FORM AND MEANING IN "THE MAGUS"[1]

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The most straightforward reading of *The Magus* offers a modern version of the myth of the hero's quest for maturity. Structurally, the novel unfolds like a triptych: it is divided into three section, the first one, from chapter 1 to 9, shows the hero still in his home land, at the crucial moment in his evolution from adolescence into manhood when he has finished his University training at Oxford and is trying to orient his life. This part ends with his decision to abandon England in search of a job in a remote and alluring island in the Aegean, that is to say, with the hero's "call to adventure" and the "crossing of the first threshold" (Campbell, 1948).

The second and by far the largest section of the book goes from chapter 10 to chapter 67 and in it the hero will undergo the different phases of trial and testing that constitute his ritual initiation into knowledge; while the third section, covering chapters 68 to 77, may be read as the hero's return, his maturity now achieved. Joseph Campbell (p. 30) aptly synthesizes the threefold formula of the mythological adventure of the hero:

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men.

(1) John Fowles's dissatisfaction with the structure of *The Magus* is well known. Although *The Magus* was his first full-scale manuscript, written in

From the very beginning, then, Fowles consciously organizes his tale along traditional lines, but will use it -as he has already done with the memoir, diary and epistolary traditions in *The Collector*- for his own particular ends. First of all, he ensures the circularity of the tale by making the hero the narrator of the story: by allowing Nicholas d'Urfé to report the tale of his own life in the past we are assured from the start that he did return safely from his adventure. At the same time the fact that the narrator is the mature hero speaking about himself when he was still untaught and purblind produces a constant irony similar to that created in *Great Expectations*, where Pip, the adult narrator, must report the adventures, fears and feeling of Pip, the child, from the latter's perspective and without anticipating later events.

Finally, by having the narrator speak in the first person, the author has restricted our perspective to the narrator's point of view, so that we have to accept what he says even if we find him unreliable or ill-informed.

In the mythological versions of the hero's quest, the hero is generally endowed with several outstanding features, by which he can be easily recognized and which will ensure his survival through the dangerous journey. Often the mythological hero is a god's son, or has been miraculously begotten or saved, or is related in some way to a certain divinity. Often, too, the hero's name points to his divine or supernatural condition.

In *The Magus* the hero's name -Nicholas d'Urfé- has no supernatural connotations, but, significantly enough, evokes the world of literature:

> The wishful tradition is that our family came over from France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes -noble Huguenots remotely allied to Honoré d'Urfé, author of the seventeenth-centrury best-seller *L'Astrée* (p. 15)

a connotation the narrator ironically tries to minimize:

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the early 1950's, he continued almost obsessively to rewrite it over more than the next two decades, discarding draft after draft. He finally published a first version in 1964 and a wholly revised one in 1977.

Most existing criticism on the novel (mostly American) was published before the appearance of the revised edition of 1977. The present essay, however, is based on the second, revised edition of 1977, which, no doubt, Fowles himself considers to be an improvement on the first.

> Certainly -if we exclude another equally unsubstantial link with Tom Durfey, Charles II's scribbling friend- no other of my ancestors showed any artistic learning whatever: generation after generation of captains, clergymen, sailors, squirelings, with only a uniform lack of distinction and a marked penchant for gambling and losing, to characterize them. (pp. 15-16)

The hero's ancestry, remotely connected with a well-known and reputed writer and with a tradition of dissent, has later developed into the prototypical representatives of the English upper middle class with which John Fowles is so often concerned in his novels and to which Miranda herself belongs. The family fostering of the tradition of a French, Huguenot and literary ancestry all point to a common English upper class concern to trace a reputable lineage as far back if possible as the aristocratic Norman invaders. The mock-heroic ancestry of Nicholas d'Urfé thus established, the narrator expresses in words which again betray Fowles's conscious desire to give his novel a mythical scope, the oppressiveness of his parents' attitude to life and morals:

> I was born in 1927, the only-child of middle-class parents, both English, and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow (...) of that monstruous dwarf Queen Victoria. (p. 15)

"The grotesquely elongated shadow of that monstruous dwarf Queen Victoria" -a description that Dickens would undoubtedly have relished- is a major symbol in Fowles's tale and finds its echo in, for example, the Huguenot and literary ancestors attributed to Nicholas d'Urfé. The only son of middle class parents with precise ideas about "Discipline, Tradition and Responsibility" (p. 15), but also the true born inheritor of a Frech and literary tradition, fostered by the post-war atmosphere at high school and Oxford, and the reading of a novelist such as D.H. Lawrence, d'Urfé soon finds himself living two different and opposed lives:

> I went on leading a double life in the Army, queasily playing at being brigadier 'Blazer' Urfé's son in public, and nervously reading *Penguin New Writing* and poetry pamphlets in private.

The parallelism between d'Urfés position and that of Miranda Grey at this stage is striking: both are the children of middle-class parents with means; both have had the best possible educational opportunities; both feel ashamed of their parents for differents reasons (d'Urfe of his father; Miranda of her mother and aunt); and both have artistic talent. In the Prologue to

The Aristos, Fowles speaks disparagingly of Miranda, calling her "a prig", a beautiful and intelligent young woman, proud of her natural gifts, who still lacks the necessary insight:

> She was arrogant in her ideas, a prig, a liberal-humanist, like so many university students. Yet if she had not died she might have become something better, the kind of being humanity so desperately needs. (p. 10)

D'Urfé is also one of these snobbish University students. "Prig" is the word that comes to mind when we hear of Nicholas's membership of the Oxford club "Les Hommes Revoltés". A club whose members devoted themselves to drink,

> Very dry sherry, and (as a protest against those shabby duffel-coated last years of the 'forties') (to wear) dark-grey suits and black ties for our meetings. (p. 17)

In retrospect, the narrator is now able to see the futility of the club's enterprise which amounted to little more than the acquisition of "expensive habits and affected manners" under the cover of analysing "Existentialism" and living up to its principles.

The desire to create a fashionable club of this sort with its pompous french name and the effort to mark off their members from the common run of mortals by the adoption of "expensive habits and affected manners", as well as the uniform-like "dark-grey suits and black ties" all point to the same social bias: d'Urfé tells us that their dark suits and ties were intended as "a protest against those shabby duffel-coated last years of the 'forties'" and we could add, "and of the fifties" -the duffel-coat, the corduroy jacket with leather-patched elbows and of the so-called "angry generation" of the late forties and fifties that emerged on the English literary scene as a result of the protective measures of the Welfare State taken by the first Labour government after the Second World War. By expressing his disgust and contempt for these "shabby" fellows, d'Urfé reveals himself as the prototype of the upper-middle class with a sensitivity towards tradition and "class" that he so thoroughly despised in his own parents.

In *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950's* (1980) Blake Morrison synthesizes the characteristics of the realistic literary trend that stemmed from the Larkin-Amis-Wain troika:

> By the middle of the 1950's the image of the typical Movement writer as a provincial, lower-middle-class, scholarship-winning, Oxbridge-educated University lecturer was firmly established, (...) what was significant was that the Movement writers were assigned an identity which presented them as the 'coming' class. They were identified with a spirit of change in post-war British society, and were felt to be representative of shifts in power and social structure. (p. 56)

The association of this literary Movement with a wider class-struggle was, according to Morrison, "one reason why the group established itself so quickly in the years 1953-1955", but also the reason why the literary generation of the 1930's reacted so aggressively to the emergence of the Movement: "Stephen Spender labelled them 'Lower Middle brows', (Evelyn Waugh) spoke of a 'new wave of philistinism' (and Somerset Maugham made an) infamous attack on the 'ominous significance' of *Lucky Jim*. In this view the novel symbolized the arrival of a generation of young people best described as 'scum'" (p. 58)

"Philistinism", "little Englandism", "provincialism" and "social concern" were, then, labels liberallly bestowed upon the Movement writers by their analysers and detractors. They all point to the Movement's rejection of the Modernist idea of art and culture, that is to say, of elitism, cosmopolitanism and technical experimentation. Nicholas d'Urfé's nervous reading of the *Penguin New Writing* series is in sharp contrast to James Dixon's boredom with the Welches' "arty-get-togethers" and his anger with a reading of Anouilh ("Why couldn't they have chosen an English play?"), compare Amis's remark on "filthy Mozart", while d'Urfé's admiration for Greek culture is directly opposed to Philip Larkin's "a Greek statue kicked in the privates" (p. 59).

Before taking the decision to leave England d'Urfé's has tried a first job as a teacher in a "minor public school in East Anglia"; he boastfully tells us that he got the job because the only two other applicants were "redbrick". However, the drab, monotonous and unheroic life he leads at the school proved too hard a trial for the young man of aspirations:

> The mass-produced middle-class boys I had to teach were bad enough; the claustrophobic little town was a nightmare; but the really intolerable thing was the common-room. Boredom, the numbing annual predictability of life, hung over the staff like a cloud. And it was real boredom, not modish *ennui* (...)
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> I could not spend my life crossing such a Sahara; and the more I felt it the more I felt also that the smug, petrified school was a toy model for the entire country and that to quit the one and not the other would be ridiculous. There was also a girl I was tired of. (p. 18).

Like Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, Lawrence Durrell, Malcolm Lowry, Samuel Beckett and other Modernist and post-Modernist writers, Nicholas d'Urfé's feels the necessity of breaking out of the narrow boundries of their barren homelands in search of transcendence. Here, in mythological terms, is the origin of this "call to adventure". But d'Urfés's protest that it was "real boredom, not modish *ennui*" is heavily qualified by his last, reluctant, statement that "there was also a girl I was tired of". At this stage, again and again, d'Urfé presents himself as an intelligent but spoilt young man, who wants to lead a full, creative life, but for the wrong reasons and primarily for the sake of impressing others.

In "Collectors and Creators: The Novels of John Fowles", John Mellors says:

> The rules of the game are flexible, but it almost always involves a conflict between collector and creator, the two classes into which Fowles divides mankind. (p. 65)

Although essentially true, the statement needs qualification. If Frederick Clegg is a particularly awesome exponent of the human tendency to "collect" and Miranda of the potentialities of a "creator-to-be", Nicholas d'Urfé may be said to bring together in his own person these two tendencies: thematically, *The Magus* can be viewed as the inversion of *The Collector*. Using the Dickensian technique of focalizing the same themes from different points of view in subsequent novels, Fowles undertakes to analyse in *The Collector* and *The Magus* the clash between the lower and upper-middle classes from two complementary perspectives: in *The Collector*, as we have seen, Fowles studies the negative effects of a non-conformist, mediocre, lower-middle class upbringing on a shy, orphaned and unintelligent youth, and how the unexpected winning of the pools threatens to dislocate the balance of power between the "many" and the "few". In this novel, the sympathy is wholly on Miranda's side, the beautiful and clever Art student who represents the highest potentialities of the human being.

