UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Myths and Existential Masks in John Fowles's *The Magus*

Mýty a existenční masky v románu Johna Fowlese Mág

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Fowles, Mág, mytologie, existencialismus, divadlo, masky, hra

KEY WORDS

Fowles, The Magus, mythology, existentialism, theatre, masks, play

THESIS ABSTRACT

In John Fowles's novel *The Magus*, the protagonist Nicholas Urfe is subject to a series of metatheatrical illusions created by a Greek eccentric recluse named Maurice Conchis, the eponymous magus of the title. Increasingly crueller and more surreal, the tricks and peculiar performances are parts of a scheme designed to rouse Nicholas from his life of egotistical freedom and existential inauthenticity.

The employment of myths and masks plays a vital role in Nicholas's "initiation" and in the overall theme of the novel. The thesis and aim of this work is to illustrate, on the various techniques in which the mentioned myths and masks are exploited, both in the immediate plot and Nicholas's narrative voice, the interrelations of mythologies and masks with the inauthenticity of Nicholas's existence. Through the analysis of *The Magus*, this text will focus on the means in which the theatrical disguises work as an extension of Urfe's own social masks.

The first part of the thesis addresses the connection of classical mythology with the modern understanding of myth, including its use in existential drama and 20th century philosophical and psychological theories. The second part of the thesis considers the early work of the British author John Fowles and draws the connection between the existential aspects of his literary creation and the previously mentioned theories, illustrating so through the author's debut novel and a collection of philosophical aphorisms. The third and concluding part of the thesis focuses on the analysis of *The Magus*, in which it will address the position of the proposed themes in the context of its narrative, emphasizing its overall importance in Fowles's literary work.

ABSTRAKT

Nicholas Urfe, hlavní postava románu *Mág* Johna Fowlese, je podroben řadě metateatrálních iluzí, jejichž tvůrcem je excentrický Řek Maurice Conchis, mág z názvu knihy. Triky a podivná představení, která jsou stále krutější a iracionálnější, jsou součástí plánu, jehož úkolem je obrazně probudit Nicholase ze života plného sebestředné svobody a neautentické existence.

V Urfově iniciaci a v celkovém námětu knihy hrají důležitou roli mýty a masky. Tezí a účelem této práce je na různých technikách využití těchto mýtů a masek ilustrovat jejich propojenost s neautentičností Nicholasovi existence. Tyto techniky jsou viditelné jak v samotném ději knihy, tak v Urfově hlasu jakožto vypravěče. Pomocí analýzy *Mága* se tak bude tato práce soustředit na způsoby, kterými popsané divadelní masky fungují jako prodloužení Nicholasových společenských masek.

První část práce se zaměří na propojení antické mytologie s moderním pojetím mýtu, Pozornost bude věnována i využití mytologické tvorby v oblastech jako psychologie či filozofie. K tomu bude využito prací několika moderních teoretiků a spisovatelů. V druhé části práce bude hlavním bodem vztah mezi zmíněnými teoriemi a existenciálními aspekty Fowlesovi tvorby – text se zaměří na to, jak se tyto aspekty projevují ve zkušenostech jednotlivých protagonistů děl. Třetí část se nakonec bude zabývat pozicí zmíněných témat v kontextu Fowlesova románu *Mág*, čímž práce zdůrazní význam těchto témat skrz autorovu tvorbu.

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INTRODUCTION

The 17th and 18th century had been an era of a revolt of the rational mind against the abstractions of metaphysics. The proponents of the Enlightenment at the front of a revolutionary change strived to liberate man from the shackles of religious obscurantism and unfounded superstition.

The development of the following centuries with its revolutionary scientific discoveries of evolution and the psychological theories of human subconsciousness did however shed light on a certain truth; it was, unfortunately for the Army of the rationalists and positivists, defunct to attempt to explain the complex situation of the world and human mind in purely rational terms. Despite the rising independence of the middle classes from the Church and the gradual secularization of mainstream society, it was the language of myth and mythical imagination that found its way back to the realm of European thought in the form of the newly arising psychological and psychoanalytical theories. This deep-rooted cultural mythological consciousness, which the Enlightenment refused as a figment of imagination, proves itself to be the semantical necessity in the search for a deeper understanding of human behaviour, thinking and, all in all, the nature of human existence.

This is the position from which this thesis approaches the 1977 revised edition of John Fowles's novel *The Magus*, in which a young protagonist veiled in inauthentic masks of a cynic and existentialist finds himself in a mythical quest, surrounded by a mysterious meta-theatre created for the sake of his existential awakening.

The intent of the thesis is to analyse, using the various theories and philosophies of the 20th century, the way in which *The Magus* operates with the theme of existential masks and mythological matter. The thesis will address the theories and philosophies that inspired and influenced Fowles's own system of thought and belief, in which French existentialism and the psychoanalytical theories played a crucial role, as well as the influential works of various

academics concerning mythology and the theory of play that show to be an inspiration for the metatheatrical narrative of the novel. Another point of departure concerns itself with the early work of the author which preconceives the themes underlying his later novels, including Fowles's debut novel *The Collector* and the book of short fragments and aphorisms *The Aristos*, in which he lays out his philosophy in a naked form.

Using these sources and various excerpts and quotations of Fowles's writing, the work shall provide the grounds for its thesis through both the theoretical research provided, and the analytical approach to the novel's narrative and structure.

2 MYTH AND ITS APPLICATION

2.1 The Meaning of 'Myth' throughout History

Before using the word myth in the meaning applied today in the humanities and literary criticism, it is necessary to look upon the evolution the meaning of the word went through. After flourishing of mythological narratives in the works and art of primordial civilizations, the definition and understanding of the phenomenon changes dramatically due to the development of rational reading and scrutiny of Homer's myths and mythology in general where the Greek philosophers put mythos into opposition to logos¹. Logos was, on the contrary, connected to the rational mind and preferred truth to the illusions of mythos.

The scrutiny of mythology in the Western philosophical tradition thus "goes back to Plato, who rejected Homeric myth on, especially, ethical grounds."² Plato therefore judges the system for its immorality in "representing the gods as practitioners of immoral behaviour."³ The rationalistic criticism of myths is associated with "[1]he rise of Ionian rationalism [which] coincides with a more and more damaging criticism of the 'classic' mythology."⁴ Already the "earliest Milesian philosophers refused to see the Figure of the true divinity in Homer's descriptions. disliking the anthropomorphic conception of gods."⁵ As Mircea Eliade further notes, "in these critiques of classical mythology we can see an effort to free the concept of divinity from the anthropomorphic expressions of the poets,"⁶ constructing into myth a connection with poetry and the imaginative, as "the adjective *mýthódés* meant 'fabulous and unauthenticated,' in contrast to every kind of truth or reality."⁷

¹ "Myth enables two contradictory assessments, as if two contradictory concerns of reason stood against each other. On the one hand, reason rejects myth, excludes and banish it; it is necessary to choose between *mythos* and *logos*." Paul Ricoeur, "Mýtus a jeho filozofická interpretace," *Reflexe* 4 (1990): 1, REFLEXE https://www.reflexe.cz/File/ricoeur-mytus.pdf 21 May 2017.

² Robert A. Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 11.

³ Segal, 11.

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 148.

⁵ Eliade, Myth and Reality 152.

⁶ Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 153.

⁷ Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 153.

It was the Stoics, however, who were able to partially rehabilitate the reputation of mythological matter, yet they diverted from its original worldly significance by treating it allegorically⁸. A similar approach was adopted in the following centuries by the rising establishment of the Christian church which, to ensure its position, indoctrinated useful parts of various mythologies and, on the other hand, pronounced the rest to be false stories and tales of imagination incompatible with the Christian doctrine. This was the fate of many intricate mythologies of opposing religions and beliefs, be it the Norse mythology of various Germanic tribes or Greek mythology in the Balkans.

In contrast to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance allowed for a more secular approach to the subject, mainly thanks to the fact that, as Meletinsky notes in his *Poetics of Myth*, "it deliberately combined the traditions of Christian Middle Ages with the pagan culture of the ancient times."⁹ With the decline of Renaissance, Meletinsky further states, "the mythological traditions that fuelled Renaissance culture, even though in an aesthetically transformed and humanised form, finally ran dry."¹⁰

The cultural aspect of demythologization, where the significance of mythical narratives fell victim to scientific scrutiny, escalated with the arrival of the Enlightenment whose representatives would "dismiss myth for explaining the world unscientifically."¹¹ This denial of myth connected with the evolution of modern scientific classification and theories, however, structurally coincides with the development of human sciences, among which the field of psychology again draw its attention to the symbolical interpretation of myth as a way of communicating the hidden corners of human psyche.

⁸⁸ Segal, 11.

⁹ Eleazar M. Meletinsky, *Poetics of Myth*, translated by G. Lanoue & A. Sadetsky (Routledge: New York, 2000) 14.

¹⁰ Meletinsky, 20.

¹¹ Segal, 11.

2.2 Psychology

The psychoanalytic and analytic approaches of the two prominent thinkers of the field, Freud and Jung, respectively, both to a certain degree draw inspiration and terminology from the original conception of mythology as it appears in the primitive cultures, the Asian philosophies, and partly also in Greece, as an opposing force to rationalistic criticism. In Jung's analytical tradition, myth, or the survival of it, can be connected with his concept of the collective unconscious, a system of universal qualities and tendencies shared by the collective of the whole human species. The collective unconscious predates the individual, as it exists as something unconditioned by events in one's life, yet, being the universal principle, it stimulates human behaviour and gives rise to reoccurring motives.

> The collective unconscious - so far as we can say anything about it at all - appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reason the myths of all nations are its real exponents. In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious... We can therefore study the collective unconscious in two ways, either in mythology or in the analysis of the individual.¹²

From this short excerpt, we can take two arguments as being relevant for this thesis. Firstly, the analogy of mythology and collective unconscious brings forward the theory that mythology, as much as it may appear "extinct" in the modern Western world, cannot ever truly disappear since it functions as the universal platform of human existence. Jung's statement can be seen as an attempt at reconciliation of myth with modern science, as it "integrate[s] the myth into the general history of thought, as regarding it as the most important form of collective thinking... since 'collective thinking' is never completely abolished in any society, whatever its degree of evolution."¹³ Secondly, Jung's suggestions of two methodological approaches illustrate the changing nature of myth as it transformed from primitive to modern societies - in archaic

¹² Jung, "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche," *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 8* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) 325.

¹³ Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 24.

societies, myth functioned as a special tale or performance constituting reality, it therefore functioned deeply on the level of tribal or communal belief and early forms of religion; in modern society, the territory of myth was replaced from civilization to the individual. That is why Jung suggests myth should be studied from two vantage points – mythology, the study of myths following their development from their beginnings in primitive societies, and psychology of the individual, as "at the level of *individual experience* [myth] has never completely disappeared: it makes itself felt in the dreams, the fantasies and the longings of the modern man... [there are] little mythologies in the unconscious and half-conscious activity of every individual."¹⁴ From this we can infer that "there was no break in the continuity between the archaic world and the modern world. The one great difference was that of the presence... of a personal thinking that was absent, or almost so, among the members of traditional societies."¹⁵ Jung's analytical approach therefore takes into account both sides of the meaning of myth – the social and the personal.

