontal. Time was the great fallacy; existence was without history, was always now, was always being caught in some fiendish machine. (FLW,206) (emphasis mine)

Charles finds himself abruptly trapped in the small room of the
the present, and like Miranda of *The Collector*, he struggles to escape the new reality he confronts. Behind the appearance of life, which Charles attempts to penetrate for the first time, he sees a malevolent process at work.

When Charles loses his faith in the rational comprehensibility of life, his illusory faith in the "immensely reassuring orderliness of existence" is supplanted by a belief in a dark and diabolic force of causality that, like Hardy's "purblind Doomsters"\(^1\), silently wills his predicament. All the powers of reason and science that had earlier made the world seem an imminently knowable quantity are negated in a greater confusion. All life takes on, like the ammonite, a mysterious significance that only serves to remind him of the inevitable destructive force that lies behind appearance. Like the ammonite, the case-book on psychology that Dr. Grogan gives him becomes a mirror. Struck by the coincidence that a French Lieutenant was sentenced on the day of his birth and that Charles now risks an involvement with a girl, who in turn, has been abandoned by a French Lieutenant (not the same one), Charles is overwhelmed with awe:

For a moment, in that silent Dorset night, reason and science dissolved; life was a dark machine, a sinister astrology, a verdict at birth and without appeal, a zero over all. ([FLW], 235) (emphasis mine)
Victimized by what he believes is the mechanical movement of inevitable forces at work, Charles begins to turn for escape to the liberating world of illusion that Sarah offers.

Although he is forewarned of a possible deception of Sarah's part, by Dr. Grogan, Charles, like Nicholas of *The Magus*, believes only what he wishes to believe. In a scene strikingly similar to one in *The Magus*, Dr. Grogan marks a passage for Charles' attention in a casebook of psychology that he claims provides an explanation of Sarah's behaviour. (FLW, 228) (see also M, 215) But Charles ultimately rejects the clinical description as an inadequate portrayal of the Sarah he knows, and he chooses to allow himself to experience the dream. In the similar situation, Nicholas explains his rejection of Conchis' warning as a desire for hazard: "you can't warn off a man with gambling in his ancestry." (M, 220) Significantly parallel to his counterpart in *The Magus*, Charles shares this background; his father lost most of the family fortune at the baccarat tables. (FLW, 13)

With Winsyatt gone as a future hope of release from the predicament of the present, Charles becomes the unwilling heir to another seat of responsibility - that of Mr. Freeman's expanding business. During his London visit, Charles approaches the
store, and finds it a living embodiment of the dark machinery he feels operating through existence; it is "a great engine, a behemoth that stood waiting to suck in and grind all that came near it". (FLW, 193) Freeman's store is a powerful force that threatens Charles with ignominious extinction. He resists it through the instinct to preserve his identity. "His whole past, the best of his past self, seemed the price he was asked to pay." (FLW, 295) To give himself totally to the inevitable movement of the age and surrender his own desires, means to Charles a form of death.

He turns to Sarah finally because she offers an escape from the inevitable course upon which he feels impelled. Although, on the conscious level, he believes his actions to be an assertion of his own freedom in the face of fate - an attempt to escape "the prison of his future" (FLW, 362) - he goes to Sarah for the escape she offers from the real world of time and change. When he discovers that she has been deceiving him from the beginning, he loses his last refuge from reality. When Sarah reveals her deception, she denies Charles the fulfilment of the dream that he has projected upon her. Abruptly aware that he has only been confronted with a world of appearances, Charles, like Miranda and Nicholas, demands to understand the motive
behind the fabrication. In declaring that she "cannot explain it", Sarah leaves her chosen victim with an unsolved puzzle that evokes the familiar question - "Why?"