In *The Magus*, on the other hand, Fowles makes the vulgar, mediocre but appealing Alison (representative of the man in the street), the innocent victim, and Nicholas, the upper-middle class snob with a polished upbringing and a superior intelligence, the aggressor.

One outstanding feature of Frederick Clegg is his incapacity to have a normal sexual relation with Miranda or with any other woman: he kidnaps

Miranda because he is madly in love with her -throughout the novel he protests that his is a pure, uncontaminated, love, devoid of sinful fleshly cupidity. Nicholas d'Urfé, on the other hand, is a Don Juan type, a Lovelace obsessed with taking to bed as many girls as possible and boastful of this incapacity to "love". For all his protests, d'Urfé's is primarily presented as a "collector":

> I didn't collect conquests, but by the time I left Oxford I was a dozen girls away from virginity. I found sexual success and the apparently ephemeral nature of love equally pleasing. (p. 21)

Both Clegg and d'Urfé suffer from a basic deficiency. Clegg's portentous capacity to eternally love a single woman is transmuted into d'Urfé's reckless changing of sexual partner. "Learning" for Clegg involves learning how to go beyond his monomaniacal fixation on Miranda and develop sexually, and this he does in an awful and ironic way: he develops sadistic and voyeuristic attitudes and, when Miranda dies, is able to focus his "interest" on another girl without falling in love with her ("this time it won't be love" (1963:283)). D'Urfé's reaching of maturity, on the other hand, must involve a recognition of Alison's worth, the rejection of sex as an end in itself and his acknowledgement of love.

Nicholas d'Urfé, then, synthesizes in himself some of the outstanding "creative" characteristics of Miranda: the artistic bent, the love of trascendence, the superior intelligence and breeding; but also has the basic "collecting" quality of Frederick Clegg. He is, in a word, the aristos-to-be blinded by pride and folly. John Mellors' statement then, that "(the) collector and (the) creator (are) the two classes into which Fowles divides mankind" (1975: 65), might be qualified by saying that in the case of d'Urfé rather than classes of people, the "collector" and the "creator" represent deep human traits to be met with simultaneously in the same person. This point is crucial, for it explains why Miranda is unable to "teach" Clegg while Conchis succeeds in his teaching of d'Urfé:

> (...) "Are you elect?'
> 'Elect?'
> 'Do you feel chosen by anything?'
> 'Chosen?'
> 'John Leverrier felt chosen by God'.
> 'I don't believe in God. And I certainly don't feel chosen'
> 'I think you may be'.
> I smiled obviously. 'Thank you'.

'It is not a compliment. Hazard makes you elect. You cannot elect yourself'.

(1966:87)

In John Fowles's modern version of the mythical quest, then, the hero bears the marks of the superior being even though he still doesn't know it himself; like the mythological hero, his character is marred by a blemish: his inconsiderate and rakish sexual feats and his incapacity to love. This he will learn through the ordeals of his quest.

The first stage of the mythological journey, the "call to adventure", says Joseph Campbell, (1948: 58)

> Signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasures and danger may be variously presented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountain-top, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strange fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight.

It the novel, the distant land of torments and delight is Greece; to it d'Urfé is driven by an irresistible impulse and when he finally lands on it he finds that his expectations are surpassed by reality. D'Urfé's first contact with Greece is described in wholly metaphorical terms, which underline its mythical quality:

> It was like a journey into space. I was standing on Mars, Knee-deep in thyme, under a sky that seemed never to have known dust or cloud. I looked down at my pale London hands. Even they seemed changed, nauseatingly alien, things I should long ago have disowned. (p.49)

This world of superhuman purity which "seemed never to have known dust or cloud" is also a world of potentially simultaneous torment and delight:

> When that ultimate Mediterranean light fell on the world around me, I could see it was supremely beautiful; but when it touched me, I felt it was hostile. It seemed to corrode, not cleanse (...) It was partly the terror, the stripping-to-essentials, of love; because I fell totally and for ever in love with the Greek landscape from the moment I arrived. But with the love came a contradictory, almost irritating feeling of impotence and inferiority, as if Greece were a woman so sensually provocative that I must fall physically and desperately in love with her, and at the same time so calmly aristocratic that I should never be able to approach her. (p. 49)

So, from the start, d'Urfé senses this "Circe-like" quality of Greece", its potential benignity and its potential aggressiveness, which is the essential quality of the "unknown", the marvellous land where the hero must undergo his trial. To express his ambivalent love-hatred for Greece d'Urfé uses a simile which is extraordinarily apt, for it anticipates in a verbal icon the trial the hero will undergo in the hands of Lily. The comparison of Greece to an ever-enticing, ever-denying woman also works towards our identification of the changeable Lily/Julie/Vanessa figure with Greece. D'Urfé stresses this identification by using a technique of personification elsewhere:

> What Alison was not to know -since I hardly realized it myself- was that I had been deceiving her with another woman during the latter part of September. The woman was Greece. (p. 39)

And again:

> To get through the anxious wait for the secondary stage not to develop, I began quietly *to rape* the island. (p. 63)

The coming to Greece, then, may be interpreted as "the crossing of the first threshold". Beyond it, says Joseph Campbell, "lies darkness, the unknown, and danger (...) The powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky, yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades" (pp. 77 and 82).

From his arrival to Greece on October 2nd to "a Sunday late in May", d'Urfé lives in Phraxos a sterile life of loneliness and depression. His relation with Alison is more and more feeble: he only thinks of her at "moments of sexual frustration, not love" (p. 54). By December he is determined to "cut (Alison and London) away from (his) life" (p. 54). Simultaneously he deepens his relationship with Demetriades, a somewhat caricature modern equivalent of the mythological defenders of the boundary, who will help him down in his reckless pursuit of amoral sexual gratification. Demetriades takes him to a brothel in Athens to which d'Urfé would later return by himself and, at Christmas the hero even indulges in some "Gide-like moments". At the same time d'Urfé dreams of becoming a world famous poet:

But then, one bleak March Sunday, the scales dropped from my eyes (...) the truth rushed down on me like a burning avalanche. I was not a poet. (pp. 57-8)

The burning of his poems and the diagnosis of syphilis are the tangible outcomes of his two self-destructive primordial occupations during the winter. Still d'Urfé is too blind to see his failures from the right perspective: he indulges in self-pity and decides that his life is too sterile to be worth living any more. At this stage, d'Urfé still behaves as a member of *Les Hommes Revoltés:*

I stood in (Dr. Paratescu's) doorway, still foolishly trying for his sympathy.

'Je suis maudit'

He shrugged, and showed me out, totally indifferent, a sere notifier of what is. (p. 59)

D'Urfé decides to commit suicide as a final act of romantic revolt against life: the reasons for it are wholly aesthetic, a way of "creating" something at last:

It was a Mercutio death I was looking for, not a real one. A death to be remembered, not the real death of a true suicide, the death obliterate. (p. 63)

The comments are those of the mature narrator in retrospect. At that stage d'Urfé was unable to see the "intensely false -in existentialist terms, unauthentic" quality of his suicide, and thus, the contrast it stands in with regard to Alison's real and authentic desire to die:

I don't want to live any more. I spend most of my life not wanting to live (...) I'm only happy when I forget to exist. When just my eyes or my ears or my skin exist. I can't remember having been happy for two or three years. Since the abortion (p. 42).

From a mythical point of view, d'Urfé's "unauthentic" death symbolizes the descent into the "belly of the whale" which, according to Campbell (1948: 90) symbolizes "the idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth". Often this ritual death of the hero takes the form of "sparagmos", the tearing into pieces of the body of the hero and the eating of these pieces by the community. In the novel, d'Urfé's token suicide and the feeling he has that the only way on is "down, down and

down" (p. 63) stresses the idea that "the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation" (Campbell 1948: 91) previous to his entry into the sacred place where he will undergo an important metamorphosis before he is reborn again.

In medieval iconography the gargoyles at the entrance of the temples are symbols of the guardians of the thresholf: They stand in resentful animositi against those who dare cross the boundary without the appropriate mood, but will not touch the initiate, as the whale will safely vomit the hero it has swallowed.

When d'Urfé approaches Bourani for the first time he finds on the beach a pair of footfins, a towel and a paperback anthology of English poetry. Some lines form *Little Gidding,* from poems by Auden and by Ezra Pound have been underlined: these lines are all gargoyle-like warnings for the hero, summing up in a verbal icon the essence of what is to come. In them the aim and form of the hero's trials are synthesized. They all stress the danger and exhaustion of the journey to hell prior to the acquisition of knowledge of self, which after all amounts to less than the knowing of "drugged beasts". At the same time, the fact that the warnings take the form of poems also points to the basic quality of the realm the hero is entering: the polysemic world of literature. Th incongruous notice d'Urfé soon after finds with the words *Salle d'attente* "in the sort of position one sees *Trespassers will be prosecuted* notices in England" (p. 17) begs a similar double warning. The notice also confirms the hero in his intuition that he has finally come to the "realm", as it explains Mitford's criptic warning "Beware of the waiting-room".

When Nicholas jumped over the broken barbed-wire fence that offered a token protection to Bourani, he entered a mysterious realm where he was to be confronted by a series of ordeals intended in principle to test and adjust his notion of reality. During his first visit to the villa Conchis explains the meaning of the word "Bourani":

Two hundred years ago it was their (the Albanian pirates') slang word for gourd. Also for skull'. He moved away. "Death and water'. (p. 83)

In Conchis's interpretation, the skull stands for death, the gourd for water. Thus, Bourani may be said to contain the two opposed principles of life and death, but this is not the meaning with which the word "skull" is used elsewhere in the novel. It is often used to suggest, rather, the inner, mental or psychological potentialities of man. Thus, after the incident in the Earth, when Nicholas is left locked up for half an hour, he finds, after

his release two "clues" hanging from a tree: a doll in rags and a human skull. Nicholas interprets the doll quite easily:

> The doll was Julie, and said that she was evil, she was black, under the white innocence she wore. (p. 459)

but is undecided about the interpretation of the skull:

> Alas, poor Yorick
> Disembowelled corpses?
> or Frazer... *The Golden Bough?* (p. 460)

With these possible interpretations in mind, Nicholas walks away. As he does so, the adult narrator comments:

> The skull and his wife swayed in a rift of breeze. Leaving them there, in their mysterious communion, I walked fast away. (p. 460)

This comment on the "mysterious communion" of "the skull and his wife" shows that the mature d'Urfé has solved his doubts in the direction of the third possibility. Julie is neither a symbol of death nor of sadistic slaughter, but belongs, like Frazer's "dolls in sacred woods" (p. 460) to the realm of myth and fantasy, that is, to the realm of the psychological.