Jung's version can be seen as a reworking and expansion of the original theory by Sigmund Freud that treats mythology at the level of an individual. Freud's theory elaborates on the idea of the unblemished beginning and the necessity to know the origin of things in order to control them/free oneself from them. Similar philosophy was exercised in primitive societies and their interpretation of myths as truthful and meaningful representation of the original state of being. In Plato's idealism, we can find a related development in his theory of *anamnesis*, though there are too many differences as to call them analogous. Psychoanalysis thus made use of an ancient idea, where the concept of the beginning is part of an ahistorical time, and applied it to the historical and personal time of individual psyche. For Freud, early childhood represents the unblemished beginning, a sort of a personal paradise, a place beyond time which is destroyed by a later trauma in childhood, creating a psychological milestone saved in our

¹⁴ Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries 27.

¹⁵ Eliade, Myth, Dreams and Mysteries 24.

subconscious. Through remembering these events the patient can be freed from his past and establish control over his present life.

All this shows the importance of myth for human psyche and existence, and its scientific significance for modern humanities. It is important to note that what follows from the previous paragraphs is the ever-present dichotomy in the approaches of philosophy and science to myth. From the first critique delivered by Plato, myth has always found a way to incorporate itself into philosophical and scientific theories that criticised it. Though Plato criticised myth on ethical grounds, he, nevertheless, made use of mythology in many of his philosophical doctrines, following the tradition of the Orphic myth in his theory of metempsychosis. Christianity on the one hand condemned pagan mythologies, on the other it created its own system of Biblical mythology, which is basically founded on a fusion of the original pagan mythological systems with Christian additions and adaptations. The Jungian and Freudian theories call for a "methodical critique of mythos in the name of logos,"¹⁶ however, both don't hesitate to exploit the language of myth in their psychological models of the human psyche¹⁷. This all proves that a complete absence of myth is often unthinkable, pointing to the fact that, as a kind of language, myth cannot be substituted¹⁸.

2.3 Mythologies

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes participates in creating this discourse, defining myth in semiological terms and demonstrating its presence in all aspects of human life. For Barthes, "myth is a system of communication, it is a message,"¹⁹ a speech that, as any other kind of

 ¹⁶ Joel Whitebook, *Freud: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 294.
 ¹⁷ For example, Freud's well-known theory of Oedipus and Jung's theory of the Electra complex, which Freud

later also incorporated, are a clear indicator of that.

¹⁸ As Paul Ricoeur notes, "[s]omething tells us that myth does not exhaust itself in its explicative function, that it is not a mere pre-scientific attempt to find the cause of things; on the contrary, it shows that its fictional function points to and examines a certain dimension of truth which is not identical with the truth of science." Ricoeur, 2. ¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage Books, 2000) 109.

language, consists of the signifier and the signified, displaying its symbolic nature. These symbols can be expressed in various ways, not only in words, but in a photograph, or, in fact, any image. That is why, in the face of Greta Garbo and her make-up that has "the snowy thickness of a mask", he can see "an archetype of the human face, … a sort of Platonic Idea of the human creature,"²⁰. In a different chapter, he compares wrestling to Ancient Greek drama with its "grandiloquence" and "spectacle of excess"²¹, indeed, characterizing it not as a sport, but as a *spectacle*, with the wrestlers having their position clearly stated, similar to actors in a play. The participants, appearing on stage, create a sort of a boxing-match-theatre, where their function "is not to win; it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of [them]."²²

The richness of possibilities of "modernizing" myth is strongly influenced by the fact that, "unlike poetry... [mythology] searches for the meaning of things per say, not of words."²³ This leads to an "endless play of hide-and-seek of meaning and form."²⁴According to Barthes, the structure of myth is peculiar in its treatment of *signifiant* and *signifié* as it is based on the sensory fullness of the signified and emptiness of the signifier.²⁵ By using a sign or symbol historically connected with a certain meaning and filling it with a concept or meaning which, under the surface, opposes the preconceived stereotype, we reach a symbolical simulation of a presumed shared reality, a simulacrum where the play of hide-and-seek manifests itself in the subversion of symbols masked as facts. In the realm of masks and simulation, moreover, "[s]uch 'appearance' has, from time to time, a stronger experiential reality and power of impression than the bulk of everyday things in their worn-out ordinariness."²⁶

²⁰ Barthes, 56.

²¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995) 15.

²² Lévi-Strauss, 16.

²³ Meletinsky, 96.

²⁴ Meletinsky, 95.

²⁵ Barthes, 109.

²⁶ Eugen Fink, "Oasis of Happiness," *Play as a Symbol of the World and Other Writings,* translated by A. A. Moore & C. Turner (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016) 28.

2.4 Importance of Play as an Ontological Symbol

Barthes' connection of sport to spectacle and play brings forth another important concept whose importance has been, in the 20th century, highlighted in the theoretical work of Johan Huizinga and Eugen Fink. They oppose the simplistic explanations of play as an activity aimed at discharging excessive energy or the satisfaction of certain imitative instincts as it omits the fundamental Being of play as a significant non-materialistic function with an inherent meaning that precedes culture²⁷. It is primary to civilization – Huizinga sees the cause of this in the fact that "in its earliest phases culture has the play-character... it proceeds in the shape and the mood of play."²⁸ Play is therefore hidden behind all cultural phenomena but "as a rule the play-element gradually recedes into the background."²⁹

The dichotomy of play and seriousness (work) in colloquial speech similarly treats play on its face value, ignoring its aesthetic and existential qualities. According to Fink, play embodies existence in itself and the present moment and "the activity of play has only internal purposes, not ones that transcend it."³⁰ Work and seriousness, on the other hand, are characterized by their "futuristic" nature, aiming to the unattainable realm Fink calls *eudaimonia*. The main problem in treating play as a phenomenon equal to work is located in its resistance to all logical explanations, as it "lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil."³¹

Thanks to its supra-logical and irrational nature, play became the most fruitful way of representing mythological matter. Similarly to play, myth works as "a transformation or an 'imagination' of the outer world,"³² based on manipulation of certain images and that which is perceived as real, yet it occupies its own space and time separate from the historical time of

²⁷ Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (London: Routledge, 1980) 1.

²⁸ Huizinga, 46.

²⁹ Huizinga, 46.

³⁰ Fink, "Oasis of Happiness" 20.

³¹ Huizinga, 6.

³² Huizinga, 4.

ordinary human existence. This symbolic activity of human existence comes heavily into play in mythical rituals, seen by Huizinga as the "spirit of pure play."³³ Despite its symbolical nature, however, rituals aim towards more than just appearance or symbolical representation, their goal is the actualization of something higher than mundane, customary life.

2.5 Existentialist Approaches to Myth

2.5.1 Sartre's Mythical Theatre and Existential Responsibility

This connection of mythical rituals and plays leads all the way to the dramatic arts whose "sole aim [according to Sartre] should be to project... vitally important theme of man's total engagement with his situation."³⁴ Sartre's view of mythology is, however, different from the psychological, Jungian, approach where it embodies the mental archetypes of human history. According to Sartre, mythology for humans comprises "not [their] nature but the situations in which man finds himself... situations which throw light on the main aspect of the condition of man."³⁵ And because freedom is inherent to any form of play³⁶, Sartre uses this in his exploration of the achievement of existential freedom.

In *Les Mouches*, Sartre makes use of the mythological protagonist Orestes in order to illustrate a path towards an authentic individuality and "the pattern of the ideal 'mythical' existent"³⁷. And he uses a mythological character for the reason that, from his very nature, his Being exists in "a supranatural mythological world that has its own reality, occupying as it does the middle ground between facticity and the non-factical."³⁸ Orestes can achieve absolute

³³ Huizinga, 5.

³⁴ Krishna Grosh, "The Relationship between Greek Mythology and Twentieth Century European and American Drama with Special Reference to the Orestes Myth," University of Calcutta (Department of English Language and Literature): 209, http://hdl.handle.net/10603/161951 24 May 2018.

³⁵ Sartre, "Forgers of Myths," *European Theories of the Drama*, edited by B. H. Clark, translated by R. Gilder (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1970) 400.

³⁶ "First and foremost, then, all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it." Huizinga, 7.

³⁷ Grosh, 240.

³⁸ Grosh, 241.

freedom and reach totality precisely because of his status as a mythological character who can transcend the realm of facticity, which is just another name for nature. In a mythological play operating in its own space and time, Orestes escapes the historical time of facticity and reaches the plains of being liberated from his past which is, in any way, a conception that "does not have a fixed meaning that can be known"³⁹, unless you "give it one"⁴⁰. In an exploration of a mythological narrative, Sartre plays out an existential version of his own, through which he discovers, in the words of Eugen Fink, "ways in which finite beings become truthful symbols and can experience a primordial, worlded 'completion'—in which the fragment is returned to the intact whole."⁴¹

Following on Sartre's dramatical attempt at exploring absolute freedom, it is important to notice that, in Sartre's terms, what is emphasized is not only the freedom of an individual to define themselves as such, but also the responsibility that is inseparable from that possibility. Sartre's existential declaration *Existence precedes essence* states that, within these barriers that define "I", man is his own creation, and is ceaselessly defined by his actions. This of course creates consequences, as Sartre noted in his lecture *Existentialism is An Humanism*: "If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is."⁴² As an individual does exist within certain barriers, but not in a vacuum, he or she must consider in their actions not only themselves, but the whole of humanity. Sartre stresses that fact when he says:

"[w]hen we say that man takes responsibility for himself, we say more than that - he is in his choices responsible for all men. All our acts of creating ourselves create at the same time an image of man such as we believe he must be. Thus, our personal responsibility is vast, because it engages all humanity."⁴³

³⁹ Krishna, 222.

⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations* (New York, George Braziller, 1965) 95.

⁴¹ Eugen Fink, *Play as a Symbol of the World*, translated by A. A. Moore & C. Turner (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016) 128.

⁴² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is An Humanism*, translated by Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 200) 3

⁴³ Sartre, Existentialism is An Humanism 2.

When one disregards this responsibility, and acts against his best conviction, or somehow assaults the freedoms beyond one's barriers, then such a person is living an existence of lies and insincerity⁴⁴.

2.5.2 Camus: Absurdism and "The Myth of Sisyphus"

In existentialism, therefore, the perception of myth changes significantly as "it is quite clear that Sartre is not thinking of myth, and of its moral and tragic and ceremonial aspects, in any of the senses that Eliot or O'Neill, for instance, thought of them." Rather, the mythological character (and the narrative of drama) is for Sartre useful by forcing the protagonist to participate "in the free choice which man makes in these situations"⁴⁵. Thanks to that, he can say that in Camus' domestic tragedy *Le Malentendu*, the characters "are mythical in the sense that the misunderstanding that separates them can serve as the emblem of all misunderstandings which separate man from himself, from the world, from other men."⁴⁶

The relationship of these two prominent French thinkers' philosophies is, however, more complicated, as Camus' system of thoughts diverges from those of Sartrean existentialism. As existentialism is "to a certain degree the inheritor of 'the philosophy of life,'"⁴⁷ as proposed, among others, by Friedrich Nietzsche, it stresses the non-existence of absolute values and a rational framework of nature (i.e., essence), leading to the conclusion that it is therefore every individual's own freedom to define themselves and the values that will define their life. The fact that there is no self-standing world of meaning we could know is, according to existentialism, the source of existential anguish or anxiety. The individual creation of meaning is where Camus' approach can be defined as absurdism – for him, meaning in any

⁴⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Washington D.C.: Washington Square Press, 1993) 113.