The residue of his faith in the age's "painted screens" is evident in Charles, for in his moment of confusion and doubt - heightened by his failure to understand why Sarah has lied and led him to apparent ruin - he goes to a church to find comfort. But there he realizes that he will receive no answer to the vast puzzle that life has become for him; "He knew, in the dark church, that the wires were down. No communication was possible." (FLW, 360) Forced to search out the meaning himself, he comes to a revelation of the truth that Nicholas grasped in Regent's Park at the end of The Magus. The sense of guilt that Charles feels for what he has done, like the need to assert a unique identity, is based upon the belief that he is being watched and judged by something beyond himself. He imagines "a dense congregation of others...behind him" in the church; but when he looks there is nothing but "Silent, empty pews". Abruptly, Charles penetrates the appearance of life and realizes the true 'God' that is behind the mask: "They do not know, they cannot judge." (FLW, 364)

This is the "gift" that Sarah brings him, the gift of truth in Fowles' scheme. (FLW, 361) "The false version of her betrayal by
Vargueness, her other devices, were but stratagems to unblind him." (FLW, 368) When Charles leaves the church, he does so with an awareness of the absolute freedom possible to man - his actions can be judged by himself alone, there are no omniscient observers watching him. "He was shriven of established religion for the rest of his life." (FLW, 367)

When he returns to Lyme Regis to inform Ernestina of his decision not to marry her, he is a new Charles shriven also of his old self:

He caught sight of himself in the mirror; and the man in the mirror, Charles in another world, seemed the true self. The one in the room was what she said, an imposter; had always been... an observed other. (FLW, 382)

With his new awareness, Charles must consciously confront the existential truth of freedom - the knowledge of being absolutely alone. This becomes a reality that he must physically experience when he is unable to find Sarah again. In his moment of illumination "he had not realized how much the freedom was embodied in Sarah; in the assumption of a shared exile." (FLW, 427)

By refusing to reappear and rescue Charles from his exile and loneliness, Sarah, herself, lives out her chosen role - that of the absent 'God' who does not intervene. Leaving him
in his isolation she forces him to live with the truth of the real world. When circumstance brings them together again, she maintains her chosen role as 'God', and her indifference toward him. In a momentary insight, Charles emphasizes the role she portrays when he recognizes that "To her he might be no more than a grain of sand among countless millions, a mere dull weed in this exotic garden of..." (FLW,456) Fowles does not supply the missing word, and the reader is left to imply what he wishes. Is it an "exotic garden of" life or fiction?

In the final chapter of the novel, Fowles considers the ultimate meaning of Sarah, as the rejected Charles makes his way out of the fictional world of the novel:

He (Charles) walks towards an imminent, self-given death? I think not; for he has at last found an atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness, on which to build; has already begun, though he would still bitterly deny it, though there are tears in his eyes to support his denial, to realize that life, however advantageous Sarah may in some ways seem to fit the role of Sphinx, is not a symbol, is not one riddle and one failure to guess it, is not to inhabit one face alone or to be given up after one losing throw of the dice; but is to be, however inadequately, emptily, hopelessly into the city's iron heart, endured. And out again, upon the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea. (FLW,467)

Thus the truth of the fiction that Sarah embodies flows into that of life and the two become one. As Fowles returns his reader to life, he reminds him of the greater reality that
lies behind the "game" of the novelist. His closing echoes Mrs. de Sietas' message to Nicholas: "there are no gods. It is not a game." (M. 575) In the final analysis there is no answer to the riddle Sarah poses; life is not a conundrum that can ever be solved by guesses and investigations. It is, for Fowles, a mystery that must forever be "endured". Like another exponent of the "godgame", Fowles cannot usher his creation off the stage without reminding his reader that the mystery of the dream itself is that of life:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV


4. Ibid., p. 58.

5. In his memorandum that appears in Fowles' "On Writing a Novel", he makes clear his own conscious intention of revealing the author's mask to the reader. "A novel is something new. It must have relevance to the writer's now - so don't pretend you live in 1867; or make sure the reader knows it's a pretence." See "On Writing A Novel," pp. 283-284.

6. Allen, p. 67. The critic cites Eliot's *Adam Bede*. To this I might add Thackeray's *The Newcomes* or *Lovel the Widower*.


8. Ibid., p. 217.

9. Ibid., p. 153. The "permanent truth" for Fowles is the touch-stone of "serious" art. "All serious scientists and artists want the same: a truth that no one will need to change." The truth that Fowles wishes to communicate lies, of course, in the everpresent mystery posed by the absent 'God'.


SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY WORKS


SECONDARY WORKS