The psychological nature of Bourani is further enhanced by the poem d'Urfé writes during his first week-end stay at the villa:

> From this skull-rock strange golden roots throw
> Iknos and incidents; the man in the mask
> Manipulates. I am the fool that falls
> And never learns to wait and watch,
> Icarus eternally damned, the dupe of time... (p. 95)

The skull-rock from which "golden roots throw ikons and incidents" may literally refer to the *head-land* on which the villa is set, but its "golden roots" suggest golden hair, and it is from them that "ikons", that is, symbols, and incidents spring.

Over and over again, the psychological entity of Bourani is stressed. So, for instance, when d'Urfé first knocks at the door of the villa, he has,

> ... a *déjà vu* feeling of having stood in the same place, before that particular proportion of the arches, that particular contrast of shade and burning landscape outside (p. 78)

which contrasts with his strong awareness of coming back to reality after leaving the "domain".

> Yet I enjoyed the walk back to school (...) In a sense I re-entered reality as I walked. (p. 157)

Similarly, John Fowles has explained the etymology of "Conchis" saying that by it he meant to suggest "echo-catching, sea-murmuring" qualities, but, as Barry N. Olshen points out (1978: 41), it also "carries an obvious pun on conscious (ness)". It is, therefore, easy to agree with this critic when he says that,

> The symbolic names, in combination with the geographical metaphors (...), already provide more than sufficient indication that the journey from London to Phraxos and back to London is a journey of self-discovery, to be interpreted as both external and internal reality. It is at once a physical reality, that is, an actual journey over space and time, and a metaphorical account of a non-physical, experimental reality, that other kind of trip over the inner landscape of the mind. (p. 41)

After the discovery of the objects on the sand, and following the quotation of the line from *Little Gidding* "We shall not cease from exploration" (p. 69), d'Urfé immediately starts gathering information about Bourani and its mysterious owner, Maurice Conchis. From the start, the difficulty of establishing a one-sided, univocal truth about him, becomes apparent. Conchis is alternatively described as a German collaborationist; a patriotic major; a retired musician; a cynical man and an atheist and, simply, as a man who cherishes his privacy. Neither can d'Urfé himself describe his looks: he feels incapable of guessing his age and alternatively thinks he might be "slightly mad, no doubt harmlessly so" (p. 79). But "then he changed (...) he wasn't mad after all" (p. 30). Perhaps he was "an old "queer" (p. 85), or "a transvestite" (p. 90); Conchis was "somehow not contemporary (...), his whole appearance was foreign. He had a bizarre family resemblance to Picasso: saurian as vell as simian (...) the quintessential Mediterranean man (...)" (p. 81), and later d'Urfé will describe him as "Picasso imitating Ghandy imitating a buccaneer" (p. 139). Nevertheless, his manners suggest "the quick aplomb of a conjurer" (p. 80)

All these and other efforts d'Urfé makes at describing the ever-changing nature of Conchis and his doubts about his sexual tendencies point to the two basic qualities of the "magus": his protean nature, on the one hand, that is, an inherent capacity for transformation to match the polymorphous

quality of reality and, on the other, his bisexual condition, which points to his god-like nature and also perhaps to his double role of both wiseman and trickster.

But Conchis is not the only character in the novel that puzzles d'Urfé. Alison too is viewed primarily as the mixture of opposite elements.:

> She had two voices; one almost Australian, one almost English (...) She was bizarre, a kind of human oxymoron (...) innocent-corrupt, coarse-fine, an expert-novice. (pp. 23, 24 and 28).

Just as d'Urfé used a technique of personification to express his love for Greece, thus pointing to the identification of Greece with Lily, so he now uses oxymorons to express the "human oxymoron" quality of Julie: literature comtemplates and expresses itself, directing the reader's attention to the medium, and we have the growing sensation of being immersed in a wholly literary world whose reality is precisely its fictionality. This feeling is enhanced by the endless transformability of the characters in the masque, especially Lily/Julie/Vanessa and Rose/June/Margaret. As Conchis organizes and displays one ofter another the different acts of his masque in an evermore-involuted spectacle, we finally gather the essential meaning of the "magus": he is the "master of words", the Prospero-like figure capable of using words to create his own (fictional) worlds within the boundaries of his "domain". In this sense Conchis stands in the same position as the novelist: he is the essential creator (as opposed to the 'collector') the builder of reality, a polysemic reality, alive (while the objects of collections are dead) and as endlessly transformable as the literary text may be endlessly interpreted and also endlessly rewritten.

Having recognized the material and psychological nature of the hero's quest we might analyse the form it actually takes. Throughout the second section of the novel Nicholas d'Urfé will wildly try to find his Ariadnne's thread in the maze set out for him by the Magus: he will insist in separating illusion from reality, lies from truth, the apparent from the actual. He will write letters, will study archives, will ask questions, will compare reports and will write down names, dates and places, refusing, in a word, to admit the polymorphous nature of reality, which is precisely what Maurice Conchis wants him to learn. From the start, Conchis insists that what is going on at Bourani must be taken as a mere entertainment, belonging to the realm of the unreal. This is why he gives Nicholas a book entitled *Le masque français du dixhuitième siècle* with a passage marked out for reading. After having done so, Nicholas comments:

> All that happened at Bourani was in the nature of a private masque; and no doubt the passage was a hint to me that I should, both out of politeness and for my own pleasure, not poke my nose behind the scenes. I felt ashamed of the questions I had asked at Agia Varvara. (p. 165)

At its surface level, the passage works as a reality-enhancing mechanism: by openly acknowledging the fictive quality of Conchis's experiments, the passage gives Nicholas a pleasurable feeling of knowing where he stands. When Nicholas tells Conchis that he has already read the passage, the latter says:

> It is only a metaphor, but it may help. (p. 166)

Nicholas takes this remark literally and is further reassured. But, of course, *Le masque français* is a metaphor of the masque organized by Conchis in the same way Conchis's masque is a metaphor of the real world. This blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality becomes clearer if compared to Conchis's explanation of his reason for burning all the novels within his reach:

> 'Why should I struggle through hundreds of pages of fabrication to reach half a dozen of very little truths?
> 'For fun?'
> 'Fun!' he pounced on the words. 'Words are for truth. For facts. Not fiction'.
> 'I see'. (p. 96)

Nicholas says 'I see', but, of course, he does not, at this stage, understand the real meaning of Conchis's words, his warning that Nicholas's own "struggle through several hundreds of pages" in the godgame will not be a question of amusement, but something serious and truth revealing. Conchis's remark, then, again emphasizes the blurring of boundaries between literature and non-literature, literature symbolizing the mythical, archetypal and unconscious side of man. To mature, Nicholas must be able to understand the essentially polymorphous nature of truth and the futility of drawing boundaries between literature and non-literature, that is, between the real and the unreal, the conscious and the unconscious. Metaphorically, then, we can say that Nicholas willl mature the day he is able to interpret his life creatively, not literally, as he has been doing so far. Before coming to Bourani, Nicholas thought he knew very well what sort of man he was and what he wanted to be in life; he also had set ideas about his parents,

about English society in general, and about Alison in particular. The function of the masque will be to shatter Nicholas's ideas by showing him the radical complexity of truth and by testing his capacity to accept both reality and fantasy.

By burning all the novels within his reach and by dedicating the rest of his life to "truth" and "reality", not fiction, Conchis is performing an act similar to that carried out by the friends of don Quixote with his books of chivalry: old fiction is burned only to allow don Quixote himself to live a real life which, after all, is only a further fiction. Conchis burns his books in order to be able to create a "real fiction", a masque which will permit d'Urfé to mature as a man. But, of course, not only the masque at Bourani is a fiction: the outer world, Athens and England are also fictional places described in a novel entitled *The Magus*. Nicholas d'Urfé himself is just a fictional character like Don Quixote and the span of his life is included within *the Magus* in the same way as Don Quixote's "real" adventures, as opposed to the fictional adventures of his books of chivalry, are included in *El Quijote*.

In *Le récit spéculaire* (1977), Lucien Dällenbach defines the *mise en abyme* as,

> Tout miroir interne réfléchissant l'ensemble du récit par reduplication simple, répétée, ou spécieuse. (p. 52)

Dällenbach understands the *mise en abyme* as a structural reality, whose essential property is its capacity to reflect the whole discourse, and thus to uncover its formal structure and to enhance the intelligibility of the literary work. The simplest kind of *mise en abyme* is represented by *le blason dans le blason* (p. 38), a shield that contains within itself the design of a shield. This is the type of reflection we find in *The Murder of Gonzago*, where Claudius sees enacted once the murderous act he himself committed with King Hamlet. A more complex kind of reflection is *la réflexion à l'infini*, symbolized by the box of Quaker oats, which shows a box of Quaker oats, which shows a box of Quaker oats, which... *ad infinitum;* while the third type or *réflexion paradoxale*, is a sort of reflection where the fragment is supposed to include the work of which it is a part.

Bearing these notions in mind, it is easy to see the events that take place at Bourani as primarily a re-enactment of the relation between Alison and Nicholas, in which Julie plays the role of Alison but where the premises are inverted: Nicholas fails to understand the real value of Alison

beneath her commonness, he doesn't value the love she offers him and refuses to admit that he loves her in his turn. Consequently, Julie will perform throughout the masque the role of a delicate, innocent, rare and intelligent young woman, little versed in sexual matters, who seems to be offering him the opportunity to share a unique romantic experience. From the start, Julie and Alison come to represent in Nicholas's mind two quite disparate personalities:

> I sat on the bunk again. (Alison) pulled off her jumper and shook her hair free. I invoked the image of Julie, but somehow it was a situation that Julie could never have got into. (p. 262)

Alison and Nicholas had become sex-partners from the very first day they met, their love, whether avowed or not, developing later. In the masque the reverse situation is enacted: Julie will captivate Nicholas first, delaying the fulfilment of his sexual aspirations till the very end of their relation. At the same time, the successive metamorphoses of Lily into Julie and finally into Dr. Vanessa Maxwell will be accompanied by shocking revelations about her sexual capacity, which will progressively corrode Nicholas's earlier notions about her virginal innocence and purity, ending up in climatic love-making the night before the trial. The inversion is, then, very neat: thematically, the Julie-Nicholas relationship acts as the symmetrical mirror image of the Alison-Nicholas relationship.

Structuraly, then, the *Masque français* may be seen as a *mise en abyme* of the main story in *The Magus*. John Fowles takes the game further in "The Ebony Tower", a *mise en abyme* itself of *The Magus*, when he makes The Freak read an engaging novel entitled *The Magus*. Thus, "The Ebony Tower", whose story is contained within *The Magus*, simultaneously contains within itself the novel within which it is contained, a clear case of paradoxical reflection.