⁴⁵ Sartre, "Forgers of Myth" 400.

⁴⁶ Sartre, "Forgers of Myth" 402.

⁴⁷ Meletinsky, 29.

form does not in fact exist. The absurd nature of Camus' philosophy is in his approach to this non-existence of meaning – the first step is to acknowledge the absurdity of the situation human beings find themselves in, the absurdity of which stems from the natural need of the human consciousness to look for meaning in an inherently meaningless natural pattern of creation and destruction.

Camus discusses the possible answers to this absurd situation in his famous essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus", where he rejects suicide and various philosophical systems as inauthentic because they diverge one's attention from the absurdity of his situation by finding a system of objective values (in his words, people such as Kierkegaard or Heidegger commit philosophical suicide by committing themselves to beliefs which must be inherently false). For Camus, the only possible solution is found in Sisyphus' revolt against the gods, which is possible only if Sisyphus defines himself against "the other", embodied by the gods who impose the damnation upon him. Camus reworks the relationship of man and gods, emphasizing the possibility of Sisyphus to choose his destiny by rejecting hope and finding happiness in his plight. The mythical Sisyphus was condemned to "futile and hopeless labour,"⁴⁸ a punishment the gods considered to be the most severe. Sisyphus, however, as the "absurd hero"⁴⁹, finds his rebellion in defying the gods, in Camus' words, in "scorn[ing] the gods." His "hatred of death"⁵⁰ leads Camus to the conclusion that "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn."⁵¹ Sisyphus becomes untouchable for the gods because he owns his damnation through his rebellion, his "silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing."⁵²

This is a remaking of an original mythological narrative, in that it finds its "absurd" borders in the middle of the hero's transformation. This might imply that his transformation is

⁴⁸ Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Writings*, trans. J. O'Brien (London: Vintage, 1991) 146.

⁴⁹ Camus, 147.

⁵⁰ Camus, 152.

⁵¹ Camus, 151.

⁵² Camus, 140.

cut short, leaving him an undeveloped embryo, implying his failure to achieve the resolution "where the ego finds reconciliation with and rehabilitation in his collective."⁵³ Camus however makes sure to point out that his Sisyphus is a complete hero. He reworks Sisyphus' destiny by finding a new path to freedom, and in his short literary reworking of the myth he gives form to his philosophy where "[e]xistentialism has seized on one aspect of the literary myth and raised it to an absolute. It centers on the second stage of the myth, that which is concerned with the revolt of the individual against the mythical collective,"⁵⁴ eventually restructuring this stage into the conclusion, where "the absurd hero" attained his freedom by defining himself against his torturers.

2.6 Meletinsky's Poetics of Myth

As a major figure of Russian formalism, Meletinsky, in his book *The Poetics of Myth*, bridges the gap between literary and non-literary usage of myth. In the first part of his book, he, similarly to Eliade, explores the original versions of myths from an ethnological point of view. However, in demonstrating modern theories of myth, he exploits its connection with literature. In the Introduction to his *Poetics*, he outlines the inherent affinity of myth and literature. According to Meletinsky, this connection is given by the similar nature of both myth and literature since "myth expresses specific artistic images in concrete form, and artistic expression carries within itself a considerable mythological inheritance. In fact, archaic mythology blended... art in general and the verbal arts in particular; art is a means of expression inheriting both the syncretic and the concrete qualities of myth."⁵⁵.

⁵³ Harry Slochower, "The Function of Myth in Existentialism," *Yale French Studies* No. 1 (1948): 43, JSTOR http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928857> 17 Jun 2017.

⁵⁴ Slochower, 42.

⁵⁵ Meletinsky, 19.

Meletinsky also sees the fascination of 20^{th} -century authors with mythology as a consequence of the crisis of humanity, predominantly after World War I, and, in general, a result of the crisis of modern bourgeoisie. Unlike the 19-century realistic novel, which "oriented itself on a credible representation of reality [and] on an establishment of artistic history of its own time,"⁵⁶ and which can be seen as the climax of the demythization of Western culture, literary tendencies of the 20^{th} century – i.e. of modernism and post-modernism – are symptomatic of the turning point in Western culture where a mere implicit use of myths gave way to a conscious treatment of mythological matter. We can call this the period of remythization. Together with the shift in understanding human psyche visible in the field of psychology (as has been illustrated in a previous part concerning Jung's approach), this new attitude to literature enables its reconciliation with original mythical narratives.

One of the reasons the literary incorporation of mythology and the inward turn to symbolic embodiment of deep, psychological roots of man in Modernist literature work so well together is, says Meletinsky, the fact that "symbolism of mythology is primordial."⁵⁷ This primordial symbolism is, in the 20th century, related to the transition in literature from linear, objective time of the 19th century realistic novel, to the conception of time as a cyclical pattern in the manner of mythological time. This transition is rooted in the deep crisis of consciousness typical of the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Unlike the positivistic optimism of the Enlightenment, which perceived the human kind as naturally good, rational beings, the upcoming century completely subverted this view, leading to a general scepticism.

⁵⁶ Meletinsky, 7.

⁵⁷ Meletinsky, 20.

3 FOWLES AND LITERARY TENDENCIES

3.1 General overview

20th century literature saw a revival in the study of myth as a significant phenomenon in understanding the world and the human experience. From Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where he makes use of the mythological perspective of literature as a tool for expressing the state of modern man and modern world, famously drawing inspiration from Weston's anthropological work *From Ritual to Romance*, or James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a modernistic reworking of the original Homeric myth, to the vast number of works in the field of humanities, time and time again, myth reveals itself as being of great importance when trying to understand the complex situation of man, his relationship to himself, others, and the world.

Emphasizing Barthes' statement that mythical language provides a medium for communicating meanings otherwise unattainable, and thanks to the fact that the signified of mythological semiotics is emptied out, the literary employment of myth carries with it a large potential of rich artistic expression as it permits the combination of historically established mythological narratives and masks with unprecedented meaning behind them. This mixing of the old into the new points to the exhaustion, as John Barth names it in his essay "The Literature of Exhaustion", of the traditional narrative approaches, as expressed in the works of Nabokov, Fowles, Pynchon, or Vonnegut, to name a few authors that illustrate the wide variety of postmodern literature. This exhaustion should be viewed as an opportunity for change and transformation, not a resolution over the death of literary forms. As John Barth notes:

By "exhaustion" I don't mean anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities – by no means necessarily a cause of despair.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1984) 64.

The engagement of myth, the Greek myth in particular, is especially rich in possibilities, because, as a mythology that has been removed from religious context, there is no restriction in employing the "stories" in a modern cloak. By Fowles' time, Greek myths had become part of the general canon, and their narratives were ready for literary exploitation. Their potential may lie in their pagan origin, as "the pervasiveness of classical, or pagan, mythology is even more of a feat than that of biblical mythology, for classical mythology has survived the demise of the religion of which, two thousand years ago, it was originally a part."⁵⁹ This, after all, may be the reason why so many authors of the Western literary tradition chose to incorporate Greek mythology into their work.

3.2 Before *The Magus*

3.2.1 Literary Tendencies

Drawing inspiration from the previously mentioned approaches and theories, we come to the work of John Fowles, whose fiction and non-fiction were deeply influenced by the thought system of psychoanalysis emerging throughout the first half of the 20th century, as represented by the prominent figures of the field, Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung. Another profound influence, French existentialism, was of primary importance in Fowles' writing, even though, in some of his works, he tries to find alternatives to the French version.⁶⁰ The novels' narratives combine these features together with post-modern approaches to novel-writing, such as the relativity of perspective in his first novel *The Collector*, or the metanarrative theatrical performances and the employment of Greek mythology in *The Magus*, emphasizing Barthes' statement that mythical language provides a medium for communicating meanings otherwise

⁵⁹ Segal, 79.

⁶⁰ Susana Onega, "Self, World and Art in the Fiction of John Fowles," *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.1 (Spring, 1996): 42, JSTOR https://www.jstor.org/stable/441674> 17 Jun 2017.

unattainable. This approach to myth makes use of its potential to convey an idea of ancient wisdom, its metaphorical power and creative potential.

3.2.2 Early work

The relevance of Fowles's early work for the main focus of this thesis is manifold, most importantly, many of the themes of his first published books, novel *The Collector* and the essayistic collection of philosophical aphorisms *The Aristos*, foreshadow their deeper engagement in *The Magus*. These include the questions of personal and existential freedom, and the role of authority and authenticity in trying to attain independence. In *The Collector*, Fowles create his narrative using a prototype text as a stencil – this text is Shakespeare's romance *The Tempest*, where the great playwright touches upon the themes of the nature of art and artist, questioning the role of a creator in his own creation and the possibility of individual responsibility in the hands of an authority figure.

The Aristos, on the other hand, does not consist of an immediate narrative, on the other hand, it expresses Fowles's beliefs and convictions on the matter of personal freedom and the nature of reality and, furthermore, examines the role of education, state or biological determinism in attaining the desired situation where the individual "elects", capable of freeing themselves of external authority, accept their own personal responsibility in co-creating reality.

3.2.3 The Collector, or the Deadening Effect of Having

In his very first published book *The Collector*, Fowles gives form to his beliefs of individual existential freedom and authenticity, a topic he passionately employs in all of his work. The realistic writing creating the plot of a genre we could call horror or suspense tale, and which is, in a way, "a savage parody of the romance form,"⁶¹ is combined with the more

⁶¹ Simon Loveday, *The Romances of John Fowles* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 27.

experimental approaches such as the changing perspectives of the two protagonists and the *in medias res* jump to Miranda's narrative after the Clegg-narrated part. The novel has been subject to many interpretations which would emphasize the obvious meaning of the characters – Miranda, as the embodiment of potential good, is overcome by the actual evil centred in Clegg⁶². Yet it is Miranda who is able to grow as a human being in her imprisonment, whereas Clegg as the captor is "the one in prison; in his own hateful narrow present world."⁶³

The sickness of Clegg's view of reality is implied both in the book's title and in his greatest hobby, i.e. collecting butterflies. Fowles links the act of collecting with the "destructive materialism"⁶⁴ and the purely mechanistic and scientific view of the world which deprives its objects of freedom and autonomy⁶⁵, it is therefore a deadening force where *having* stands in direct opposition to *being⁶⁶*. Miranda sees the connection, too, when she notes in her diary:

I am one in a row of specimens. It's when I try to flutter out of line that he hates me. I'm meant to be dead, pinned, always the same, always beautiful. He knows that part of my beauty is being alive, but it's the dead me he wants.⁶⁷

Moreover, Miranda's imprisonment works in two ways. The obvious level of her captivity is the physical level, where the underground dungeon Clegg created could represent his subconscious desires. The other level is connected with Clegg's objectivization of Miranda as "he won't, refuses, to see her as a conscious subject who is constituted as a subject of her world; instead she is, for him, only an object in his."⁶⁸ Miranda's ability of inner maturation despite her imprisonment points to that, for the real Miranda has never been captured in the first place.

⁶² John Fowles, *The Aristos* (New York: Little, Brown and company, 1970) 10.

⁶³ John Fowles, *The Collector* (London: Vintage, 2004) 212.

⁶⁴ John M. Neary, "John Fowles's Clegg : A Metaphysical Rebel," Essays in Literature 15.1 (1988): 57,

20 Jun 2018">https://library.calstate.edu/sanfrancisco/ebsco/record?id=hft-509404611>20 Jun 2018.

⁶⁵ John Fowles notes in *Wormholes*, "[f]irst of all, I was a collector. One of the reasons I wrote – and named – my novel *The Collector* was to express my hatred of this lethal perversion." 260.

⁶⁶ More on this issue in, e.g. Erich Fromm's To Have or to Be?

⁶⁷Fowles, *The Collector* 203.

⁶⁸ Robert Campbell, "Moral Sense and The Collector: The Novels of John Fowles," *Critical Quarterly* 25.1 (1983): 48.

She, from the perspective of Clegg's narration, is a construct of his perception, and anytime Miranda diverges from Clegg's expectation, she is "betraying" the idealistic concept the Collector forced upon her. Exactly that happens when she tries to seduce him – the act works as a "desperate and unfeeling assault on his sexual timidity," and leads Clegg to say:

She was like all women, she had a one-track mind. I never respected her again. It left me angry for days. Because I could do it.⁶⁹

It is this situation that makes Clegg lose his ideal and, in the end, makes him decide to kidnap

yet another girl – only this time he focuses on a more available territory:

She isn't as pretty as Miranda, of course, in fact she's only an ordinary common shop-girl, but that was my mistake before, aiming too high... I could never get what I wanted from someone like Miranda... I ought to have got someone who would respect me more. Someone ordinary I could teach.⁷⁰

There is no place for chance in Clegg's universe, his need for control points to his "features of what Erich Fromm calls the necrophiliac, the type attracted to all that is unalive, sick, or mechanical."⁷¹

3.2.4 Inevitability of Hazard

By creating an elaborate underground dungeon, Clegg wants to eliminate all hazard from his life, a concept which, according to John Fowles, "is as vital to man as water."⁷² Hazard, or the mystery of life, constructs the basic situation of man who cannot know the future, will never know if there is any god to know, and who is thrust into his existence with the only possibility, which is that "being is understanding that I must exist in hazard[.]"⁷³

⁶⁹ Fowles, *The Collector* 102-103.

⁷⁰ Fowles, *The Collector* 282.

⁷¹ Barry N. Olshen, John Fowles (Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1978) 28.

⁷² Fowles, *The Aristos* 27.

⁷³ For Fowles, "[m]y only certainty in life is that I shall one day die." In addition, "hazard is essential for an evolutionary process." Fowles, *The Aristos* 42.

The inevitability of hazard is also present in *The Collector* when Clegg wins a large sum of money in the lottery. This is supposed to represent the so-called "bet situation"⁷⁴ of human existence, where Clegg is literally put into the position of a better. Moreover, he even describes kidnapping Miranda as something that "happened suddenly, it wasn't something I planned the moment the money came."⁷⁵ The role of hazard is therefore present in Fowles's literary debut, it is, however, "a hazard within bounds [as] hazard without bounds would be a universe without physical laws: that is, a perpetual and total chaos."⁷⁶ This hazard within bounds can be found in the game theory of Johann Huizinga who says that a game is "a voluntary activity executed... according to rules freely accepted."⁷⁷ The role of rules is thus crucial in human existence.

3.2.5 Play as Hazard Embodied

Fowles uses the analogy with game of chess to illustrate the nature of hazard. In chess, one is limited by the particular movements of each chess piece – the possibility of movement is therefore relative, not absolute. Clegg, who strives to eliminate hazard from his life, represents "the authority figure [whose] power derives not so much from intentional evil as from the tendency to reduce humanity to a lower material state."⁷⁸ On the other hand, Miranda accepts her limitations of living in "a prison cell [that] can be made to become a comparatively spacious one; and inside it we can become relatively free."⁷⁹ And so the roles of captor and captive swap their places – despite being locked up, Miranda's existence shows signs of authenticity and freedom whose growth has been violently cut short by the collector who "is enslaved by his own enslaving, tyrannized by his own tyranny."⁸⁰ The fact that Clegg creates

⁷⁴ Fowles, *The Aristos* 67.

⁷⁵ Fowles, *The Collector* 16.

⁷⁶ Fowles, *The Collector* 17.

⁷⁷ Huizinga, 28.

⁷⁸ Roy Mack Hill, "Power and Hazard: John Fowles's Theory of Play," *Journal of Modern Literature* 8.2 (1980): 212, JSTOR https://www.jstor.org/stable/1208625> 20 Jul 2018.

⁷⁹ Fowles, *The Aristos* 68.

⁸⁰ Fowles, *The Aristos* 81.

an environment of his own controlled microcosm only further emphasizes this, as "to be able to win at a game [a literal game of life and death in our case] compensates the winner for not being able to win outside the context of the game."⁸¹

3.2.6 Wanted: Prospero

Similarly to the modernist writers who used mythical matter as prototypes and prototexts for their own work, the canvas for Fowles's *The Collector* can be found, as has been mentioned before, in *The Tempest*. The references to the play are quite obvious in the case of the protagonists' names. Miranda shares her name with Prospero's daughter, and her situation in certain ways mirrors that of *The Tempest* Miranda. Before reaching her part of the narrative, the voice of Clegg's Miranda remains locked up and unheard, a heroine as passive as the Miranda of Shakespeare's play that seems devoted to her father Prospero, who literally calls her "my art"⁸². However, this meekness and passivity give way to a strong, independent voice when Miranda addresses Caliban. This happens shortly after he and Prospero make implications of Caliban's attempt to rape Miranda – she must assert herself in order to keep her individuality. This is reminiscent of the break between Clegg's and Miranda's narrative in *The Collector*, where Miranda's voice proves we "must take her seriously,"⁸³ not as "merely a pawn in an interesting play."⁸⁴

In Frederick Clegg, the reader can find both references to *The Tempest*'s Ferdinand and Caliban. The connection to Ferdinand is mostly ironic, as Clegg does not carry many similarities to Miranda's beloved – be it in the perversion of his love for her, or the fact that Miranda herself does not believe his name is Ferdinand. Clegg's lie does however lead Miranda to associate him with the drama's Caliban.

⁸¹ Fowles, *The Aristos* 158.

⁸² William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) I, i, 25.

 ⁸³ Pery Nodelman, "John Fowles's Variations in *The Collector*," *Contemporary Literature* 28.3 (1987): 334
 ⁸⁴ Nodelman, 334.

A slave creature, Shakespeare's Caliban is often mocked for his low intellect and brutish, animal-like nature. His position on Prospero's island shows, however, that he is indispensable for the magician – he collects wood, makes fire and, overall, tends to others' needs through his low-level work. He can therefore be seen as the embodiment of the rising lower classes, who, thanks to the era of capitalist consumerism in Fowles's time, where the ability offered itself to them to free themselves from Prospero by material possession. This freedom is, however, only illusory, as creatures like Caliban do not know the nature of authentic freedom and cannot therefore operate as truly independent.

This is mirrored in Clegg's own gaining of independence through a lottery win. A large sum of money enables him to fulfil his desires. His lack of education, on the other hand, prevents him from using the money in favour of becoming truly free – he stays the victim and subject of his own limited perception of reality, he creates his own mad universe where Caliban reigns free. It is because, with Prospero missing form the narrative, Caliban has been left to his own devices. The absence of Prospero points to Fowles's belief that, in order to evolve into human beings with "whole sight", i.e. people understanding the ever-changing nature of reality, the presence of an authority figure is undesirable. His absence is, nonetheless, also deeply troubling. Without the leading hand, Clegg-Caliban misuses his newly acquired freedom, as he has never been taught the responsibility that necessarily comes with it.

The question which haunts Fowles's *The Collector* is then: What is Caliban capable of? What will he do when unhindered by Prospero's hand? The implied answer in *The Collector* is bleak, yet quite straight-forward – ignorant and uneducated, Caliban/Clegg cannot tell the evil of his actions and the kidnapping of Miranda can be seen as a turning of *Tempest*'s narrative where "the slave" gets the opportunity to rape the object of his desire. Gaining sudden financial independence, Clegg does not know any other way but *abuse* it. The novel's collector therefore embodies the "deadweight of the Calibanity of England,"⁸⁵ as Miranda poignantly calls it. As the representative of the potential good, a potentiality in a person to attain Fowles's whole sight, Miranda despises Clegg's "pettiness and selfishness and meanness of every kind,"⁸⁶ his "hatred of the unusual, this wanting everybody to be the same."⁸⁷ The New People, as Miranda calls them, see equality in "hav[ing all] a telly and a car."⁸⁸

But what they are lacking is not material possession; in reality, the masses need education and teaching in self-reliance and independence so that, instead of feeling hatred and envy, they realize both their powers and limitations. Clegg who, unlike Miranda, did not get his fair deal in life, lives a life of inferiority and feelings of inadequacy and humiliation, and these qualities in turn become the currency of existence in his limited view. When given the chance, Caliban creates his own microcosm where he also plays the part of a tyrant Prospero.

This leads us to the conclusion that, despite Fowles's cries for the absence of authority figure, as he sees "the Prosperolike power to control the destinies of his characters [to be] an intrusion upon the freedom of his readers,"⁸⁹ a savage like Caliban, once let free, creates nothing but destruction and death. Occupying the illusive world of Sartrean bad faith, "Caliban is only half a person at the best of times."⁹⁰

4 THE MAGUS

4.1 The Mythical Quest and Its Application to Western Mentality

Due to its isolation, Clegg's country house has the qualities of an island. It is, however, an island inhabited by the lone Caliban and Prospero is nowhere in sight. The island of Phraxos

⁸⁵ Fowles, *The Collector* 162.

⁸⁶ Fowles, *The Collector* 206.

⁸⁷ Fowles, *The Collector* 209.

⁸⁸ Fowles, *The Collector* 209.

⁸⁹ Nodelman, 345.

⁹⁰ Fowles, *The Collector* 232.

in *The Magus*, on the other hand, is full of the magical creation of a Prosperolike figure, Maurice Conchis.

Considering the revised version of the novel from 1977, The Magus follows the experience of its protagonist, young bourgeois⁹¹ Englishman Nicholas Urfe, "an ordinary, even dull, man experiencing events in the framework of a mysterious, unconventional reality."⁹² The narrative structure, however, is not a simply linear passing of events; on the contrary, it revolves around the inner structure of a mythical story. "Mythical" here implies that the structure of time, and the novel itself, is cyclical. This cyclicality refers to the nature of original mythical thinking where one's life can be purified through the re-rendering of the most important life events, most notably one's birth. This rebirth gives one the opportunity of a conscious initiation into life. Consciousness and conscience play a vital part in Nick's metaphorical rebirth because they imply a conscious choice and, in turn, the freedom to choose. Here comes into play the idea of existential responsibility for one's choices, as Maurice Conchis, the eccentric Greek trickster, is trying to illustrate to his guest through the theatrical replay of the deciding moments of his own life. This cyclicality is mirrored not only in the narrative, as Conchis' narrator role in certain parts of the novel emphasizes the connection between the present and the past and their inherent connection, but also in its form, as the structure gradually unfolds into a triptych, with each beginning of a new part finding Nicholas at a breaking point (the transition between boyhood and manhood in the first part, the start of his mythical quest in the second part, and his rebirth and inner change in the third part), a triptych, however, whose individual parts form an upward spiral, the cyclical nature of which shows the reoccurrence of certain archetypes and forms, yet it does not imply stagnation.