But what is the real aim of the masque? Robert Huffaker (1980: 58) among others, has analysed the close connection between Jung's theories of the archetypes and the development of the godgame:

> The godgame is initiation ritual, dramatized fiction, and several other things; but in *reality*, the metatheatre is an elaborate psychodramatic application of Jung's psychology to Nick's individual case. Jungian analysis aims to bring about a consciousness of one's mental processes and to rescue modern man from his own facelessness - a rescue which Nick needs badly. (p. 58)

From Huffaker's point of view, the aim of the masque is to help Nicholas control his own behaviour, "by helping him to understand his unconscious feelings and drives, but also to appreciate their suggestions of truth, their universal beauty, and their function in motivating him to happiness, kindness, and creativity, as well as to sorrow, cruelty and destructiveness". (p. 58) Conchis's task, then, is to help Nicholas become aware of the fact that the unknowable, the mysterious, "does exist within the human mind". Huffaker concludes:

> By allowing the individual person to retain his faith in the beauty and efficacy of his own irrational nature, Jung's method would bring the neurotic to harmony and creativity by reinforcing his individuality. The theory is designed to help man become his own magus -to exult in his own unconscious drives and to use them for his own happiness and creativity- and for the happiness of his fellow-men. (pp. 58-9)

The highlighting of the literary and psychological quality of the world in which Nicholas d'Urfé is made to move, should unable us to understand the peculiar characteristics of the ordeals the hero will have to endure at Bourani. In "John Fowles: Radical Romancer" (1973) Ronald Binns has stressed the links between *The Magus* and the traditional romance, establishing a series of parallelisms with Mrs. Radcliff's, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which he takes to be *The Magus's* major source. "The Gothic", Binns says,

> Is a deeply theatrical genre since, as Fiedler points out, many of its devices were borrowed from the stage. In *The Magus* the properties of suspense and sensation are brought out into the open, and almost from the begining Nicholas is made aware that he is the voluntary leading-player in an elaborately arranged masque - or novel. His rationalist sensiblity sustains a running commentary on the dramatic action together with an analytical forecast of what will happen next, but it is one of the meanings of the parable that his rationalism should prove always one step behind Conchis's godgame. (p. 326)

In the traditional fairy-tales a child, or often a little brother and sister, get lost in a wood and finally discover a house in the middle of the wilderness which appears to be irresistibly atractive; sometimes the house is fantastically ornamented: it is wholly made of gold and gems, or, if the children are starving, is made of chocolate and candy. Invariably, too the owner of the house turns out to be a child-eating giant or a witch.

Nicholas d'Urfé is attracted to Bourani in much the same way that these fairy-tale children are attracted to the chocolate house: a book of English poetry; a towel with the musky scent of sandalwood; the enigmatic *salle d'attente* notice; the rumours about Conchis, are all sure enough lures for the excitement-starved d'Urfé. In the villa the role of the gems/gold/chocolate/candy of the tales is now played by a series of "authentic" works of art: the "authentic" Modigliani and Bonnards; a maquette by Rodin, a Pleyel harpsichord and even the 15th century Venetian window which, d'Urfé realizes with a pang, is the very same window Fra Angelico painted in The Annunciation, besides a series of authentic-looking ancient Greek vases and Edwardian "curiosa", including a picture of Conchis's long-deceased fiancée. Conchis gives d'Urfé all kind of details about the form in which he came to own these works of art, implying by the way that he possessed many others, and Nicholas believes him. So, from the start, the villa is presented as a sort of tabernacle of the fine arts and Conchis as an artist himself, a wonderful musician who further captivates him with his music.

Art would have been enough to allure d'Urfé, but to art Conchis adds another vital source of attraction: mystery, the expectation of the strange and unknown:

> He was standing in the doorway, giving me his intense look. He seemed to gather strength; to decide that the mystery must be cleared up; then spoke.
> 'I am psychic'
> The house seemed full of silence; and suddenly everything that had happened led to this. (p. 100)

What puzzles d'Urfé most is Conchis's ability to baffle him, to disprove his conclusions and expectations. The result of this endless bafflement, of this never knowing what Conchis is really at, produces in Nicholas a mixed feeling of attraction and fear:

> I was increasingly baffled by Conchis. At times he was so dogmatic that I wanted to laugh, to behave in the traditional xenophobic, continentals-despising way of my race; at times, rather against my will, he impressed me -not only as a rich man with some enviable works of art in his house. And now he frightened me. It was the kind of illogical fear of the supernatural that in others made me sneer; but all along I felt that I was invited not out of hospitality, but for some other reason. He wanted to use me in some way. (p. 102)

Attraction and fear, the two basic feelings aroused by any fairy tale or gothic story, are already felt by d'Urfé during his first visit to Bourani. The combination of these two will constitute Conchis's only weapon to ensure the return of d'Urfé to the villa week-end after week-end. But, having once aroused his interest, Conchis has to provide new means of mantaining it. In keeping wih the literary quality of their world, Conchis will entertain d'Urfé by telling him stories, thus entering the field of yet another literary genre, the didactic master-pupil colloquy. Nicholas is aware of this didactic purpose of his host, and he expresses it with the image of the Victorian picture:

> In some way we (Julie and Nicholas) were both cast now as his students, his disciples. I remembered that favourite Victorian picture of the bearded Elizabethan seaman pointng to sea and telling a story to two goggle-eyed little boys. (p. 311)

Like the sages and the prince in *The Seven Sages*, Conchis teaches Nicholas by telling him stories with a clearcut moral. This, in essence the training of d'Urfé at Bourani may be said to consist of two major exercises: telling of stories and participation in the masque.

The overall structure of *The Magus* can easily be seen as linear by virtue of the discourse narrated by Nicholas d'Urfé. Within this linear development, the central episodes corresponding to his visits to Bourani, disrupt the linear development by the introduction of a second narrator: At Bourani Nicholas sometimes hands over the narrative role to Maurice Conchis, who in his turn narrates his own lifestory to Nicholas. Thus, the roles of narrator and listener are reversed: Nicholas listens and Conchis narrates. From a structural point of view, these alternations imply a change of narrative level; that is, we are confronted with a discourse and a metadiscourse. When Nicholas hands over the narrative role to Conchis the linearity of the primary discourse is arrested and the narrative time altered. The stories Conchis narrates refer to episodes of his own life, and so must be viewed as retrospective heterodiegetic digressions, digressive anachronies, unrelated in principle to the diegesis. If there is a thematic relation betwenn the story of Conchis's life and the story of the life of Nicholas d'Urfé, it is simply analogical. In *Narratologie* (1977: 107-9) Mieke Bal describes the function of the icon as identical to the function of the *mise en abyme*, with one difference:

> L'icône diagrammatique *ressemble* par analogie, à un signifié: si ce signifié est le récit entier dans lequel l'icône fonctionne, on peut parler d'une mise en abyme. (p. 108)

That is to say, the only difference between icon and *mise en abyme* lies in the fact that the latter analogically reflects the whole discourse, the icon only part of it. With this definition in mind we may say that the stories Conchis tells function as diagrammatical icons of concrete points Conchis wants Nicholas to understand. Thus, the first time Nicholas refuses to tell him anything about Alison, Conchis unexpectedly tells him the story of the Swiss and the goats. With the image of the beautiful Bonnard pictures still in mind, d'Urfé has mentally rejected Alison as a desirable reality, in favour of the ideal woman painted by Bonnard:

> I thourght of the Bonnard; that was reality; such moments; not what one could tell. (p. 99)

Although Nicholas does not utter this thought, Conchis seems to know what he is thinking, for he then says,

> 'Greece is like a mirror. It makes you sufer. Then you learn'.
> 'To live alone?'
> 'To live. With what you are'. (p. 99)

And then he starts telling d'Urfé how he once knew a Swiss who had come to end his days at Phraxos. He was a man who "had spent his life assembling watches and reading about Greece". He had one hidden passion: goats, and one day he decided that to be a shepherd on a remote island in Greece was all he wanted in life:

> He was alone. No one ever wrote to him. Visited him. Totally alone. And I believe the happiest man I have ever met". (p.99)

The story of the Swiss turned shepherd is the literary materialization of the sentence "to live with what you are", which analogically reflects precisely what d'Urfé, who misunderstands the correct use of art, has failed to do with Alison. Alison has always fallen short of his expectations because Nicholas expected her to embody his own idea of woman, and cannot take her for what she really is. By telling him the tale of the Swiss at this precise moment, Conchis is rejecting his point of view, but is also giving us a clue for the interpretation of the following move in the masque:

no sooner has d'Urfé mentally compared Alison to the Bonnard girl than Conchis leads him to the table where stands a large picture of Lily in her Edwardian dress. Conchis tells him that she died a long time ago, and that she was his fiancée. A little later, downstairs, Conchis shows him a glass cabinet which contains various antique objects with only one thing in common, their obscenity and among them, another picture of the Edwardian girl. The display of obscene "curiosa" makes d'Urfé wonder about the perverted sense of humour or the simple bad taste of their owner. Neither the reader nor d'Urfé is able at this stage to gather the connexion between these obscene objects and the aethereal, virginal-looking Edwardian girl, nor between this girl and the naked girl in the Bonnard picture. However, Conchis has carefully drawn the analogies: if Lily is to come to life at all (as she later will) she must do so by stepping out of the picture, for she is d'Urfé's ideal woman come real and the fact that she is surrounded by obscene objects is a warning that we should not trust her virginal appearance. Thus the display of the "curiosa" and the pictures of the Edwardian girl already forerun the essential meaning of the metatheatre.

If d'Urfé wants to enjoy the unique experience of seeing the ideal woman become flesh, he must allow the blurring of boundaries between the real and the unreal; the logical and the psychological. Conchis is very clear on this point from the beginning, when he reprimands Nicholas for behaving like a porcupine, which prefers to starve to death rather than lay back its protective spines. To the incredulous d'Urfé's question "You...travel to other worlds? (...) In the flesh?", Conchis's answer is unequivocal:

> 'If you can tell me where the flesh ends and the mind begins, I will answer that'. (p. 106)

Toward the end of the second section, after having passed through the nightmare of the trial, Nicholas d'Urfé returns to Bourani, and to "The Earth", the atomic refuge used by the actors as a hiding and resting place. There he finds several costumes used for the masque and also Conchis's directions taken in part from *The Tempst* and *Othello* and also from the marquis de Sade. With them there is a story entitled "The Prince and the Magician" which Nicholas takes to be "a fairy story on them". The story of "The Prince and the Magician" sums up the essence of Conchis's teaching as regards the reality-unreality question, and thus synthesizes at the end of the second section the quality of the transformation undergone by the hero.