⁹¹ Delma E. Presley, "The Quest of the Bourgeois Hero: An Approach to Fowles' The Magus," *Popular Culture* 6.2 (1972): 394.

⁹² Roberta Rubenstein, "Myth, Mystery, and Irony: John Fowles's *The Magus*," *Contemporary Literature* 16.3 (1975): 335, JSTOR http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207406 23 May 2017.

The title of the novel is in itself connected to the figure of Conchis as the mysterious initiator of Nicholas' rebirth. His motives, however, remain unclear throughout the novel – as much as Nicholas' involvement in the "godgame" points to the fact that Conchis is, though in a cruel fashion, attempting to give his visitor answers to a more authentic way of life, it is hard to miss Conchis' own personal interest in "trying to work out some fundamental questions about his values by placing Nicholas in circumstances comparable to those of his own youth;... one is [thus] never certain whether to regard his masquerades as the work of a wise man or a madman."⁹³

To frame Nicholas' development throughout the narrative, it is necessary to determine the conditions of his life before his journey to the Greek island of Phraxos, the "stage" for his theatrical "godgame" meant to initiate him into a life of authenticity. In the very first paragraph of the novel Nicholas introduces himself in strongly autobiographical terms:

I was born in 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English, and themselves born in the grotesquely elongated shadow, which they never rose sufficiently above history to leave, of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria. I was sent to a public school, I wasted two years doing my national service, I went to Oxford; and there I began to discover I was not the person I wanted to be.⁹⁴

As trivial as such an autobiographical note may sound, it nevertheless works as a manner of showing that Nicholas' (as inauthentic as it was) self has been historically determined⁹⁵. His realization that he "was not who [he] wanted to be" was his first step towards self-realization and freedom.

⁹³ Rubenstein, 336.

⁹⁴ John Fowles, *The Magus* (London: Vintage, 2004) 15.

⁹⁵ John Campbell, "An Interview with John Fowles," Contemporary Literature 17.4 (1976): 466.

4.2 Authenticity and Play of Masks

After the death of his parents in a plane crash, Urfe mistakes his "almost immediate sense of relief, of freedom"⁹⁶ with the authentic freedom of an existentialist nature. He instantly accepted cynicism as a way of maintaining a distance from the boredom of his world and fails to realize that by doing so, he is mainly distancing himself from his authentic self. By calling "a certain kind of inconsequential behaviour 'existentialist'" ⁹⁷, Urfe fails to see the full potential of existentialism as a philosophy and a way of living, transforming it into a mere shadow of itself, a manner of pseudo-intellectually justifying his own foul behaviour. As if the physical absence of his parents had the power to unleash the chains of years of nurture and direct influence, Nicholas believes that an external event, as traumatic as it was, can change the inner environment of his personality. A personal belief supported by a mere reaction towards the outer events is, however, no more based on freedom than being directly led by these events would be. They are the head and tail of the same coin, and, as Nicholas at one point realizes, "just because I said with impunity things that would have apoplexed my dead father, I was still no less under his influence."⁹⁸ His newly acquired cynical approach to life did not exist "by nature, only by revolt."⁹⁹

Since *The Magus* is "a novel about the difficulties of attaining personal freedom, especially in terms of discovering what one is,"¹⁰⁰ Nicholas at the beginning of the novel stands exactly where the narrative needs him to be, i.e. at a point of his life where he exchanged the strains of his son-role for the chains of his own self-construct demonstrated by his changing masks of a cynic, loner and an existentialist. His life is therefore characterized by its simulative

⁹⁶ Fowles, *The Magus* 16.

⁹⁷ Fowles, *The Magus* 17.

⁹⁸ Fowles, *The Magus* 17.

⁹⁹ Fowles, *The Magus* 17.

¹⁰⁰ Carol M. Barnum, "An Interview with John Fowles," *Modern Fiction Studies* 3 (1985): 201, JSTOR https://www.jstor.org/stable/26281415 20 May 2017.

nature, however, we cannot call him "the subject of [his] play,"¹⁰¹ as characterized by Fink, pointing to the "interpersonal" horizon of play and its intrinsic role in human existence. The objectivization of play in Nicholas' case shows the foulness of it, its preoccupation with the future, its meaning oriented at attainment of a goal (such as seducing the girl he desires) rather than the participation in the sheer "joy of existence."¹⁰² The play of appearances in this case thus gets rid of its "wondrous joy" and exists in the realm of "a deceptive... ascertainment, an unclear representation... in those who conceive falsely."¹⁰³ It seems approaching play from the position of power naturally kills all its regenerative, creative potential.

4.3 The Universal Hero and The Power of Mystery

There is, however, a necessity in the air, that of achieving the freedom of existence unhindered by outside social norms; Urfe must have felt it as well as he says:

I didn't know where I was going, but I knew what I needed. I needed a new land, a new race, a new language; and, although I couldn't have put it into words then, I needed a new mystery.¹⁰⁴

Nicholas' decision to go to the Greek island of Phraxos for a teaching job can be seen as the starting point of his initiation into a life of existential authenticity. Fowles's choice of the location is not coincidental, it works here as a means of making a connection between the contemporary Western world of the novel, represented by Nicholas' stale existence in England dominated by the need to possess unrestrained to materialism (for example, Nicholas' attitude to relationships resembles that of Frederick from *The Collector*, he simply collects sexual victories as a way of proving his own self-worth), and the cradle of Western thinking embodied in the serene and mysterious nature of the Greek island.

¹⁰¹ Fink, "Oasis of Happiness" 15.

¹⁰² Fink, Play as a Symbol of the World, 247.

¹⁰³ Fink, Play as a Symbol of the World, 248.

¹⁰⁴ Fowles, *The Magus* 19.

As far as the concept of mystery is involved, we come upon a differentiation in meaning in Nicholas' own interpretation, and in the Greek understanding of it. In Nick's interpretation, mystery has profane connotations. It points to the modern interpretation of play as something liminal, peripheral, and, most importantly, as a distraction from the harshness of everyday reality. It is relaxing, it calms down and releases build-up stress. Awaiting him, however, is a more primordial kind of mystery, one that is intended to "elevate man above the human sphere into the divine and to assure his redemption by making him a god and so conferring immortality upon him."¹⁰⁵ Greek mysteries, in the form of initiations, thus demonstratively put humans in the role of gods – a role emphasizing the creative possibilities of human existence. His statement can also be seen as a premonition to his own initiation to be one of the *elect* in the Trial part of Conchis' experiment.

In view of traditional mythical narratives, the hero of a myth is, according to Otto Rank, who based his views on Freud's theory¹⁰⁶, usually of noble birth¹⁰⁷. When we look at Nicholas as the hero, this idea of a noble descent is subverted at the same time it is mentioned:

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-century best-seller L'Astrée.¹⁰⁸

Urfe's choice of the words "wishful tradition" implies the desire of his bourgeois family to elevate themselves above the conformities of their class and background. It is, after all, the ability of such beliefs to offer "a stronger experiential reality and the power of impression"¹⁰⁹ that illuminates the stultifying ordinariness of everyday reality. Nicholas, however, distances himself from that wish and his ancestry by saying that, unlike him, "no other ancestors showed

¹⁰⁵ Martin P. Nilsson, "The Religion of Eleusis," *Greek Popular Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947) 44, http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/gpr/gpr07.htm 29 June 2018.

¹⁰⁶ R. A. Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999) 76.

¹⁰⁷ Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero – A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology* (New York: Grove Press, 2015) 133.

¹⁰⁸ Fowles, *The Magus* 15.

¹⁰⁹ Fink, "Oasis of Happiness" 28.

any artistic leaning whatever: generation after generation of captains, clergymen, sailors [...]"¹¹⁰ The fact is that, in *The Magus*, the tradition of a mythical hero of noble origin is, in Nick's case, subverted in order to serve a different kind of purpose: in the novel, an "ordinary" hero is preferred to a noble one because it is precisely the "everyman" of the 20th century that is in dire need of transformation. The hero is interchangeable, after all, since, before Nicholas Urfe visited Phraxos, Conchis has had other subjects for his "godgame". Nicholas is thus expendable, and in his interchangeability the universal nature of Conchis' meta-plays comes to light – it is the process that matters, and this process is not restricted to the participation of one specific man.

Upon coming to Phraxos for his teaching job, Nicholas starts taking an active interest in the island's mysterious recluse, whose enigmatic and shadowy presence outside the borders of the village makes Nicholas the more attracted to him. These are the parts of the narrative, together with the sections taking part in England, constituting "the profane" part of the story, i.e. the mystery story presenting Nicholas in the role of a detective¹¹¹. When he approaches Bourani, Conchis' villa, for the first time, he stumbles upon a notice in French which can be translated as "the waiting room" (salle d'atente). It is at this point in the narrative that Nicholas' existential quest enters another stage: from the confounds of the waiting room, he enters the stage upon which he will experience his mythical rite of passage. An important point is made when readers realize that Mitford, Nicholas' English predecessor at the Lord Byron school, has warned Nicholas against the place. His words "[b]eware of the waiting room"¹¹² work not as a discouragement, on the contrary, they only further fuel Urfe's need to solve a mystery.

Moreover, it further emphasizes his tendency to live in the realms of a fictional environment, where his games of masks and appearance can flourish. This form of self-

¹¹⁰ Fowles, *The Magus* 15.

¹¹¹ "Fowles uses mystery in the novel in two ways: the unknown manifests itself as mystery in the sacred sense (the deeply symbolic aspect of experience, often conceptualized through myth) and in the profane sense (the 'mystery' story) Rubenstein, 329.

¹¹² Fowles, *The Magus* 45.

proclaiming prophecy was a fundamental idea for the Hellenic world-view of Ancient Greece and figures in many of the original mythological narratives stressing out the unchangeability of one's fate. That is, of course, a conception that plays against the concept of a self-made man who is, in existentialism, defined by his freedom to choose to do otherwise, and it is crucial for understanding the complex relationship between the two seemingly incompatible philosophies, The existentialist subversion then constitutes a turn away from the divine providence of the traditional Greek prophecy.

4.4 Ratio vs Play

Climbing the steep hills towards the mansion, Urfe likens himself to a "new Orestes":

[...] for besides the tzitzikia the air throbbed, whined, hummed with carmine-winged grasshoppers, locusts, huge hornets, bees, midges, bots, and ten thousand other anonymous insects. In some places there were nagging clouds of black flies, so that I climbed through the trees like a new Orestes, cursing and slapping.¹¹³

This is both a reference to the mythical hero, and to a play by Jean-Paul Sartre *Le Mouches* reworking the Greek mythological story. This quote creates a bridging between the essential nature of mythical narratives and the existential nature of Sartrean authenticity that both present themselves in Fowles's narrative.

That is the prism through which to view Nicholas' further encounters with Conchis, and the theatrical and mythical performances that will follow his stay at Bourani. Similar to the original mythical rituals, Conchis' plays "are not meant to be understood as literal truths, but rather as metaphorical descriptions of complex modes of feeling."¹¹⁴ Moreover, after finding out that Bourani as a word means both *death* and *water*, we can see that Nicholas' involvement

¹¹³ Fowles, *The Magus* 77.

¹¹⁴ Paul H. Lorenz, "Heraclitus against the Barbarians: John Fowles's *The Magus*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.1 (1996): 72.

from the beginning "anticipate[d] the mythical experience of initiation which [he] will soon begin under Conchis' tutelage."¹¹⁵

Nicholas's Greek experience on Phraxos, with its "sinister-fascinating, Circe-like quality... sharply contrasts with his own world of Oxford-inspired Socratic rationalism."¹¹⁶ Fowles uses this contrast to highlight his critique of Western civilization, or, more precisely, its adoration of the rational. Urfe's self-proclaimed reverence for Socratic honesty and, predominantly, the way in which he uses it to excuse his morally questionable choices, point to the need of his transformation. At the same time, Nicholas' state of consciousness mirrors certain stages of the evolution of Maurice Conchis as we get to know his younger versions through Nicholas. Conchis' involvement in The Society of Reason, whose principles are laid down in the manuscript provided to Nicholas, proves that the "Magus" himself had to undergo a certain evolution to reach authenticity. Illustrated by the word *merde* scribbled over the last paragraph of the original manuscript is the point in Conchis' existence where he says no to strict rationalism.

Nicholas thus enters the godgame as an "anti-hero [who] places a higher value on words and appearances than on substance."¹¹⁷ The extremes of that shallowness come to light most strongly in his relationships to women. In Urfe's description of his seducing techniques, he puts himself in a position of a magus-like individual, describing his conduct in a reproachful way, as if the real Nicholas was not really a part of these games.

My 'technique' was to make a show of unpredictability, cynicism, and indifference. Then, like a conjurer with his white rabbit, I produced the solitary heart.¹¹⁸

There were sometimes a few tedious weeks of letters, but I soon put the solitary heart away, 'assumed responsibility with my total being' and showed the Chesterfieldian mask instead.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Rubenstein, 329.

¹¹⁶ Lorenz, 73.

¹¹⁷ Lorenz, 72.

¹¹⁸ Fowles, *The Magus* 21.

¹¹⁹ Fowles, *The Magus* 21.

I mistook the feeling of relief that dropping a girl always brought for a love of freedom.¹²⁰

As mentioned previously, the "futuristic" purpose of Nicholas' plays of appearances disturbs the rejuvenating and social functions of play, degrading it to a mere method of attaining one's goals, tearing it out of its inner dimension of time and space unhampered by the physical world. Nicholas' take on plays comes from a position of power, it therefore cannot withhold its internal nature, of not aiming to reach goals that logically transcend it.¹²¹

The quotations also reveal Nick's life of *mauvaise foi*, his deep preoccupation with constructing a false image of self, and the ultimate inauthenticity towards himself and others. From his words it seems he was barely involved in his love affairs, they merely existed to him in a physical sense, and his responsibility towards himself and others mounted to nothing. As the conjurer he compared himself to, he was a master at creating an illusion of himself. Putting on the Chesterfieldian mask, he was the director of his own game of appearances. The godgame he is a part of in Phraxos can then appear as an organic continuation of his own games, with a single difference – his role in Conchis' godgame is of the unknowing actor, while in his life in England he was the director.

4.5 Illusion and Simulacrum

Urfe's troubled relationship with women can explain the importance of Lily's character(s) in the masques, and also the reason for Alison to subsequently take part in them as well. Firstly, it is important to mention the enigmatic nature of Lily's persona. She first enters the scene in the role of Conchis' long dead fiancée and, during the experiment, she regularly changes masks to fit the script and situation. During the course of the novel, she changes identity so often that it becomes of no importance as to what her real face is. The importance of Lily

¹²⁰ Fowles, *The Magus* 21.

¹²¹ Fink, "Oasis of happiness" 24-25.

comes to light in the absence of set identity and highlights the fluctuating nature of meaning Conchis often brings forward. Considering the definition of simulacrum as "a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be said to be a copy,"¹²² we can see that simulacra can be closely connected to the concept of deception and simulation. What Lily then simulates is the archetype of a virgin, she puts on a mask to embody a seemingly truthful personification of innocence and inexperience. Quoting Deleuze and Guattari, the simulacrum, "in order to become apparent, is forced to simulate structural states and to slip into states of forces that serve it as masks... underneath the mask and by means of it, it already invests the terminal forms and the specific higher states whose integrity it will subsequently establish."¹²³ That is to say, the purpose of the simulacrum in this case is to be the bait that will force Nicholas to become involved in the masks, and, at the same time, its complexity undermines the Platonic "world of representation and objective (re)production." It stresses the non-existence of external meaning bound to an object and falseness of appearance and, on the other hand, it draws attention to the immanence of meaning which thus must be, from its nature, unstable and changing.

Furthermore, without Alison's appearance at the very end of the novel, Nicholas' progress may feel incomplete as we would not be able to witness his transformation in his approach to love and, more generally, interpersonal relationships. Or, to quote, "as the story develops, Fowles uses... the quality of Nicholas's relationships with women as a kind of litmus test to determine whether or not he has understood the lesson which Conchis is trying to share with him, to determine whether he has attained whole sight."¹²⁴

Conchis' concept of whole sight is deeply connected with the theatrical performances that occur periodically throughout the narrative. Conchis makes use of their ability to

¹²² Brian Massumi, "Realer than Real: The Simulacrum according to Deleuze and Guattari," *Copyright* 1 (1987):
91. https://www.brianmassumi.com/textes 23 Jun 2018.

¹²³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977) 91.

¹²⁴ Lorenz, 73.

communicate meaning without the use of words as they reflect the primordial belief that a mythical performance carries the same value as the original occurrence the performance is supposed to imitate. It is therefore not so much an imitation as the creation of a situation that, being unrealistic to a Western spectator who perceives the divide between the real and the performed world (similar to a modern view of play as a childhood phenomenon undesired in the realm of adults), is the one act that forms the existing reality of human beings. There is an ironic twist in the way a Westerner (Nicholas in our case) perceives the dramatic art, completely misinterpreting the act as fiction, muting its powers by seeing it as mere entertainment. One of the best known lines from the dramatic world, Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage, / and all the men and women merely players"¹²⁵ can be understood as a word-play on the divide between the real world and the fictional world of a performed play in the way that it is its complete subversion – the divide cannot be if there is no leaving the stage. The question that suggests itself is whether we deduce from that an actual non-existence of reality, or whether we grant a staged performance the same value in co-creating reality as we do with things off the stage.

4.6 Choosing Humanity and the Relativity of Freedom

When Conchis says "[a]ll I ask you is to pretend to believe,"¹²⁶ he is asking Nicholas to consciously abandon his Western, rationalized view of the world and immerse himself into the innocence of an open mind that would be free from what it has been taught in a society obsessed and enslaved by positivistic rationalising. Such change requires the abandonment of a "position of power" since "no real dialogue on certain issues is possible [when one's] position rests on a foundation which is absolute and unchangeable."¹²⁷

¹²⁵ William Shakespeare, As You Like It (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006) II, vii, 140-141.

¹²⁶ Fowles, The Magus 137.

¹²⁷ Lorenz, 70.

However, for the most part of the novel, Urfe is unable to abandon his grounds and position of power, his natural reaction to the masques is to "resist mystery, by trying to find reasonable and rational explanations for what is happening to him."¹²⁸ Nicholas, whose relation to mystery tends to be sexualized, craves the most for the demasking of his object of desire, represented in Conchis' game in the character of Lily. His attitude to mystery really exposes his relationship to it; for Nicholas, real pleasure from mystery comes in the moment of demasking, in which he is becoming the master of the situation. His relationship to mystery is then, at the same time, its own negation. His inability to accept that "destiny is hazard," an inability similar to Henrik's from Conchis' retelling, whose "Jansenist" religious mania and belief in "a divine cruelty" brought him to a false realization that he has been "chosen, especially to be punished or tormented,"¹²⁹ points to a misunderstanding of freedom in general. Henrik did not even master his own freedom, Nicholas craves to master the freedom of others. He wants to reveal in order to control, his "morality before meeting Conchis has been 'freedom' in the most self-serving and exploitative sense,"¹³⁰ on the other hand, he has not understood its limited and restricted nature. By not accepting the freedom of others, he can never truly embrace responsibility for the consequences of his action as, in a world with no limitations to his freedom, all his actions exist in a vacuum. What he needs to do is to "escape from imprisonment in a stultified persona."131

To realize the potential of his existence and to, in Sartrean terms, "transcend facticity" and enter the realm of freedom, he must crawl out of his cynical shell that exists for the sole purpose of keeping reality at bay¹³². A shell is, in fact, a poignant image in that it indicates the

¹²⁸ Rubenstein, 330.

¹²⁹ Fowles, *The Magus* 302.

¹³⁰ Rubenstein, 333.

¹³¹ Dwight Eddins, "John Fowles: Existence as Authorship," *Contemporary Literature* 17.2 (1976): 213, JSTOR <<u>http://:www.jstor.org/stable/1207665> 9 June 2016</u>.

¹³² In the words of Dwight Eddins, "[t]he result in Nicholas' case is a seemingly endless succession of ironic poses behind which he can hide from recognizing his personal inadequacy in the face of infinite freedom and potentiality." 213.

static *in-itself* existence of an inanimate object. In order to achieve the *for-itself* existence of a human being that can, unlike a stone or a shell, choose itself, Urfe must abandon what views he deemed as truly his¹³³. Such action would condition changes in two ways: Firstly, Urfe fills his life with actual existence and authenticity. Secondly, by choosing himself, he provides the necessary conditions for choosing for all men, from which stems the anguish and responsibility of a "true" existentialist.¹³⁴

4.7 Opening the World to the Play – Breaking the Fourth Wall

As far as the mythological metatheatrical performances are concerned, they display Conchis' handwriting as they carry the signs of "a new kind of drama":

One in which the conventional separation between actors and audience was abolished... [a]nd in which the action, the narrative was fluid, with only a point of departure and a fixed point of conclusion. Between those points the participants invent their own drama.¹³⁵

By continually drawing Nicholas into the performances, resulting in the climax of the trial, which will be discussed later, Conchis is attempting to make theatre resemble real life. By bringing his metadramas closer to reality, he tries to show Nicholas their *real* significance in his journey to maturity and authenticity. By not believing and maintaining his cynical distance, Nicholas becomes his own enemy.

According to Věra Olivová, in the ancient Greece, sports and games were meant not as a competition but as a social way of celebrating life and the gods¹³⁶. Conchis' masques thus occur in order to transform Nicholas into a whole human being who celebrates life but does not want to possess or rule it; another reason "why Nick is frequently reminded that the game is

¹³³ As in "the illusion of freedom produced by emotional insulation and isolation." Rubenstein, 333.

¹³⁴ In words of John Fowles, he uses his power of responsibility to "humanize the whole." *The Aristos*, 214.

¹³⁵ Fowles, *The Magus* 404.