A young prince, the story runs, is told by his father that princesses,

islands, and God, do not exist. But then he meets a man with his coat-sleeves rolled back who convinces him that his father lied. The stranger presents himself as God. When the prince goes back to the palace and explains the incident, the king tells him that, in reality, the stranger is only a magician, and that all kings and gods are merely magicians. On hearing that, the prince is distressed:

> 'I must know the real truth, the truth beyond magic,'
> 'There is no truth beyond magic,' said the king.
> The prince was full of sadness.
> He said, 'I will kill myself'. (pp. 551-2)

But when he saw the awful face of death and remembered "the beautiful but unreal islands and the unreal but beautiful princesses" he decided he could bear the burden of uncertainty. As soon as the prince accepts as the only truth the fact that there is no absolute truth, he starts turning into a magician himself.

Peter Wolfe fittingly sums up the moral of the tale (1979: 119):

> No reality underlies appearance; the phenomena is all. Truth and reality do not exist objectively but inhere, instead, in the perceiver.

The story of "the Swiss and the Goats" and the tale of "The Prince and the Magician", respectively opening and closing the second section of the novel, encapsulate within themselves the two major ideas Conchis wants to impress on d'Urfé's consciousness: that to be happy, man must know himself and live with what he is; and that there is no reality outside the boundaries of the perceiver. These two theoretical principles give rise in practice to two major questions: the first the nature of the individual's relationship to other human beings and to himself; the second the nature of freedom.

In order to show d'Urfé the importance of these two questions, Conchis will again resort to the telling of a story, in this case the story of his own childhood, youth and manhood, which he will combine with the metatheatre.

Conchis tells d'Urfé the story of his own life as a real story, insisting that it did really take place, admitting at the same time that the masque is only an entertainment, a fictional make-believe whose only "raison d'être" is the performance itself. In practice, however, it is absolutely impossible to separate the story from the masque, as in both of them Lily and Conchis

play major parts, so that, again, "real" story and "fictional" metatheatre function as inseparable aspects of a polymorphous reality. Furthermore, as both the story and the masque develop, we see how the story of Conchis's life becomes more and more fictional, and the masque more and more disquietingly real. Thus, after the revolting account of the battle of Neuve Chapelle, d'Urfé has a strange feeling of listening to a fictional rather than a real report of the war:

> The horrors of Neuve Chapelle had been convincing enough as he described them, yet they turned artificial with this knowledge of repetition. Their living reality became a matter of technique, of realism gained through rehearsal. It was like being earnestly persuaded an object was new by a seller who simultaneously and deliberately revealed it must be second-hand: an affront to all probability. (p. 127)

while Julie described the masque as,

> In one way (...) a sort of fantastic extension of the Stanislavski method. Improvising realities more real than reality. (p. 338)

One of the reasons why the story of Conchis's youth sounds unauthentic is the abundance of analogies with Nicholas's life: Conchis, like him, had an artistic bent; he gave piano concerts at the age of nine and had hoped to become a first-rate harpsichordist, as Nicholas had hoped to become a poet. But, then, at the age of fifteen he had had a nervous breakdown and when he was twenty he had decided, as d'Urfé had just done, that he "was not going to fulfil (his) early promise" (p. 113). Where d'Urfé had become a member of *Les Hommes Revoltés*, a futile romantic endeavour, Conchis had founded the *Society of Reason* and contributed greatly to the writing of its Manifesto, which stressed the possibliity of human progress only through the cultivation of reason. Just after his nervous breakdown, when he was fifteen, Conchis met Lily, one year his junior, and a pure, platonic love developed between them, helped by their mutual fascination for music. Conchis describes Lily as,

> A Botticelli beauty. Long hair, grey-violet eyes (...) A sweetness without sentimentality, a limpidity without naivety. She was easy to hurt, to tease. And when she teased, it was like a caress (...) Lily was a very pretty girl. But it was her soul that was *sans pareil*. (p. 115)

Now, it is easy to see how the relationship between Conchis and Lily reflects, in mirror-image, that between Nicholas and Alison. As they grow together, Conchis begins to love Lily physically too. But she goes on treating him "as a brother" (p. 116) and in the same way the frustration Nicholas feels with Alison leads him to indulge in fanciful dreams about a virginal ideal woman, Conchis starts having erotic dreams:

> She became in my mind at night the abandoned young prostitute. I thought I was very abnormal to have created this second Lily from the real one. (p. 116)

At the end of their relation, when Conchis returns from the war, a desertor but a free man, Lily is unable to understand his motives. Her exemplary death by the typhoid fever she had caught at the hospital where she worked as a war-nurse, synthesizes her unflinching devotion to duty: her soul *sans pareil* only amounted to this. This episode of Conchis's life, then, reflects, in an inverted form, the affair between Alison and Nicholas, and also synthetically foreruns the relation to come between Lily and Nicholas, anticipating its bathetic "denouement". Again, Nicholas is aware of the didactic purpose in the story:

> It was finally much more like a biography than the autobiography it purported to be; patently more concealed lesson than true confession. (p. 133)

The parallelism is carried further by another aspect of Conchis's activities: his interest in birds, which analogically reflects d'Urfé's rakish interest in "collecting" girls:

> I came to birds through sound. Suddenly even the chirping of sparrows seemed mysterious. And the singing of birds I had heard a thousand times, thrushes, blackbirds in our London garden I heard as if I had never heard them before. (p. 113)

So, Conchis turns into an expert ornithologist and, in due time, into an avid collector of bird-sounds:

> As soon as I had ornithologically exhausted the tundra of the extreme north I crossed the Varangerfjord and went to the little town of Kirkenes. From there, armed with my letter of introduction, I set out for Seidevarre. (p. 297)

At this stage, then, Conchis has reached the phase of "collector" which, we are led to suppose, is attained when man relies for his knowledge of reality only on his senses. Thus, Conchis's statement, "I came to birds through sound", is not unimportant. The temptation to collect bird-sounds is basically of the same sort as that of Frederick Clegg to collect butterflies, or that of Alphonse De Deukans to collect spiders, or that of Charles Smithson to collect ammonites. Or again, of the same sort as Nicholas's temptation to collect girls. Collecting for Fowles in essentially evil for it exhausts itself in the passion to collect, but also, because it is a passion only fed through the senses.

The story of Alphonse De Deukans, which Conchis inserts within the story of his life, presents the picture of the arch-collector, the man who "has devoted all his life to his collecting of collections", someone who "collected in order to collect" (p. 117)

An immensely rich aristocrat with a fantastic château in Eastern France, De Deukans symbolizes one of the alternatives open to man: to close himself up in the "Ebony Tower", and consume himself in the relish of possession. Among the millions of beautiful objects De Deukans had in Givray-le-Duc there was Mirabelle, *la maîtresse-Machine*, a mechanic puppet devised for the Sultan of Turkey as a substitute for a real sex-partner:

> De Deukans cherised her most because she had a device that made it unlikely that she should ever cuckold her owner. Unless one moved a small lever at the back of her head, at a certain pressure her arms would clasp with vice-like strength. And then a stiletto on a strong spring struck upwards trough the adulterer's groin. (pp. 177-8)

Mirabelle stands as the symbol of the hideous egoism of all collectors, but also points directly to the life-killing effects of d'Urfé's attitude to women in general and to Alison in particular.

When Conchis went to Givray-le-Duc for the first time, he was,

> shocked, as a would-be socialist. And ravished, as an *homme sensuel*. (p. 177)

In this brief comment Conchis synthesizes the essence of the "collector", he is *l'homme sensuel*, the intrinsic materialist, a man who only lives to satisfy his sensual desires, in this case, his hunger for beauty, which he must feed through his senses, watching, touching, possessing, not through his imagination. So the collector is the least imaginative of

men, for, in order to exist he must tangibly possess the objects that obsess him. This is exactly what Clegg meant when he said that "to have her was 'enough" and this is why, when Givray-le-Duc is destroyed by the fire, De Deukans commits suicide

The refusal to remain simply a collector, a passive consumer of fictions, is what makes Conchis burn all his novels: he must destroy them in order to be free to create his own fictions. And we must not forget that Nicholas only realizes the real value of Alison when he gives up hope of ever touching or seeing her again.

The day Givray-le-Duc is burned to ashes and De Deukans kills himself, Conchis tells us he was "in fact in the remote north of Norway, in pursuit of birds -or to be more exact, bird- sounds" (p. 296). with this simple remark Conchis makes two stories within the story of his life coincide chronologically, which will turn out to be basic for the teaching of d'Urfé: The story of De Deukans, and the story of Henrick Nygaard, the Norwegian ship's engineer gone mad who lived retired in Seidevarre. Henrick Nygaard was a Jansenist and so believed in divine cruelty -he had the conviction that God had elected him to be punished and tormented and so lived like an anchorite in a log cabin in the wood. When Conchis offers him his medical aid, Nigaard tries to kill him with an axe:

> It seemed incredible to me that a man should reject medicine, reason, science so violently. But I felt that this man would have rejected everything else about me as well if he had known it -the pursuit of pleasure, of music, of reason, of medicine. That axe would have driven right through the skull of all our pleasure-oriented civilization. Our science, our psycho-analysis. To him all that was not the great meeting was what the Buddhists call *lilas*- the pursuit of triviality. (p. 306)

After the episode of the axe, Conchis is able to spy Henrick Nygaard one night, calling on God, knee-deep in a stream:

> Something was very clear to him, as visible to him as Gustav's dark head, the trees, the moonlight on the leaves around us, was to me. I would have given ten years of my life to have been able to look out there to the north, from inside his mind. I did not know what he was seeing, but I knew it was something of such power, such mystery, that it explained all. And of course Henrick's secret dawned on me (...) He was not waiting to meet God. He was meeting God, and had been meeting him probably for many years. He was not waiting for some certainty. He lived in it. (p. 308)

After this extraordinary experience Conchis abandoned all interest in collecting bird-sounds. The sight of Henrick Nygaard in the water, comtemplating God in his mind's eye, convinced him of a radical truth, the complexity of reality:

That great passive monster, reality, was no longer dead, easy to handle. It was full of a mysterious vigour, new forms, new possibilities. (p. 309)

Henrick Nygaard rejecting "what the Buddhists call *lilas*" (one cannot help noticing the heavy pun on "Lily"), in favour of the essential, and then creating it in his own mind, stands at the opposite pole to De Deukans. The visionary aesthete confronts the sensual materialist. At the same time, by rejecting any kind of established convention - comfort, a family, society, medicine, etc. -and choosing illness and poverty and suffering as a way of life, Henrick Nygaard teaches Conchis another fundamental truth: that man is radically free. This is the last lesson Conchis has reserved for d'Urfé, and to illustrate it he will select the main strand from the story of his life.