¹³⁶ Věra Olivová, Sport a hry ve starověkém světě (Praha: Artia, 1988) 18.

better if he pretends to believe"¹³⁷. In his barbaric mindset, however, Urfe "wants to win the godgame... he thinks the game is an ego-satisfying competition of power."¹³⁸

4.8 Modern reworking of myth

In connection to the mythological characters the masques depict, Conchis' game is a sort of celebration of Nicholas' journey towards maturity. This points towards the enormous metaphorical power myths still carry, the power which Conchis consciously exploits. Nicholas himself reaffirms that by giving himself a mythical role in and between the masques, that of Theseus¹³⁹. The original narrative of the Greek myth would then imply the existence of Ariadne, a fact to which one of the scenes between Urfe and Lily points when he keeps a thread from her dress "to remind him of her reality"¹⁴⁰ – there is, nevertheless, a certain subversion of the narrative of the thread that leads Theseus from a labyrinth, as this one, on the contrary, leads Nicholas even deeper within. The structure of a labyrinth then plays a distinctive role, it suggests Nicholas' journey towards the centre of himself, an authentic core to his personality that would be rid of insincerity and masques – after all, the end of the godgame is signified by the protagonists finally putting away the masks and props they had been so far using.

While the story of Theseus is directly connected to Nicholas and his existential journey, the scene of Apollo is more of a commentary on the state of the world. Apart from the Greek god, the masque features other characters as well, namely the figure of the Greek goddess Artemis, a nymph and a satyr. Artemis, a twin sister to Apollo and the daughter of Zeus, is presented with her traditional gear, a bow and arrow, with which she kills the lustful satyr, saving the virginal nymph from harm – she is thus demonstrated as fulfilling her duties as a guardian of young girls before they become women. Meanwhile, the role of Apollo bears

¹³⁷ Lorenz, 74.

¹³⁸ Lorenz, 85.

¹³⁹ "Now I was Theseus in the maze; somewhere in the darkness Ariadne waited; and the Minotaur." Fowles, *The Magus* 313.

¹⁴⁰ Rubenstein, 330.

allusions to the dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles as elaborated in Nietzsche's work. The killing of the nymph can thus be understood as the ultimate triumph of reason and rationality over emotions, chaos and pleasures connected to the physical world, "the final victory of the religion of death over the Dionysian religion of earthly, sensual life."¹⁴¹

Furthermore, satyrs typically accompany Dionysus in the same way nymphs are connected to Artemis. The metadrama thus represents, in Conchis' own words, a world where "Apollo will reign again. And Dionysus will return to the shadows from which he came."¹⁴² Taking into consideration Conchis' criticism of preferring pure reason at the expense of life itself, the masque is therefore a critique of his own young self (as portrayed through The Society of Reason) and of Nicholas' approach to life reduced to Socratic rationalism.

4.9 Dichotomy of the Verbal and Performative

However, in the mythical realm of Bourani, such theatrical performances are not left to their own devices as they are accompanied by a textual source.¹⁴³ A source directly connected to the Apollo scene is given to Nicholas in advance. This source is *La Masque Français* and the excerpt reads as follows:

Visitors who went behind the high walls of Saint-Martin had the pleasure of seeing, across the green lawns and among the groves, shepherds and shepherdesses who danced and sang, surrounded by their white flock. They were not always dressed in eighteenth-century clothes. Sometimes they wore costumes in the Roman and Greek styles; and in this way the odes of Theocritus and the bucolics of Virgil were brought to life. It was even said that there were more scandalous scenes – charming nymphs who on summer nights fled in the moonlight from strange dark shapes, half man, half goat...¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Lorenz, 81.

¹⁴² Fowles, *The Magus* 186.

¹⁴³ The only exception is the scene of Conchis' execution.

¹⁴⁴ Fowles, *The Magus* 165.

As becomes clear with the last sentence, the passage noted for Nicholas literally foreshadows the acted-out performance and it thus connects the written text with the theatrical masque that takes place later.

Because *The French Masque* separates the audience from the dressed up actors, it leads Nicholas to assume he is meant to embody the role of a spectator who from "the nature of a private masque...both out of politeness and for my own pleasure, [should] not poke my nose behind the scenes."¹⁴⁵ As much as this interpretation seems accurate (the repeated plea from Conchis to believe, or pretend to believe, point to that), a deeper link suggests itself when we consider the nature of the text and its connection to the performative. As Conchis notes, he burned every last novel he had ever possessed in an act of purification upon the realization that "[w]ords are for truth. For facts. Not fiction."¹⁴⁶ In keeping with this, the texts Nicholas is supplied with are genuine historical documents, i.e. words of facts. For Conchis, historical documents, unlike fiction, speak truth; on the other hand, its connection to the performed masque in Bourani subverts this proclamation as it occurs in the timeless space of a play separated from the everyday occurrences of one's life. Here, we return to relativity of meaning – history, as much as words, is relative because it is an object of interpretation, which is inherently subjective.

It also points to a certain inadequacy of words to capture genuine humane experience. There is a quality in the performative art which can grasp the fleeting nature of existence better than words thanks to its directness of unmediated experience. In the end, we may ask whether or not the performed part of *Le Masque Français* underscores the separation of meaning from form, and the simulative nature of reality. Is the depiction truthful to the words? Can words depict reality at all? Can a performance twice removed from its original constitute a truthful

¹⁴⁵ Fowles, *The Magus* 165.

¹⁴⁶ Fowles, *The Magus* 96.

copy, or does it live a life of its own? The title of the document does indeed refer to the masked nature of its participants where nothing is what it seems, where "the different is related to the different through difference itself."¹⁴⁷

4.10 The Moral Aspect of Freedom

We reach the climax of Conchis' narrated experience in the only titled chapter of the novel. The title reads $E\lambda\epsilon\nu\theta\epsilon\rho\iota\alpha$, transcribed to English alphabet as 'euletheria,' meaning 'freedom'. All of Conchis' stories can be thus seen as leading up to this moment of his transformation. Preceding Conchis' narration is a masque in which Nicholas meets the protagonists of the climactic scene – the German soldiers and Greek hostages. His surprise with being taken prisoner by the Germans is intensified by the fact that the order of Conchis' narration and the masques changes – the narration *follows* the masque. This leads to Nick's feelings of shock and surprise meant to replicate Conchis' own feelings of terror. Nicholas' role in the masque is that of Conchis, as he "is accused by one of the guerrilla men of being *prodotis*, a 'traitor' and later on he will learn that the person who was considered traitor was Conchis himself, but we must not forget Nicholas has behaved treacherously with Alison and with women in general, so that the meaning of the iconic scene expands itself in all directions."¹⁴⁸ One of the German actors is meant to embody Anton, the sensitive young intellectual who, after the heinous actions that take place on the island, commits suicide.

The main antagonist of the scene, Captain Wimmel, is absent in the masque, yet, it is his psychopathic sadism and unquestionable allegiance to the German cause that represent "a world governed by brute force, humourless arrogance, illusory prestige and primeval

¹⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 299.

¹⁴⁸ Susana Onega, *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles* (New York: University of Rochester, 1989)37.

stupidity."¹⁴⁹ In Wimmel's words, the "only one supreme purpose in life [is] the German historical purpose – to bring order into the chaos of Europe."¹⁵⁰ This calls into consideration the aforementioned philosophical principles of the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, and the consequences of their disbalance. For Conchis, however, "precisely the opposite is true – they were successful because they imposed chaos on order. They tore up the commandments, they denied the super-ego, what you will."¹⁵¹ They thus tortured and killed in the name of revolt against both the ancient tradition of religion ("tore up the commandments") and the 20th century perception of human psyche as developed from Freudian psychoanalysis ("denied the super-ego"), and operated beyond any historical precedence in order to establish "a legacy of the Aryan barbarians."¹⁵² They sought to undermine the purpose of established human values.

Conchis' decision not to beat the two guerrillas to death and instead allow the execution of eighty hostages, himself amongst them, then "reveals the central purpose of the whole masque. He illustrates for Nicholas that man's whole struggle is concerned with the annunciation of personal freedom and individual choice even in the face of death."¹⁵³ In the moment of decision, Conchis finally understands the resolution of the guerrillas to be tortured rather than to say anything and betray their purpose:

He spoke out of a world the very opposite of mine. In mine 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 euletheria: freedom... [h]e was the final right to deny. To be free to choose... [h]e was something that passed beyond morality but sprang out of the very essence of things – that comprehend all, the freedom to do all, and stood against only one thing –the prohibition not to do all.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Fowles, *The Magus* 413.

¹⁵⁰ Fowles, *The Magus* 428.

¹⁵¹ Fowles, *The Magus* 428.

¹⁵² Lorenz, 79.

¹⁵³ Ralph Berets, "A Study in the Creation of a Personal Myth," *Twentieth Century Literature* 19.2 (1973): 91.

¹⁵⁴ Fowles, *The Magus* 434.

Conchis' decision cannot make sense in the realm of logic or pragmatism. It is his manifestation of "the smile [that is] the *nature* of the cruelty of life, a cruelty we cannot even choose to avoid, since it is human existence."¹⁵⁵

Conchis' newly acquired understanding of freedom as something "more important than common sense, self-preservation, yes, than my own life, than the lives of eighty hostages"¹⁵⁶ made him realize that "his place was among the hostages, equal to all of the other men of the village."¹⁵⁷ That is a complete reversal of Nicholas' perception of freedom, one far more similar to the conception held by the sadist Wimmel – "the absolute freedom… of an all-powerful god, or an unregenerate Nicholas [that] denies other human beings freedom of choice."¹⁵⁸

Conchis' near-death experience and rebirth into the world of authentic freedom symbolically parallels Nicholas' own resurrection played out in the Trial scene. His impression of the places he is being held in suggests "a progressive delving into the hero's unconscious"¹⁵⁹, with their windowless walls [which] were dry, but subterranean,"¹⁶⁰ a descent into hell without its "customary flames"¹⁶¹. The final masque referred to as The Trial then introduces characters dressed into costumes representing a whole variety of figures, from the mythical deities of ancient Egypt, to Tarot or Eleusian mysteries. The range of allusions may be seen as representing the Jungian theory of universal archetypes of collective unconsciousness. It is thus possible to say that "by presenting Nicholas with aesthetic, mythic and historical images from the human consciousness, the godgame applies Jung's 'individuation' process."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ Fowles, *The Magus* 531.

 ¹⁵⁶ Fowles, *The Magus* 434.
 ¹⁵⁷ Lorenz, 81.

¹⁵⁸ Lorenz, 80.

¹⁵⁹ Onega, Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles 62.

¹⁶⁰ Fowles, *The Magus* 491.

¹⁶¹ Fowles, *The Magus* 488.

¹⁶² Robert Huffaker, *John Fowles* (Woodbridge: Twaine Publishers, 1980) 80. Huffaker continues: "Jungian individuation aims to give a person awareness and courage to behave as an individual rather than as the kind of imitator Nick has become. Jung calls such self-deluding poses as Nick's literary person, 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."