During d'Urfé's first week-end at Bourani Conchis starts telling him how he enlisted during the First World War, although he hated the very idea of it. That is, he chose a course of action strictly in opposition to his convictions and desires, influenced by the pressure of society and of Lily. Near the end of the second section of the novel, after Nicholas has undergone the climatic session of the trial, he goes to the delegation of the British Council in Athens and agrees to go to dinner with various people he finds annoying and boring. No sooner has he taken this decision than a line of the report read at the trial comes to his mind:

He seeks situations in which he knows he will be forced to rebel. (p. 555)

This association of ideas stresses the analogy between the young Conchis and Nicholas. Conchis's first step towards maturity took place when, after having survived to the horrors of the battle of Neuve Chapelle, he is able to articulate his unconscious resistance to the war by deserting, thus acknowledging his real self. The fact that he is reported as officially dead, consequently symbolizes his ritual death and rebirth to a new, more mature life. The clearer result of his experience of the war is a radical conviction in the value of human life:

I was without shame. I even hoped the Germans would overrun our positions and so allow me to give myself up as a prisoner. 'Fever. But what I thought was fever was the fire of existence, the passion to exist. I know it now. A *delirium vivens*. (p. 129)

"The passion to exist" is the first axiom d'Urfé, who has just committed his token suicide, must learn to appreciate. And this is precisely what he does when, after the trial, he is left with a loaded gun at Monemvasia:

Standing on the old bastion, I fired the remaining five bullets out to sea. I aimed at nothing. It was a *feu de joie*, a refusal to die. (p. 534)

Thus, clearly, an understanding of "what you are" produces a *delirium vivens*, the passion to exist, the refusal to die. By rejecting the social standards that justify the war Conchis has proved that man is free to choose his own way, he has rejected convention and social dictatorship and has affirmed the right of the individual. But still he has behaved according to the biological law that teaches man to preserve his life. This is why Conchis later had difficulties in understanding Nygaard's resolution to reject comfort, security, art and anything that in principle makes man's life happy. And however, Nygaard was only exchanging physical comfort for psychological bliss. But to cherish liberty as the only real good of man is a lesson Conchis will only learn much later, during the Second World War, in an episode of his life he fittingly entitled *ELEUTHERIA*.

During the German invasion of Greece, in 1941, a troop of Austrians commanded by a German lieutenant called Anton Kubler took charge of Phraxos. Kubler was sensitive to art and a tolerant man and life in Phraxos developed in a quasi-normal way until the S.S. colonel Dietrich Wimmel came with his *Raben* to stiffen the morale of the Austrian soldiers. When four soldiers were shot by the guerillas Colonel Wimmel ordered eighty villagers to be picked at random and shot in revenge. They would only be spared if the guerrillas were found out: somebody betrayed them and the three guerillas were horribly tortured in the presence of Conchis, then, the Mayor of Phraxos. When the guerilla leader was captured, he cried *eleutheria*, and he went on repeating this word until his tongue was burned out.

Conchis who, as we know, was a desertor and a pacifist, could not understand the guerilla leader, just as he had been unable to understand Henrick Nygaard years before. But when Colonel Wimmel asked Conchis to club the guerillas to death and so spare his own life and those of the remaining seventy nine hostages, light dawned on him:

In (my world) life had no price. It was so valuable that it was literally priceless. In his, only one thing had that quality of pricelessness. It was *eleutheria:* freedom. He was the immalleable, the essence, the beyond history. He was not God, because there is no God we can know. But he was a proof that there is a God that we can never know. He was the final right to deny. To be free to choose (...) He was every freedom, from the very worst to the very best. The freedom to disembowel peasant girls and castrate with wire-cutters. He was something that passed beyond morality, but sprang out of the very essence of things -That comprehended all, the freedom to do all, and stood against only one thing- the prohibition not to do all. (p. 434)

Conchis understands this basic truth and refuses to kill the men; in consequence he and the seventy nine hostages are shot, but, miraculously, Conchis survives: he is given up for dead, rescued and healed. This second death and resurrection can be symbolically interpreted as the descent into hell which finds its parallel in d'Urfé's subterranean trial: there Nicholas is confronted with the same dilemma: to take revenge on Lily by flogging her, or to use his liberty by refusing to undertake any action. Conchis's and later d'Urfé's understanding of the -existentialist- freedom of man is what turns them into "elect".

In all, the stories Conchis narrates convey three major lessons: know thyself, as the Swiss shepherd did; don't limit yourself to just one side of reality, as both De Deukans and Nygaard did, but, on the contrary, learn like the prince turned magician, to appreciate its polymorphous nature; and use freedom discriminatingly. The three lessons are interrelated, as they sum up complementary aspects of man's one great need: to understand his position in the world. And this is what d'Urfé finally does:

All my life I had turned life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good and bad behaviour -A god like a novelist, to whom I turned like a character with the power to please, the sensitivity to feel slighted, the ability to adapt himself to whatever he believed the novelist-god wanted. This leech-like variation of the super-ego I had created myself, fostered myself, and because of it I had always been incapable of acting freely. It was not my defence; but my despot. And now I saw it, I saw it a death to late (p. 539)

This understanding, brought about by the belief that Alison has killed herself, amounts to a point of fulcrum. Using the metaphor of the character performing for an omniscient author, d'Urfé ironically tries to express his

feeling of "being watched", "an experience", says Barry N. Olshen (1978: 38) "that reverberates throughout the novel". For this critic,

It suggests his continual need to perform for others and to be evaluated by others. It points, in the Sartrean terms of his own account, to his "bad faith", that is, to his incapacity to accept responsibility for the deeds he freely performs. *The Magus* is designed to indicate that the revulsion Nicholas feels at his "nothingness", his feeling of divorce between himself and the world, results from a misguided atttitude and not from a fact of nature, not from the human condition. It is in this respects that *The Magus* departs so radically from the French existentialist novels to provide a more optimistic approach to daily life.

Turning life into fiction, rejecting the real in favour of the unreal -as the octopus did- is d'Urfé's major sin, generated by his short-sighted interpretation of reality. If Nicholas is to be healed he must learn to distrust his senses and to foster his imagination. This part of his training will be achieved through his involvement in the masque: side by side with the telling of the stories, the display of the masque at Bourani will enact materially the morals encapsulated in the iconic stories, in order to provide a concrete realization of the theoretical lessons imparted by the tales. Thus, after Conchis has spoken of his long-deceased fiancée, Lily will fleetingly appear at the villa: her scent, first, then her glove, then herself; and after listening to the report of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, Nicholas will have the experience of hearing the "finest drone of men" creeping down from the hillside and then realizing with a shock that what they were singing was "Tipperary". After the ear, the reliability of the sense of smell is also tested:

An atrocious stench that infested the windless air, a nauseating compound of decomposing flesh and excrement (...) It was clear to me that the smell was connected with the singing. (p. 134)

and, the following day, the sense of sight, when, after having read the seventeenth century story of Robert Foulkes, reaper and murderer, he appears before Nicholas, dressed in black with a white-faced little girl:

As I listened to him, I thought. The incidents seemed designed to deceive all the senses. Last night's had covered smell and hearing; this afternoon's, and that glimpsed figure of yesterday (Lily), sight. Taste seemed irrelevant -but touch... how on earth could he expect me even to pretend to believe that what I might touch was 'psychic'? (pp. 143-4)

Quite accurately, Nicholas himself interprets the incidents as devices "designed to deceive all the senses". And as he intuitively guesses, *touch* is the most important sense and the most difficult to deceive in a man who has circumscribed his relation with women to a mere sexual contact: Lily's role in the masque will be, then, to convince d'Urfé of the fact that it is possible to touch a woman who only exists in his own imagination.

Analysing "The Ebony Tower", Robert Huffaker (1980: 117) stresses the analogy between the plot of the novella and the situation described in the epigram to it, which is taken from the eighth-century romance by Chrétien des Troyes, *Yvain*. The epigram. Huffaker says,

> Describes the archetypal quest to the knight who, often leaving a lover behind, reaches some mysterious master's castle and gains entry against dubious odds (...) Once inside the castle, the knight usually becomes somehow involved with at least one nubile damsel -more often two- rarely more. Of the customary two, one is distant and desirable, the other accessible and less attractive -occasionally not pretty at all, but haggish instead. sometimes the hag is transformed; sometimes the two maids prove to be one; but the hero usually discovers to his eventual surprise that the master is not as mysterious, nor the princess as distant, as he had supposed. Almost inevitably, she at last becomes available whether he decides to keep her or not.

Huffaker's analysis explains the mysterious triangle formed by the old painter and the two young women at Coëtminais. Henry Breasley, the seventy seven year-old expatriate British painter and Diana (the Mouse) and Anne (the Freak) are, in his own words,

> Contemporary versions of the medieval castle's two damsels, the Mouse, a talented art student, is initially distant and mysteriously attractive; the Freak, a skinny refugee from the drug scene, is the "absurd sex-doll" with an air of easy availability. One is ideal, the other reality. (p. 119)

Now, the parallelism between Huffaker's description of the situation in "The Ebony Tower" and that in *The Magus* is striking: Nicholas, like David Williams, has had access to the "domain" of an old and mysterious man and there he will be confronted by two girls. Lily, like the Mouse, is mysteriously atractive and distant; Rose, like the Freak, is felt to be much more easily available, as her use of a bikini and her lying in the sun without its upper part suggests:

> Once more I was shocked; this was not just the latest clothes fashion, but behaviour years ahead of its time. I was also uncomfortably aware that she was staring at me, that a comparison (with Julie) was being invited -or a reaction, observed. (p. 349)

In "The Ebony Tower" the Mouse, Huffaker says, stands for "the ideal", the Freak, for "reality". We may agree that Lily stands for the ideal in *The Magus*, but what exactly is the role of Rose in the plot? Isn't the role of reality played by Alison?. In the medieval romance, Huffaker says, "sometimes the two maids prove to be one" (p. 117), and we could add, because they are symbolic figures, representing two opposed principles of woman in the abstract: the virginal white Lily and the red rose of passion are, like the medieval damsels of the romance, two complementary *twin* aspects of the *"anima"*. which, as Jung has explained, is the female archetype within the male psyche. That this is so is clearly symbolised by the green pot of flowers Nicholas finds on the tombstone of Maurice Conchis, at St. George's:

> In which sat, rising from a cushion of inconspicuous white flowers, a white arum Lily and a red rose. (p. 559)

The "inconspicuous white flowers" are, of course, "*Alison maritime...parfum de miel*...from the Greek *a* (without) *lysa* (madness) (...) in English: *sweet Alison* (p. 566)