The following psychoanalysis narrated in a heavy Freudian jargon is aimed to put Nick in the position where he is forced to view his whole life as a pre-determined sequence of behaviours, a critical perspective of a construction to which he has clung so strongly, stripping it of its inauthentic masks and layers Urfe has himself unconsciously created, and, ultimately, uncovering the delusory nature of his freedom. These unconscious behaviours are finally tested in a scene mirroring Conchis' execution where Nick is given the chance to flog Lily as a punishment. The dynamics of his thoughts are put to challenge as he, after having wished for "[s]ome equal humiliation of Lily [as it] made me furious I had not been more violent with her before,"¹⁶³ comes to the realization that it is him "playing the role of Wimmel. Wimmel was inside me, in my stiffened, backthrown arm, in all my past; above all in what I had done to Alison."¹⁶⁴ Assessing his situation, Nick realizes that "his entire venture in Phraxos can be seen to point to this incident: one that makes a man confront his own fate and restructure it to his own myth."¹⁶⁵

4.11 Disenchantment and Passion for Life

The last part of the experiment involves Urfe's disintoxication and runs as a counterpart to the previous, gradual intoxication with the character of Lily/Julie, which culminates in the final consummation of their relationship – a consummation presented in Urfe's narration as the ultimate victory of his ego as he adds another prey to his collection, using language that emphasizes his feelings of triumph: "… to have her surrender at last, compliant, mine,"¹⁶⁶ or "completely at my mercy; that lovely slavelike limpness."¹⁶⁷ This so-called disintoxication

¹⁶³ Fowles, *The Magus* 494.

¹⁶⁴ Fowles, *The Magus* 518.

¹⁶⁵ Berets, 91.

¹⁶⁶ Fowles, *The Magus* 483.

¹⁶⁷ Fowles, *The Magus* 486-7.

resembles a sort of disenchantment in the way Johan Huizinga describes it¹⁶⁸. After the final, resolute unmasking of Julie persona, Nick suffers a "second loss of the mythical figure,"¹⁶⁹ the first being the figure of Lily.¹⁷⁰

After this, Nicholas is thrown into a limbo-like state, representing the final stages before his metaphorical rebirth. A rebirth, however, uncomplete unless he severs his connection to the illusion and construct of Lily/Julie. This final disintoxication takes place in an elaborately obscene "blue film", later to be replaced by a live theatrical performance of lovemaking between Lily and Joe, her supposed lover, without whom "the disintoxication would be radically incomplete" as he is "as much a part of Conchis' text as [Julie] is"¹⁷¹

That stage constitutes the end of the masques and the conclusion of the experiment. The final image of Monemvasia frames the narrative break into the novel's last part which takes the reader outside the realm of myth, back into the harshness of existential reality that catches him "intolerably alone."¹⁷² However, it also points to an inner, deep transformation of the protagonist, when he is able to laugh at "Conchis' last joke" when he finds the Smith & Wesson revolver, and shoots into the air in an act of "a *feu de joie*, a refusal to die."¹⁷³ This refusal to die is just another name for the "famous passion" connected with the act of playing, as described by Fink.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ "At any moment 'ordinary life' may reassert its rights either by an impact from without, which interrupts the game, or by an offence against the rules, or else from within, by a collapse of the play spirit, a sobering, a disenchantment." Huizinga, 21.

¹⁶⁹ Fowles, *The Magus* 514.

¹⁷⁰ And, as Urfe notes, "I started to think of her as Lily again, perhaps because her first mask now seemed truer, more true because more obviously false, than the others." Fowles, *The Magus* 492.

¹⁷¹ Pamela Cooper, *The Fictions of John Fowles: Power, Creativity, Femininity* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1991) 89.

¹⁷² Fowles, *The Magus* 539.

¹⁷³ Fowles, *The Magus* 534.

¹⁷⁴ "[Play] is thoroughly attuned by an elementary passion for life, a passion that is more than delight in what is delightful, useful, enjoyable, a passion for the exuberance of life that can still include in itself what is dire, evil, and horrible, as the pleasure in the play of tragedy does." Fink, *Play as a Symbol of the World* 204.

It is at that point that he gives in to the pull of the unbendable river of existence, and he finally gets to taste Conchis' "fire of existence, the passion to exist... *delirium vivens* –"¹⁷⁵ it is at the same time a refusal of the life of appearances, which crystallized in his "token suicide"¹⁷⁶ in chapter 8, a ridiculously blank attempt comically ended with a question by an innocent Greek, who gave Urfe the cartridges for his gun: "Did you kill anything?"¹⁷⁷

4.12 Gods and Elements

The moment at Monemvasia at the same time signalizes Conchis' exit from the godgame. From this point on Nicholas must play his own Conchis, the old one is dead with the only goodbye being the headstone in the old graveyard. "The last trick of the artist/magician/god," Pamela Cooper says, "is to make himself literally bodiless,"¹⁷⁸ after transforming himself by playing the roles of a god, Prosperolike magician, or the merciless Poseidon who disturbs the status quo of Urfe's life.

Conchis' theatrical exit leads us to the question of his overall motivations. In his manipulative games, he claims, he wants to lead the subjects of his experiment to the reality of genuine freedom and free them from the illusions of their own mind. Yet it is hard to believe that the intricate mythical metatheatre is pure charity – after all, even Shakespeare's Prospero used his powers to help his own case and to punish those who had wronged him. Nicholas as the subject of his godgame is therefore not the only one whose identity is being transformed. Considering Conchis' own life story, it would be of no surprise if he himself needed to resolve some of its mysteries.

¹⁷⁵ Fowles, *The Magus* 129.

¹⁷⁶ Onega, Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles 43.

¹⁷⁷ Fowles, *The Magus* 62.

¹⁷⁸ Cooper, 66.

Going back to Conchis' masks, The Greek god of the seas Poseidon is also traditionally associated with horses and earthquakes. The picturesque sight of "the angry sea, [...] and then white horses"¹⁷⁹ can be thus seen as Conchis' ultimate transformation to a force that pointed Nicholas towards a quest of existential maturation. The connection of Urfe to *Earth*¹⁸⁰ is a poignant definition of Nicholas' attitude to life before his journey to Phraxos. His class and education, his perception of reality, has been rooted in a long-living tradition by which he let himself be determined and forced into his dishonest cynicism. The shock wave that disturbs his life can be compared to a land being hit by an earthquake. The British Isles of Urfe's youth disappear behind him as they are swallowed by the wave of Conchis' godgame.

The Demeter of Conchis' godgame, Lily De Seitas¹⁸¹, a mother figure both metaphorically and literally, whom he meets in his quest after answers in England, is a different Earth than the one Nick abandoned at the beginning of his journey. She represents the fruitful, embracing and non-judgemental Earth, an emblem of stability, which creates an ever-changing reality with her union with Poseidon, a master of the seas that can be both subtle and cruel, a god of "the metaphysical sea of hazard on which we all sail."¹⁸²

Alison's occupation of an air-stewardess is also symbolical in that it creates, similarly to the opposition of Poseidon and Demeter, a counterweight to Urfe's stultified persona. The nature of air mirrors itself in her character as well – she is ungraspable (as a concept), everchanging and unstable. She embodies the changing nature of all things and the relativity of which only "the elect" are aware of. Her struggles as an expatriate that doesn't belong to one state or group show her determination to escape all attempts at pinning her down, on the other hand, her freedom brings the feelings of dread and anxiety which are inseparable from an authentic existence.

¹⁷⁹ Fowles, *The Magus* 534.

¹⁸⁰ "There is a private pun in the family name I gave him. As a child I could not pronounce *th* except as *f*, and Urfe really stands for *Earth*." Fowles, *The Magus* 9.

¹⁸¹ Urfe compares her to "Demeter, Ceres, a goddess on her throne." Fowles, *The Magus* 598.

¹⁸² Fowles, Wormholes 277

4.13 Alison as the Ultimate Reality We Cannot Know

Urfe's transition to a more authentic way of life is therefore deeply connected to the character of Alison, who has been indirectly involved in the whole of Nick's experience on the island. When he proclaims "I knew her real name,"¹⁸³ Urfe is speaking of his realization that it has been Alison behind all the masks and performances, behind the "mythical" characters of Lily/Julie and June. Even in the film frame comparing Lily to Isis, Astarte and Kali, and whichever mask the actress wore, the mythological personas and narratives always embodied the relativity of human experience, of what we perceive as "real". While Lily and June symbolized the archetypes of the virgin and the whore and their nature is thus purely psychological and confined within the mythical boundaries of Bourani¹⁸⁴, Alison is the real woman¹⁸⁵, both Eve and a prostitute¹⁸⁶, whose nature is fluent and ever-changing, not defined by being one or the other.

In the final scene of the book, when the two finally reunite, the tension between reality and play breaks as Nick realizes the performance is definitely over:

There were no eyes watching. The windows were as blank as they looked. The theatre was empty. It was not a theatre. They had perhaps told her it was a theatre, and she had believed them, and I had believed her.¹⁸⁷

However, instead of establishing a clear boundary between reality and illusion, the stage and the audience blend to form the ubiquitous playfulness of reality that is the essence of human existence¹⁸⁸. Life as a play implies that man is his own creator and creation and is therefore the only one responsible for their action. In his rebirth, Nick is learning to "handl[e] fragile

¹⁸³ Fowles, *The Magus* 531.

¹⁸⁴ Onega, Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles 60-61.

¹⁸⁵ "from the Greek a (without) and lyssa (madness)," Fowles, *The Magus* 566.

¹⁸⁶ as referred to by Nick

¹⁸⁷ Fowles, *The Magus* 654-655.

¹⁸⁸ Fink, "Oasis of Happiness" 19.

objects,"¹⁸⁹ pointing both to a change in his "tendency to turn life into fiction"¹⁹⁰ rejecting the real in favour of the unreal, and the turn towards personal responsibility for what he has broken, as the inherent freedom of his acts does not exist without consequences. He must be the creator of his life and reality, as the world does not have any inherent meaning but the one imposed unto it by the human mind. If there is indeed nobody watching,¹⁹¹ and the thriving for bliss fruitless as it lies in the non-existent future as a mere illusion¹⁹², the mythological performances, ironically by their absence, rouse Nick and thrust him into the present moment where life is being lived for itself, where no questions for a larger meaning are asked because "an answer is always a form of death."¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Fowles, The Magus

¹⁹⁰ Fowles, *The Magus* 539.

¹⁹¹ "... always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good or bad behaviour – a god like a novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please,..." Fowles, *The Magus* 539.

¹⁹² Fink describes this striving for the unattainable *eudaimonia* as the "futurism" of human existence. Fink, "Oasis of Happiness" 19.

¹⁹³ Fowles, *The Magus* 626.

5 <u>CONCLUSION</u>

As my analysis has shown, the metatheatrical narrative of John Fowles's *The Magus* is deeply connected to the renaissance of mythological language in literature and influenced by the author's system of thought incorporating existentialist and Pre-Socratic philosophies.

The novel addresses the themes of existential freedom and authenticity in the midst of a mysterious existential quest of a young arrogant protagonist, in which his mentor Maurice Conchis makes uses of various dramatical tools, including the staging of symbolic mythological scenes or an enactment of a WWII event. These performance and masques are meant to address the masks in which the young "hero" veiled himself, be it the cynical existentialist or the poetic mind.

The themes of the novel and their exploitation of mythology point to the fact that the language of pure science cannot describe the complex situation of human existence. That is why mythical language and matter was incorporated in the new psychoanalytical theories and myth became the subject matter of many prominent academics. Through its influence on Fowles, it then plays a vital part in the deeper understanding of his work and philosophy.

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