As the flower pot suggests, one Lily and one rose make the Alison, the real (without madness) woman. If we accept this interpetation of Lily and Rose we may understand why they are identical twins, only distinguishable through the scar Lily has on her wrist, and also why she insists that she has no sisters:

> 'I have no sister' (p. 205)
> 'I was an only child' (p. 208)

Lily and Rose are, like the *yin* and *yang*, complementary aspects of one whole, unique reality, the embodiments of two opposed psychological aspects co-existing in every woman. This fact explains why d'Urfé is alternately attracted by both of them, and also why he finally chooses Lily, who stands for the virginal aspect of woman. It also explains why Conchis has chosen for his film the plot of the *Three Hearts*, which is,

About two English girls (...) they meet a Greek writer (...) -a poet, he's got tuberculosis, dying... and he falls in love with each sister in turn, and they fall in love with him and everyone's terribly miserable and it all ends -you can guess. (pp. 333-4)

Most important of all, it explains the "oxymoron quality" of Alison, which has alway baffled d'Urfé:

She had two voices; one almost Australian, one almost English (...) she was bizarre, a kind of human oxymoron (...) innocent corrupt, coarse-fine, an expert-novice. (pp. 23, 24 and 28)

During the climatic trip to mount Parnassus Nicholas has had the opportunity to realize both (complementary) aspects of Alison, but he has been incapable of interpreting them. First, during the night in the wooden hut, while Alison tempts him into sex with her, Nicholas thinks, as she caresses him,

It's like being with a prostitute, hands as adept as a prostitute's (p. 263)

But the following morning, during the descent, as they stop by a pool in a clearing of the wood, when Alison runs naked through the long grass to take a bath in the ice-cold water, and then sits on the grass with a garland of wild flowers around her head, like "a Queen of May", Nicholas suddenly feels her Eve-like innocence:

She was sitting up, turned to me, propped on one arm. She had woven a rough crown out of the oxeyes and wild pinks that grew in the grass around us. It sat lopsidedly on her uncombed hair; and she wore a smile of touching innocence. (p. 268)

Alison, like all real women, possesses in herself both the potentialities of the ideal virgin and the ideal temptress. They are there, waiting for the man to appreciate them. This is the essential meaning behind Lily's progresive transformations, and why both Lily and Alison are in turn alluded to as Astarte, "mother of mystery" (p. 205), and Ashtaroth, "the unseen" (p. 566), two names for the same goddess Isis, symbol of the changing moon. D'Urfé only understands this after the session of "disintoxication":

The metamorphoses of Lily ran wildly through my brain, like maenads, hunting some blindness, some demon in me down. I suddenly knew her real name, behind the masks. Why they had chosen the Othello situation. Why Iago. Plunging through that. I knew her real name. I did not forgive, if anything I felt more rage.
But I knew her real name. (p. 531)

Lily's real name is, of course, "Alison". At he end of the novel, Mrs de Seitas again emphasizes the wholly psychological quality of her daughters:

My daughters were nothing but a personification of your own selfishness. (p. 610)

and we may say that, at least unconsciously, even d'Urfé knew from the beginning that Alison and Lily were one and the same:

I did love her (Alison), I wanted to keep her *and* I wanted to keep -or to find- Julie. It wasn't that I wanted one more than the other, I wanted both. I had to have both. (p. 269)

While the Godgame starts at the level of the conscious with the blurring at Nicholas's senses of smell, hearing and sight, each "turn of the screw" implies a progressive delving into the hero's unconscious, ending up in the fantasmagoric subterranean trial in which the actors, who are elaborately masked, are made to represent particular symbolic and mythical figures. The disguises the characters have at the trial offer the critic a wealth of alternative readings: Rosicrucianism, the Cabbala, the Tarot, Waite's Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Masonic ritual, the Greek Eleusian Mysteries, ancient Egyptian mythology and Christianity among others. But any research in this direction would only satisfy the source-seeker. The wealth and variety of mythological, religious, and symbolic allusion interspersed in the godgame is best analysed as simply a rich metaphor for Jung's theory that archetypes in the collective unconscious are timeless and universal. "By presenting Nick with aesthetic, mythic, and historical images from the human consciousness", says R. Huffaker (1980: 60), "the godgame applies Jung's 'individuation' process", and he adds:

Jungian individuation aims to give a person awareness and courage to behave as an individual rahter than as the kind of imitator Nick has become, Jung calls such self-deluding poses as Nick's literary persona, collective behaviour which only appears individual. The Latin *Persona* was originally an actor's mask; unmasking so often, the godgame players encourage Nick to

do the same. Individuation also seeks to replace unconscious behaviour with conscious action.

"To replace unconscious behaviour with conscious action" is exactly what d'Urfé has to learn if he wants to free himself from the necessity of having a "god like a novelist (...) watching and listening and giving (him) marks for good and bad behaviour" (p. 539), that is to say, if he wants to outgrow his incapacity to accept responsibility for his free acts.

When Nicholas is curtly dismissed by Conchis and told that the experiment is over, he feels baffled and lost. In Athens first, then in Rome and Subiaco and later in England, he tries to undo the labyrinth in order to maintain a link with Conchis and to recover Alison. After the sterile meeting with Leverrier, Nicholas becomes aware of his -existential- loneliness:

> I looked round, to try to find someone I might hypothetically want to know better, become friendly with; and there was no one. It was an unneeded confirmation of my loss of Englishness; and it occurred to me that I must be feeling as Alison had so often felt: a mixture, before the English, of irritation and bafflement, of having the same language, same past, so many things, and yet not belonging to them any more. Being worse than rootless, speciesless.
>
> I went and had one more look at the flat in Russell Square, but there was no light on the third floor. so I returned to the hotel, defeated. An old, old man. (pp. 574-5)

His earlier blinding assumptions of reality having been shattered, Nicholas stands alone, experimenting the nauseating *Angst* of the Sartrean existentialist, without knowing how to use his liberty in a positive, discriminating way. When he finally traces Mrs de Seitas, and so the thread back to Alison, she comforts him and mothers him in a sense, but refuses to tell him where Alison is. Instead, she presents him with a beautiful old Chinese plate she had bought with Alison. The plate's design is,

> A Chinaman and his wife, their two children between them. (p. 624)

Mrs de Seita's comment when she hands him the plate points to the fact that Nicholas is not yet prepared to meet Alison. She says,

> I think you should get used to handling fragile objects. And ones much more valuable than that. (p. 624)

The Chinese plate with the happy family functions as the iconic image of what may give a meaning to Nicholas's existence: it offers him an unheroic, quotidian life, far removed from his literary speculations, but, which, when accepted in all its implications, as the Swiss shepherd had done, may turn into a source of happiness. however, instead of following the advice the Chinese plate mutely offers, Nicholas involves himself in a pathetic relationship with a young Scottish art student, an untidy mongrel-looking, love-starved seventeen year-old girl whose company d'Urfé tries to buy:

> I'm offering you a job. There are agencies in London that do this sort of thing. Provide escorts and partners. (...) You're temporarily drifting. So am I. So let's drift together (...) (p. 635)

Nicholas offers Jojo what he believes to be a "clean" relationship: no sex, just freiendship and mutual company. As a matter of fact, however, Nicholas behaves with her as egotistically as he had always behaved with women: he uses Jojo to lick his wounds, to help him out of his dreadful loneliness without realizing that she too has feelings, desires and sorrows as any human being does. When, to his distress, Jojo tells him that she is desperately in love with him, Nicholas understands the real meaning of Mrs de Seitas's words about the "only sin", the only crime man can commit:

> *Thou shalt not inflict unnecessary pain.* (p. 641)

After Jojo slips out of his life, Nicholas considers again life without Alison: an empty cereal packet, with a picture of "a nauseatingly happy 'average' family" (643) again offers him in a silent icon the plastic image of the way in which he can give his life meaning. Nearby, the Bow Chinese plate mutely offers him the same solution:

> The family again; order and involvement. Imprisonment. (p. 643)

The sight of the plate and of the cereal packet seem to help him make up his mind to go away from London and from his past, to start a new life in the country. As he is packing,

> I lifted the Bow plate carelessly off its nail. It slipped; struck the edge of the gasfire; and a moment later I was staring down at it in the hearth, broken in two across the middle.

I knelt. I was so near tears that I had to bite my lips savagely hard. I knelt there holding the two pieces (...) I raised the two pieces a little to show her (Kempt) what had happened. My life, my past, my future. (pp. 644-5)

Nicholas with the broken pieces of his past, present and future in his hands constitutes John Fowles's living icon of the existentialist. The whole novel seems to have been moving in the direction of this picture. After it the narrative freezes: breaking the rules of narrative decorum, John Fowles opens the chapter immediately following this episode with a metalepsis, that is to say, with a break of narration to comment on the situation in his own voice. The metalepsis goes only for thirteen lines, after which the first person narrator resumes his role. The authorial digression is an open reflection on the image of the kneeling Nicholas:

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

But the maze has no centre. An ending is no more than a point of fulcrum in sequence, a snip of the cutting shears. Benedick kissed Beatrice at last; but ten years later? And Elsinore, that following spring?

So ten more days. But what happened in the following years shall be silence; another mystery. (p. 645)

From a structural point of view the insertion of the author's own words in the first person narrative may be seen as a breaking of the rule Mieke Bal synthesizes thus:

Le passage d'un niveau narratif à un autre doit passer par la narration. (1977: 24)

Thematically, the author's brief remark may be interpreted as his comment on the condition of modern man, perpetually walking along the meandering corridors of the centreless maze of life. In this sense, the end of the quest, for the existentialist hero, is the quest itself, and the aim of life, the bare fact of living. For him future, past and present merge in an eternal "waiting", as the involuted structure of the metatheatre has tried to show.

This is the deeper meaning of the mysterious notice board at Bourani, and of Mitford's cryptic warning, "Beware of the waiting-room", a meaning d'Urfé intuitively guessed in the poem he wrote during his first week-end at Bourani:

I am the fool that falls.
And never learns to wait and watch... (p. 95)

"Waiting, always waiting" (p. 643) is what d'Urfé has to learn to do all through the weary summer and autumn before he is allowed to meet Alison once more on All Hallows Eve. and when he is dismissed from Bourani, he is given a rush basket with food for two and a note with just one word: *Perimeni*, "she waits" (p. 449)

When, finally, Nicholas is allowed to meet Alison again at Cumberland Terrace, he has the feeling that the row of statues of classical gods are watching him from their pedestals, very much in the same way he had always felt watched either by Conchis and his theatrical jury or by that "god like a novelist" he had always sensed behind him "watching, and listening and giving me marks for good and bad behaviour" (p. 539). But, then, suddenly,

The final truth came to me... there were no watching eyes. The windows were all as blank as they looked. The teatre was empty. It was not a theatre. They had perhaps told her (Alison) it was a theatre, and she had believed them, and I had believed her. perhaps it had all been to bring em my last lesson and final ordeal... The task, as in *L'Astrée*, of turning lions and unicorns and magi and other mythical monsters into stone statues(...) It was logical, the perfect climax of the godgame. They had absconded, we were alone. (pp. 654-5)

Nicholas's remark that this was perhaps his "last lesson and final ordeal" is absolutely to the point. In fact it is the final act of the godgame, the "absconding" of the characters from the theatre of the world, leaving him, in the author's own words, "at a cross-roads, in a dilemma, with all to lose and only more of the same to win". (p. 645)

Nicholas's acceptance of the fact that the classical gods of Cumberland Terrace are only stone-gods, is the final proof that the hero has been healed, that he can now see the difference between life and fiction, or, in Robert Huffaker's words, (1980: 59), that he has learned to interpret symbols hermeneutically:

Confusing life with fiction, Nick interprets the symbolic acts of his literary heroes literally, not hermeneutically, as Jung realizes they must be taken. Conchis and his circle impose upon Nick therapy intended to help him understand symbol, myth and fantasy -in his own mind as well as in art- interpretively instead of literally.

Learning, like the hero in *L'Astrée*, to turn "lions and unicorns and magi and other mythical monsters into stone statues" (p. 655) is learning to interpret symbols hermeneutically, that is, as actual symbols, and thus, learning to separate life from fiction, failure to do which has been d'Urfé's overrinding sin; but it also means learning to accept his radical loneliness, and the major truth that there is no applause by a watching god, no final reward, beyond the passion to exist.

In "*The French Lieutenant's Woman*'s Man: Novelist John Fowles" (1970: 60), Richard B. Stolley relates the following anecdote:

> In response to a gentle letter from a New York lawyer, dying of cancer in a hospital, who said he very much wanted the couple to be reunited, Fowles wrote back, "yes, they were..." On the same day he got a "horrid" letter from an American woman who angrily demanded, "why can't you say what you mean, and for God's sake, what happened in the end?" Fowles replied curtly: "They never saw each other again".

This anecdote may sum up the controversy aroused by the "real" meaning of the final meeting of Alison and Nicholas at Cumberland Terrace. Most critics have interpreted the ambiguous ending positively, basing their opinion on the quotation from the *Pervilium Veneris* that closes the novel, which, translated, means, "Tomorrow he who has never loved will love, and he who has loved, tomorrow will love". In fact, however, the ending, as the anecdote suggests, is absolutely open. There is no reasonable way of knowing whether Nicholas and Alison will be able to build up a renewed happy relationship, (even if we admit that they meet again), or not. The intruding omniscient narrator already warned us in the metalepsis that "a bare continuum to exist is enough for the anti-hero's future", and this is what John Fowles does with his hero, consciously leave him "at the cross-roads" in the eternal dilemma of endlessly having to decide how to use his liberty in his next act.

From a structural point of view the openness of the ending is enhanced by a further metalepsis, accompanied by a distortion of the time scheme: As he had already done in *The Collector*, John Fowles suddenly removes the gap between narrative and story time: the last paragraph is written in the

present tense, and reported by the omniscient narrator, so that the report by the adult hero speaking of his youth in retrospect suddenly merges with the present. Simultaneously, the omniscient narrator again intrudes to give his final, metaleptic, atemporal, and thus gnomic, comment:

> She is silent, she will never speak, never forgive, never reach a hand, never leave this frozen present time. All waits, suspended. (p. 656)

As the shift from the preterite to the present and future tenses suggests, past, present and future merge in the authorial comment to provide a formal linguistic equivalent of the thematic axiom synthesized in the words "all waits, suspended".

Alison frozen in an eternal present is John Fowles's verbal icon for the final truth he has tried to develop through the whole novel, namely, that the aim of the quest is the quest itself. To imagine happy or sad endings beyond this moment would be to enlarge *The Magus* by adding to it a further fiction.

Summing up the ideas discussed so far we can say that *The Magus*, while sharing the traditional quest structure, diverges from it in the characteristics of the hero and of his quest. As we have seen, one possible reading of the novel is to envisage the hero's quest both as a physical and a psychological journey, taking place simultaneously in a physical and in a mental domain. According to this interpretation, the events that take place at Bourani could be interpreted as the plastic materialization of the drama taking place in the hero's mind.

From a structural point of view, the novel may be said to follow a circular development envolving three major movements: from London to Phraxos and back to London again. At the narrative level, the primary story is narrated retrospectively in the first person by an adult narrator, thus adding to the formal circularity; below this narrative level, a metadiscourse (in Bal's terminology, a "hypodiscourse") containing the story of Conchis's life is narrated by Conchis in the first person, who thus becomes the second narrator. At a higher level, however, a third narrator identifiable with the implied author, omnisciently comments in two metalepses on the moral of the whole novel.

From a thematic point of wiew, the situation d'Urfé has lived with Alison in England, the situation he is living with Lily at Bourani, and the situation Conchis describes when he narrates his life bear clear-cut analogies, so much so that both the metadiscourse and the metatheatre may be considered as inverted *mises en abyme* of the primary discourse.

If we take the main story (Alison and Nick), to represent the material; Conchis's story (Lily and Conchis), the literary; and the masque (Lily and Nick) the psychological aspects of reality, we may understand *The Magus* as one tale containing three variations of the same story, told from complementary perspectives which, when mixed, offer a polymorphous unique whole.

The fact that it is so difficult to separate these three theoretically different "variations" in practice, points to one important structural characteristic of the novel, namely that the *mises en abyme* it contains are not "concentrating", but, on the contrary, are *mises en abyme éclatées*. According to Mieke Bal (1977: 106), the *mise en abyme concentrante* is a story within the story, a resumé of the principal story which is contained within the principal one; the *mise en abyme éclatée*, on the other hand, functions inversely, by scattering, rather than concentrating its elements within the main story:

> L'éclatement consiste dans la dispersion des éléments de l'histoire-résumeé à travers l'histoire principale. Chaque élément répéré ailleurs renvoie à la mise en abyme, qui, à son tour, renvoie au roman entier. Celui-ci perd ainsi son caractère linéaire parce que le dénouement vers lequel il évolue, se trouve révélé dès le début et resurgit partout. (p. 107)

With these definitions in mind we may say that both the masque and the metadiscourse function in *The Magus* as *mises en abyme éclatées*, that is, as *mises en abyme* whose elements are not linearly developed, but rather appear scattered and intertwined with the elements of the main story and with the elements of each other, forming an in extricable unity.

As we know, the masque develops at Bourani only over week-ends and stops during week days when Nicholas has to work as a teacher at the Byron school, so it follows a discontinuous temporal course, further altered whenever Conchis takes on the role of narrator to tell his life. In general, two devices are used within the masque: portrait-like staging of iconic scenes by secondary actors, such as the double hunting of the satyr, the apparition of Robert Faulkes, or of the jackal-headed Anubis, or the enactment of the persecution of the Greek guerilla men by the German troops. The way in which these iconic scenes function in the masques is similar to the way in which the literary icons function in the metadiscourse, that is, by symbolically encapsulating one particular point later to be expanded and explained either in the masque or in Conchis's narration. The other device in the masque is the performance of the *Three Hearts* story by

Nicholas himself and the twins. Properly speaking, only this part of the masque may be said to constitute a *mise en abyme* of the primary story, while the iconic scenes, by interrupting its development, and intertwining with it, with the metadiscourse and even with the main story, scatter their punctual meaning in all directions. Sometimes these iconic scenes function as vivid analeptic materializations of something Nicholas has just read or heard at Bourani, as is the case with the apparition of Robert Faulkes; but the iconic scenes also often precede the account, standing as mute proleptic icons, whose meaning will only be gathered much later. This is what happens, for instance, when Nicholas is assaulted and made prisoner by the German troops and is accused by one of the guerilla men of being *prodotis*, "a traitor" (p. 376). Later on Nicholas will hear the story of the three guerillas from Conchis's lips and will learn that the person who was considered a traitor was Conchis himself, but we must not forget that Nicholas has behaved treacherously with Alison and with women in general, so that the meaning of the iconic scene expands itself in all directions, offering a waelth of possible interpretations.

The way in which these iconic scenes, and also the iconic tales Conchis tells function, is very similar to the way in which images may be used impressionistically. By the "impressionistic use of images" Robert Humphrey (1954: 77) understands,

> The description of an immediate perception in figurative terms which expand to express an emotional attitude toward a more complex thing.

Like the images used impressionistically, the meaning of the narrative and theatrical icons, "figuratively expands to express an emotional attitude towards a more complex thing", which is exactly what happens when Nicholas hears the word *prodotis*.

The combination of the formal alternation of elements from the masque with elements of the discourse and the metadiscourse, plus the polymorphous metaphorical expansions of meanings effected by the iconic tales and scenes, endlessly pointing to various, more complex levels of reading is what has sometimes produced a baffling effect on the readers of *The Magus*. These readers feel, as it were, lost in a centre-less maze which leads them nowhere. The effect may be frustrating, but we must not forget that, from a structural point of view, the *mise en abyme éclatée* neatly echoes the thematic message of the novel.

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SAMUEL BECKETT: PROSA DE MADUREZ

Carmelo CUNCHILLOS JAIME

Samuel Beckett es uno de esos autores que dejan huella en el lector. Sus obras, más que llamadas de atención, son verdaderas pedradas lanzadas certeramente a la imaginación del receptor. La respuesta por parte de éste suele ser inmediata: el abandono de la lectura ante la descortesía que supone un abuso semejante o un súbito interés por lo que, de modo tan brusco, desvela una nueva realidad, un estado de cosas insospechado.

Mi experiencia particular, con respecto al escritor cuyo octogésimo aniversario conmemoramos en este Seminario, se inserta decididamente en el segundo tipo de reacciones. Recuerdo cómo, tras acabar la primera obra, experimenté un deseo, quizás no exento de masoquismo, de conocer el resto de su producción. Acepté, en una palabra, el reto que supone aguantar una y otra vuelta de tuerca impuestas a mi sensibilidad y a mi paciencia a cambio de poder disfrutar, mediante la totalidad de la lectura, de las extrañas pero sugerentes promesas contenidas en el mensaje global.

Si a esta actividad lectora se añade la deformación profesional propia de los que estamos en contacto con los sistemas de crítica literaria o frecuentamos las aulas, no es de extrañar que me interesase a continuación por la personalidad del autor, el orden cronológico de sus trabajos, los géneros que cultivó y los que evitó, la corriente literaria en la que cabría adscribirle y otros muchos aspectos relacionados con la biografía y la obra del escritor.